

Feature

Development

# The Numerical Manipulation of Population

# ADB Enters Birth Control Battle

**by Farida Akhter**

THE abstract notion of "population" is mainly used to mean numbers. Once people are reduced into population the number becomes the substitute for real people, people of flesh and blood. The numbers thereafter can be shown to matter only whether they are more or few. What prevails is only quantitative measures. The numbers then can be manipulated and deployed as a strategy in the power game.

Barbara Duden has demonstrated the intellectual background by which "people" became "Population" during the periods of 18th to 19th century [Duden 92]. It was associated with the rise of statistics. Political arithmetic was in a way the ancestor of statistics. It was William Petty, influenced by Hobbes, who conceived the idea of quantifying society. The idea was to show that the wealth and power of the state depend on the number and character of its subjects.

Intense historical polarization between people who lost their means of subsistence and those who concentrated the productive resources in their hand under their ownership and control has already appeared as a new reality, a new era of history had already started. The minority who owned and controlled the productive resources had to reduce the majority into numbers. In reality, to the minority, owning the productive resources, the remaining majority is either "labour" or "pauper". In both cases, the majority can exist only as number to the minority. In case of labour it is only a question of how many to be engaged with a definite quantity of capital; for paupers or people who are useless for capital are simply surplus population to be disposed of the system.

The historical context of the transition of "people" into "population" should not be forgotten to shed light on the intellectual history of the process. The historical context is also important to understand why in 19th century, when scientists began to make predictions about "populations" of beans, stars and mosquitoes, applied the same concept to aggregate and graphically depict the people as numbers. Now it is a "commonsense" terminology for the education people to talk about population and compare

figures on contraception, nutrition and abortion across nation states.

**Manipulation of numbers**

One of the strategic needs to reduce people into numbers is to manipulate the figures. "Population" being a number, also indicates that it can be manipulated to realise predetermined intentions; numbers can be manipulated at the tip of the fingers or by using a computer programme.

In Bangladesh, the present population is known to be 110 million. Since the liberation of the country in 1971, three censuses have been conducted.

than the actual numbers. In the three censuses, from 1974 to 1991, a total 13,096,833 (i.e. over a 13 million) people have been added.

Bangladesh is not the only example of census manipulation. In Nigeria, a very accurate national census was conducted in 1991, closing the borders for three days, people were asked to stay at home; shops and factories were closed down. The census result was 88.5 million, according to a press release by the Armed Forces Ruling Council of Lagos. Before this, there were several attempts to take a national census, but never with success. It is fascinating to see how international



Photo: UNICEF

How less is enough?

Each time, the census results were manipulated for an increase as "post enumeration sample adjustment". The reason was, as it was claimed in a country like Bangladesh, the counting can never be 100 per cent accurate. In the first census of 1974, the manipulated increase had no other reason but the fact that the census results were much lower than the donor estimated projected figures in relation to food assistance. The projected figure of the donors like World Bank was linked with the US food aid, that is, the dumping of the surplus agricultural product of the USA. What happened in 1974 is that the food shipment from the US was made in accordance with the inflated projection of the World Bank. Therefore, the census figures, which was enumerated after the shipment was already on its way, had to be increased to match the World Bank figures. So far three censuses have been taken, 1974, 1981 and 1991. Each time there was reason for adjusting for a higher figures

agencies, population controllers, environmentalists, and others ceaselessly produced inflated figures on the basis of the 1963 census despite the fact that it had many shortcomings. To prove that population of Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate, the 1963 census was made the basis to inflate the figures of later years. Rate of population growth was marked arbitrarily and ranged from 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent growth rate per years. Some of the examples of the false figures derived by this procedure are: 122.5 million in 1991 (according to World Population Data Sheets of Population Reference Bureau Inc), 115 million in 1989 (according to Paul and Anne Ehrlich), 108 million in 1987 (according to Werner Fornos of Population Institute) and 110 million in 1989 (according to Judy Jacobson of Worldwatch Institute), etc (PRI 92). None of these are even closer to the real population number which came out in 1991. In China, two very competent and well funded census

organisations — United States Bureau of the Census and the United Nations Population Division — both made studied estimates of the population of mainland China in 1972. The results of these "very careful, professional and very objective institutions", happened to have been 120 million people apart. The US census bureau estimated the mainland Chinese population to be about 871 million people while the UN Census Bureau estimated at 753 million. The Chinese census authorities, by counting the people came up with a figure of 697,260,000 i.e. 697 million people.

The international and multi-lateral agencies have taken the responsibilities of making projections about world population. These projections are made on certain assumptions of population growth rate for different regions of the world. The United Nations projections are made upto the year 2150. There are low, medium and high projections. The medium projection has been accepted as the most probable with the assumption that the "number of children born to a typical woman in developing countries will decline gradually, stabilizing between 35 and 55 years from now. According to the medium projection, world's population was projected at 5.48 billion by 1992, to 10 billion in 2050 and a plateau of 11.6 billion in 2150.

The role projections does not only to show the absolute number of world population, but also to specify particularly that the '95 per cent of this population growth is occurring in the developing countries". However, the statistics from the developing countries show that "average family size has decreased: from 6.1 children per woman in the early 60s to 3.9 today. Population growth rates in developing countries have also declined: from more than 2.5 per cent a year in the early 60s to just over 2.0 per cent today. However, the absolute number being added continue to increase". It is clear from these, the census examples that the "overpopulation" in the Third World countries has been overcounted. The projections are also based on false and manipulated assumptions.

The writer is Executive Director of UBINIG, a leading NGO in Bangladesh.

**Abby Tan writes from Manila**

*Roman Catholics worldwide anxiously await publication of the Pope's encyclical Veritatis Splendor (the Splendour of the Truth). It is expected to arouse controversy by reaffirming the Church's ban on artificial contraception. One country much affected is the Philippines, the only Christian country in Asia, which is Roman Catholic. The dilemma there will be all the deeper because the Asian Development Bank has now recognised the need to control population explosion in Asia. Gemini News Service reports on its plans to fund population control programmes.*

**ELATEDLY**, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is to begin funding population programmes in the continent that is the most densely populated and has the fastest growth rate. Asia has three billion of the world's over four billion people. The Bank warns it will reach 3.3 billion at the turn of the century.

The Manila-based ADB begins taking a look at population programmes some 25 years after the World Bank did. Its chief economist, Satish Jha, explained that it was a matter of priorities. "Which comes first - economic development, roads and bridges or schools?" he asked. Jha announced that population was now high on the ADB agenda.

The Bank had been emphasising infrastructure development. Only in recent years has it focused on the "soft sector" that has no visible economic return, like health and pollution.

Senior economist Ernesto Pernia said: "It is only recently that the Bank realised that investment in human resources is a very important economic factor."

In the past population funding by the bank was tucked in only as part of health programmes. The first direct financing for population was a \$ 7.1 million loan for Papua New Guinea in April. Other requests are from Pakistan, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. Bank officials say loans will go towards paying for contraceptives.

Bank President Kimimasa Tsurumizu, at a population symposium in July, urged member countries to formulate "population-influenced" rather than "population-accommodating" policies.

Governments and international agencies usually approach the problem by building new schools, water supplies, and expanding health services to accommodate more people, he noted, adding: "The supply almost never meets the demand and the gap continues to widen. It seems obvious therefore that the equilibrium could be more

**Asia leads the birth race**

Annual population increase in millions, 1991

By region

Europe	1.2
North America	2.2
Latin America	9.3
Africa	20
Asia	57.2

By country

India	10
China	8
Pakistan	6
Nigeria	5
Indonesia	4

Top 5

Source: United Nations

East Asia have been accompanied by successful population programmes. Current population growth rates in Asia remain at around two per cent per annum, although considerable variations exist between individual countries and sub-regions.

China has reduced its growth rate, but Pakistan is still high at 3.1 per cent and Bangladesh at 2.4 per cent.

Ramos said in his state of the nation address in July: "This rate of growth impairs our capability to improve our quality of life. It strains both our natural environment and our resources for providing jobs, health and other social services."

The Church, which accepts only natural methods of birth control, declared "the battle line is drawn," and urged Filipinos to defy the government. It offered legal aid to those who might be dismissed.

Bishop Jesus Varela, head of the Episcopal Commission on Family Life, said: "The Church has never lost in a battle. It was President Ramos who declared war, not us. We are men of peace, we do not want war, but do not run away from a good fight."

At the heart of the controversy is whether the Church has the right to dictate which method to use. The government says the Church stand is "obsolete" and urges the clergy to recognise the couple's right to choose the family planning method.

Health Secretary Juan Flavier has challenged the Church to set up national birth control clinics throughout the country. He said: "There were no takers so we're going to do it the way we think is the right way. Name any statistics, we're in trouble."

The Bank is likely to stay out of these internal debates where religion could be a factor, as in Pakistan. It will stay out, too, of China's controversial one-child policy, considered coercive by many.

Economist Jha says that since China is successful in its policy, it is unlikely to ask for ADB aid. If it does, he admitted, "it will be difficult for the Bank."

The writer is a Singaporean journalist specialising in economic and political affairs. She has been based in Manila since 1977.

FOOD FOR EDUCATION

METROPOLITAN SLUMS

Does it Really Work?

Where People Float In and Out

**by M Khan**

came difficult to differentiate the different classes. Sights of students squatting on the floor during lessons were common. Teacher-student ratios also changed drastically. As a result, educational performance and achievement declined. All students, but particularly the more talented ones, suffered as teachers could no longer give them the attention they deserved.

The distribution of wheat it

self proved both time-consuming and disruptive. For one school, the weekly distribution required a whole day's work by driver and weighing attendant, and tended to disrupt classes. Children who were not at school on the distribution day forfeited their entitlement, however good their previous attendance record. The generalised distribution system also meant that children from all income groups received wheat.

Perhaps most significant is that the food was often seen as a temporary earning opportunity by the parents of the poorest children. They were happy for their children to attend as long as they received a material benefit but their economic circumstances would compel them to leave school and help earn in other ways, if and when the wheat distribution was to end. Significantly, the better-off parents whose children also participated in the scheme were also determined their children would continue to attend school, wheat or no wheat.

The inevitable conclusion was that a support project to promote development had the same effect as a relief effort — providing short-term benefit but no positive or lasting shifts in attitude or behaviour which are the hallmarks of sustainable development.

In post-emergency situations, RDRS, like other NGOs in Bangladesh, offers material incentives — Cash for Community Work, Cash for Health Education and similar to provide relief to the neediest members of the community and help overcome pressing short-term need. The use of these incentives in longer-term development efforts, however, it continues to view as non-sustainable and counter-productive.

It is conceivable that a well-designed and managed 'Food for Education' scheme could work. This would have to be carefully targeted at the neediest, involve the consumption in-school of at least some of the food by the children themselves and be linked with other measures designed to make primary schooling attractive and compelling on a long-term basis for both children and parents. Yet the dangers which accompany the offer of short-term material or financial inducements should caution all development organisations to proceed with great care in any 'Food for Education' project.

**One Country, Two Nations**

ALMOST every country has one or more ethnic groups whose level of human development falls far below the national average. One of the clearest, and best documented, cases is that of blacks in the United States.

Their disadvantage starts at birth. The infant mortality rate for whites is 8 per 1,000 live births, but for blacks it is 19. And black children are much more likely than white children to grow up in single-parent homes — in 1990, 19% of white children were growing up in single-parent households, compared with 54% of black children.

Children in black families are also more likely to grow up in poverty. The real GDP per capita for whites in 1990 was around \$22,000, but for blacks it was around \$17,000.

As Andrew Hacker, the author of Two Nations (1992), graphically records:

The statistics are dismaying. Nearly two-thirds of black babies are now born out of wedlock, and over half of black families are headed by women. The majority of black youngsters live only with their mother; and in over half of these households, she has never been married. At the last count, over half of all single black women have already had children, and among women in their mid to late thirties, less than half have intact marriages. These figures are from three to five times greater than for white households, and markedly higher than those

**by Raffat Binte Rashid**

problems every day. The slum dwellers thank their stars if they can find their house intact after a day's work. The common places for slums to thrive in the city, are on lands owned by private individuals source are set up on government and semi-government lands owned by the departments of railways, public works and building, roads and highways. There are also small clusters of slums constructed on disputed lands.

As a result these dwellers constantly face eviction or fear of getting their houses burnt to ashes because of some local feud between mastans or toll collectors of that area.

"We are quite used to fights and such things except for the blue uniformed men, the police. We are at a loss when it comes to legal papers and documents which only God knows what it is about? They barge in with bulldozers leaving us homeless and helpless," says Hawa Khatun.

In slums, health, hygiene, living standards are not of much importance. Just a thatched roof above their heads

is good enough for them. This particular area where she lives is constructed at the edge of a big drainage system. There are chances that the small babies might fall into the deep dirty drain and die instantly. They wake up in the early hours of the day, with raindrops dripping through the thatched roof or standing in two feet deep water inside the hut because the roof had been blown off by a strong wind.

Describing her life Hawa recalls "I left home because there was nothing for me. My father has lost whatever little land we had to the powerful landlords, and after his death my mother decided to leave the village. My sisters and brothers were all very young at that time our survival was at stake."

These slum dwellers are all day labourers doing petty trades, transport work, low grade office and domestic chores. Some are even self-employed doing seasonal or temporary trades. According to Hawa, women have permanent jobs where they get paid every month but men seem to stay

out of work quite frequently.

A survey, Slums in Dhaka Metropolitan Area 1991 conducted for Urban Volunteer Programme (UVP) of ICDDR, B by Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) Department of Geography University of Dhaka, point out some features of Dhaka's slum population. They make one-fourth of the city's total population but they share only a tiny proportion of the city's total residential area. About one-fifth of the slum settlements live without paying any amount of rent but in most cases they pay rents to those who own the land. Sometimes these tolls per square are higher than what upper classes pay as rents. Local mastans, middlemen, employees of different government and non-govt organizations forcibly collect rent from the occupants, who usually do not own the land.

Actually public lands are in high demand for constructing office buildings, roads and market complexes and so these dwellers are forced to find shelter on lands owned by private individuals. The density of slum population is five to six times higher than the over all density of Dhaka's population. But unfortunately these clusters of distressed people receive very little facilities or services from any Government departments including the Municipal Corporation.

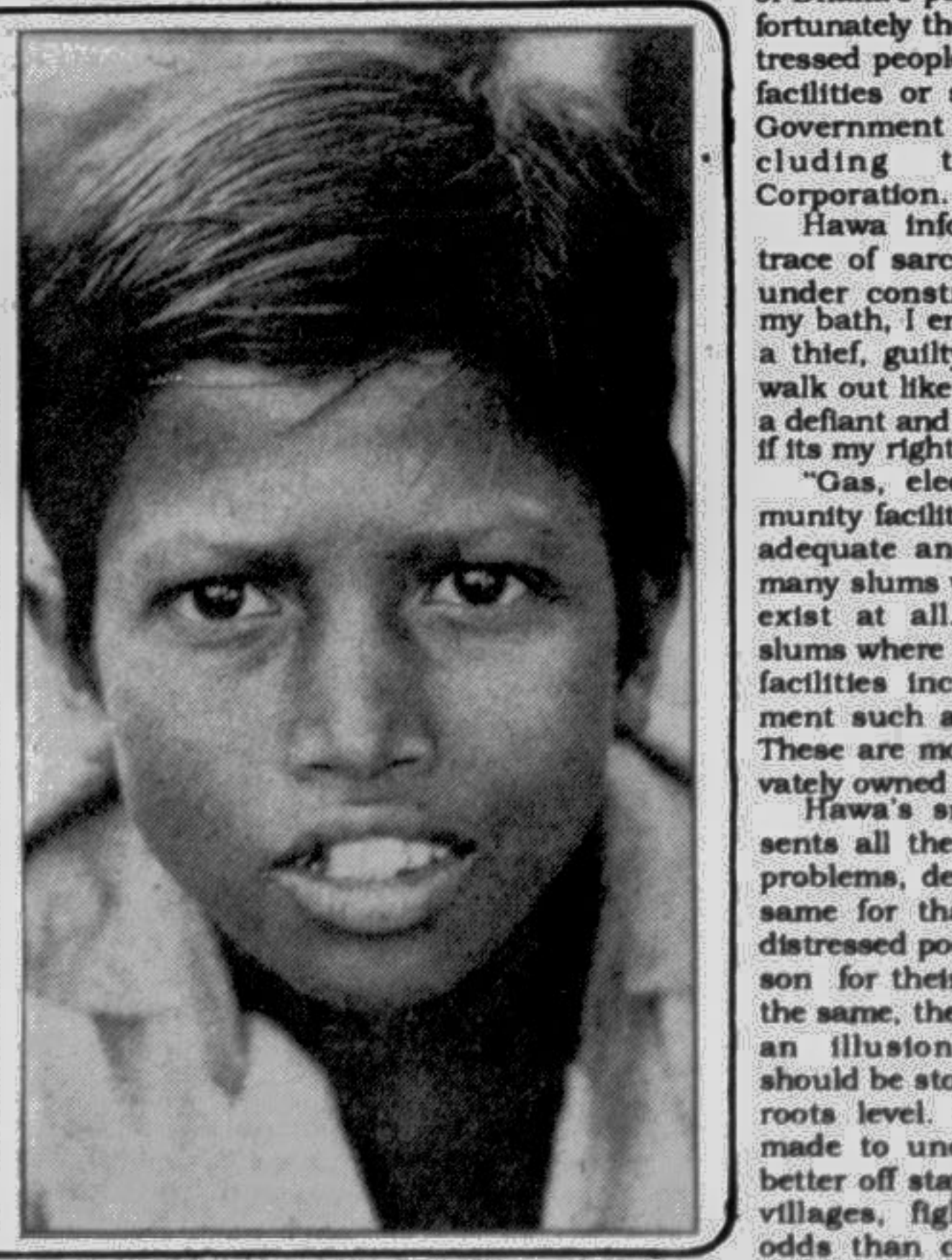
Hawa informs with a faint trace of sarcasm "I go to that under construction house for my bath, I enter the house like a thief, guilty, conscious but I walk out like a policeman, with a defiant and proud attitudes as if it's my right."

"Gas, electricity and community facilities are all very inadequate and poor, there are many slums where these do not exist at all. There are also slums where they have all these facilities including entertainment such as TVs and VCRs. These are mostly found in privately owned slums."

Hawa's small place represents all the city's slums. Her problems, demands are all the same for that whole mass of distressed poor people. The reason for their migration is also the same, they all tend to chase an illusion. This problem should be stopped at the grass-roots level. People should be made to understand they are better off staying back. In their villages, fighting against all odds than coming to Dhaka.



Staying alive is the name of the game for the BLACKS in a predominantly racially bias world.



The task of drawing attention to human needs has unfortunately given rise to the popular impression that the developing world is a stage upon which only tragedy is enacted. But the fact is that more progress has been made in the last 50 years than in the previous 2,000. Average real incomes in the developing world have more than doubled, infant and child death rates have been more than halved, average life expectancy has increased by about a third, and the proportion of children starting school has risen from less than half to more than three quarters.

UNICEF