POPULATION

Rural Mothers' Centres: Playing a Leading Role

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

RURAL Mothers' Centres owe their origin to multi-sectoral approach to family planning programme in Bangladesh. Back in 1975, a project by the name "Rural Mothers' Centres For Population activities" was prepared by the Department of Social Services for implementation in 19 rural thānas from that year.

The programme, targeted to poor rural women, was designed to break the ominous cycle of poverty, illiteracy and procreation. As part of motivational efforts to popularize small family norm, income generating opportunities were created for rural women by giving them skill training and making available credit and marketing facilities so as to enable them to make saleable cottage craft items and pursue other avocations for profit. Simultaneously, arrangements were made to impart training on literacy and other useful household skills like mother and child health care, primary health care, nutrition, sanitation, tree plantation, savings habit and home management.

During the last 20 years, the programme has expanded to 9,736 villages (one rural mothers' centre in each village) of 165 thanas. Each centre has a minimum of 20 members taken from the poor and destitute women of the selected village. The centre is managed by a 11-member committee picked up from amongst its members for a term of one year. The committee members are chosen in a meeting of the thana social service officer, respective union parishad chairman, prominent social workers, all women residents in the village and extension workers. Thus opening of the centre is brought within the knowledge of the village community. But there is nothing which spells out how the community should be involved in its day-to-day operation. The member-secretary of the committee plays a key role in the management of the centre.

The rural mothers' centre programme was evaluated from time to time. In 1982, the external evaluation unit of Bangladesh Planning Commission evaluated the programme and strongly recommended for its continuation and diffusion to each and every corner of rural Bangladesh. Another evaluation carried out in 1985 by the Institute of Social Welfare and Research, Dhaka University commented on the excellent contraceptive performance of the centre members compared to control groups. The evaluation conducted by the population evaluation unit of the Planning Commission in 1990 found the monthly average income of the centre members to be substantially higher compared to non-members and the control groups.

The programme was again evaluated recently. And according to the draft evaluation report (March 1996) the project objectives of fertility reduction through family planning methods was more than achieved. The average number of living children of the centre members was found to be 2.82, and the percentage of married couples using contraceptives (i.e., contraceptive prevalence rate or CPR) was found to be 84.57. Both the figures are much higher than the current national average of 3.4 living children born to a woman during her reproductive period (i.e., total fertility rate or TFR) and CPR of 45 per cent.

The above evaluation findings prove the soundness of the original concept of using rural mothers' centres to influence fertility behaviour of poor rural women for limiting family size. The self-employment opportunities created for them through credit-cum-training programme, and orientation on socially useful skills to improve the quality of life have helped raise their status. They are now more aware about their socio-economic environment and bring in additional income for the family. In such a situation, family members look upon frequent pregnancies as a definite disadvantage. The added family income opens up opportunities for increased investments in education, health care and nutrition and other amenities.

Inspite of what the rural mothers' centre programme has achieved so far, and its potential for further growth to stimulate socio-economic development of rural women and promote responsible motherhood, it has remained small. In 20 years, the programme has expanded to 165 thanas covering less than 50 per cent villages in those thanas. Even then all women eligible for membership could not be taken as members due to shortage of credit fund and other administrative constraints. The programme which has so far received allocation of Taka 396 million is due to terminate in June 1996, and the prospect of its continuation in the present form is uncertain.

Going by the positive evaluation results, it would be unwise to abandon the programme. In fact, time has come to strengthen the programme with greater coverage and also broaden its scope of population related activities. In this respect, the findings of the Demographic and Health Survey, 1993-94 sponsored by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are revealing.

According to the above survey Bangladesh has, of late, experienced a steep decline in fertility. Since 1989-91 the total fertility rate (i.e. live births per woman during her child bearing age) has declined from 4.3 births to 3.4 births, a drop of 21 per cent. The survey findings have also thrown lights on the age at first marriage and age at first birth, child survival, willingness of married women to use family planning methods early in marriage, decline in the proportion of women marrying in their teens and taking care of unmet demand for family planning all of which have implications for the national family planning programme.

Planned parenthood facilitates vocational training for mothers.

As a grassroots organization with multi-dimensional programme, rural mothers' centres have the potential to intervene in all these areas and accelerate fertility decline. The proportion of teen-age marriages can be further reduced by providing adolescent girls' education and employment opportunities. Through counselling and monitoring contraception by married couples, it should be possible to extend the interval between marriage and the first birth, prevent teen age and short interval pregnancies and thus brighten the chances of child survival (creating more appeal for 2-child family), meet unmet demand for family planning from one fifth of married women (for spacing and limiting births), and build up facilities for antenatal care and safe delivery to reduce incidence of maternal mortality and morbidity.

The Demographic and Health Survey, 1993-94 revealed some interesting facts which can be used in planning the intervention. For example, 41 per cent of married women with no formal education are currently contracepting; singly or jointly married women including uneducated women are more involved than before in deciding about contraception; young couples are willing to use family planning methods early in marriage; and younger women are less likely to be visited by field workers because of the notion that they want to get pregnant.

In the light of these findings, the next rural mothers' centre programme could broaden its scope of population activities not only within the members but within the community. This would mean throwing open the centre membership to all women in the village although the credit facilities may remain confined to the poor members.

Also, as potential mothers, adolescent girls cannot be left out and should be taken in as junior members of the centre.

The structure and functions of rural mothers' centre should be considered in a broader perspective as representing women's interests which affect the daily lives. With the state support, the centres could become the focal point of women's development. Here, development means a positive change in the quality of life of majority of women who live a miserable life of poverty and total economic dependence. Development activities could aim at creating opportunities for women to work outside home and supplement family income (which is likely to free them from the burden of repeated pregnancies), promoting literacy and learning of socially useful skills like health care and nutrition and savings habit, creating environmental awareness, protecting and enforcing women's legal rights, organizing resistance to violence and all forms of oppression against women. There are over 68,000 villages in Bangladesh, and rural mothers' centre formed in each village could be a force to reckon with.

Rural Mothers' Centres should now find it easier to play their multi-dimensional role in the society. Women in Bangladesh now feel much more liberated socially and economically in the wake of large number of women coming out of their homes for self-employment and working in garment factories. Grameen Bank which offers supervised credit for self-employment has more than 1.94 million female members (94 per cent of the total) as of April, 1996. The garment factories numbering one thousand employ about 960,000 female workers constituting 80 per cent of the factory hands. Over one million women participate in various credit programmes run by the leading NGOs. In primary and secondary education the percentages of female enrollment have gone up to 47.40 and 45.94 respectively in 1995, thus fast catching up with male enrollment.

Conceptually, the rural mothers' centre programme designed to influence fertility behaviour of rural women by creating income earning opportunities for economic security and imparting socially useful skills appears sound. But due to limited coverage and other deficiencies like total dependance on the Rural Social Service field staff for programme implementation and supervision, shortage of credit fund, lack of adequate training facilities, the programme could not make the desired impact nationally. On the eve of launching the next Population and Health Project, time has come to review the programme in all its aspects to decide on its continuation, size and objectives. As a multi-dimensional programme, all the Government agencies and NGOs, concerned with women's development, should be involved in framing its management policies. There should be a policy decision at the highest level to make available the services of extension workers to rural mothers' centres whenever required. An inter-departmental steering committee may be formed to ensure progress of implementation and for monitoring.

In other words, there is a need to upgrade the rural mothers' centre into a major programme with the involvement of all concerned with overall development of women. This should take us nearer to the goal of reaching the replacement level of fertility of 2.2 children per woman by the year 2005 or soon thereafter.

The author, a retired Addl. Secretary to the Govt. of Bangladesh, served as Director, Family Planning Board in mid 1970s.

In Cities — Breathing is Harmful to Health!

Air pollution in Asian cities is getting so bad that it does not matter any more whether you smoke or not. **Johanna Son** of Inter Press Service samples the air.

MANILA — Health Warning: Living in developing Asia's congested cities can be hazardous to your health!

Overcrowding and inadequate shelter, lack of safe water, sanitation and sewage facilities, polluted air and water, and noxious fumes spewed by industry and motor vehicles have become routine risks of life in cities from Karachi to Bangkok.

"City-dwellers are living in conditions that are detrimental to their health and even endangering their lives," warns Hiroshi Nakajima, director-general of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Asian cities, which made up bulk of the increase in the world's urban population in 1980 to 1990, continue to grow in size and economic power. By 2015, 17 of the world's 27 megacities will be in Asia. And by 2020, over half of Asians will be urbanites.

As early as 1988, the United Nations said five of the world's seven most polluted cities were in Asia — Beijing, Calcutta, Jakarta, New Delhi and Shenyang, China.

WHO is focusing on the crisis in urban health ahead of Habitat II, the second UN Conference on Human Settlements, which takes place in Istanbul, Turkey in June.

S T Han, WHO director for the Western Pacific, said: "While economic development should provide more resources for health care services, deteriorating urban environmental quality and associated unhealthy lifestyles, together with the ever-increasing population pressures in urban areas often create more health problems than the increased resources can address."

Symptoms of sick, poisoned cities are not hard to spot. And economic development is not necessarily a panacea. China, for example, has in recent years been posting the world's fastest growth rates. Statistics show that increased emissions of soot, sulphur dioxide, industrial fly ash and suspended particles in Chinese cities have pushed up the death rate from cancer by 6.2 per cent and lung cancer by 18.5 per cent since 1988. The highest male cancer mortality in China is in booming Shanghai.

Cities in northern China disappear in satellite photographs for months because of the thick pall of smoke from coal burning. A 1995 study of Bangkok's 2,500 traffic officers showed 59.5 per cent had health problems. Jeepney drivers have the highest prevalence of chronic respiratory problems in the Philippines. In a 1991 study, the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) found levels of suspended particulate matter (SPM) in the air over Manila to be 200 to 400 percent above guideline levels.

Much of air pollution in Asian cities, which has the world's fastest-growing market for cars, is transport-related. Asian cities have begun using unleaded fuel, but 'dirty' fuel, combined with slow vehicle speeds in traffic-clogged highways and weak traffic infrastructure, continue to poison their air.

Ajit Ninan/Inter Press Service

Asia's city folk have been breathing dirtier air in the last five years, the main pollutants stemming from the combustion of fossil fuel — including coal for power generation, fuel for running vehicles and industrial processes.

These spew a deadly mix of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, suspended particulates and lead. Many of these pollutants are high enough to cause increased mortality, lung and cardiovascular problems and neuro-behavioural effects or have been linked to cancer.

Fossil-fuel burning releases sulphur dioxide, which causes respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Carbon monoxide from vehicles poisons the blood cells, hurts liver and kidney functions and causes neurological damage.

Children and the elderly are most vulnerable, says Stephen Tamplin, WHO regional adviser on health. "The body has the capacity to clean itself, but long-term exposure to increased pollution makes it almost impossible for the system to clean itself," he said in an interview.

Industries like electricity generation, steel and cement industries dirty the air too. Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, has a cement factory in full-scale production four km from the city centre. High incidence of tuberculosis exists among workers in the Indrapastha power plant in New Delhi, which spews huge amounts of SPM, sulfur and nitrogen oxides. In Karachi, Pakistan Steel Mills is the nation's biggest single source of industrial SPM.

Health hazards also lurk in Asia's congested cities, where one-third of its residents live in settlements that often lack services like clean water and sewage systems.

Indeed, WHO says congestion in these settlements is a key reason for the incidence of measles deaths in cities. Measles spreads easily in densely packed communities and affects city infants exposed to it at younger ages. In short, cities are a high risk population. Said WHO: "The combination spells danger."

A new World Bank study on Philippine poverty says the poor are likely to suffer more heavily from urban air pollution, and have respiratory illnesses like bronchitis. And unlike richer residents, the poor cannot seek refuge in air-conditioned cars. Vehicle and industrial pollutants are often greater at the roadside, where poor children are most exposed.

Except for Singapore, less than 20 per cent of Asia-Pacific urban households are linked to central sewer systems. Only one-fourth of the poor have access to water supply in megacities. Poor residents try to exploit groundwater sources, only to find many of them exhausted or polluted. Many rivers, like Thailand's Chao Phraya river and the Philippines' Pasig river, are heavily polluted. Many rivers, like Thailand's Chao Phraya river and the Philippines' Pasig river, are heavily polluted. Many rivers in the South Asian subcontinent have turned into sewers.

There is no instant cure for ailing cities. Setting and implementing pollution standards, using low-pollutant fuels, investing in mass transport, reviewing car use policies, improving water and sanitation and making local government more financially independent, would help.

Some economists argue that pollution is a necessary part of rising living standards. Tamplin disagrees : "It is cheaper to make pollution control, sanitation and improvement of quality of life part of the development process than to try to fix them later."

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Monday 17th June

(All programmes are in local time. We recommend programmes printed in bold. There may be changes in the programmes).

BTV

3:00 Opening Announcement Al-Quran Programme Summary **3:10** Recitation From the Bible **3:15** Cartoon Film: Macron **3:45** Drama series: Retelecast of Selected Dramas **4:00** News in Bangla **4:45** Esho Gan Shikhi **5:00** News in Bangla **5:25** Nazrul Songs **5:50** Sports Programme **6:00** News in Bangla **6:30** Tarunnya **7:00** The News **7:05** Open University **7:25** Unish Bish **8:00** News in Bangla **8:40 Package Drama 10:00** News in English **10:30** Shasthatatha **10:35** Janomat : Family planning programme **10:55** Comedy series: Coach **11:30** News in Bangla **11:35** Tuesday's programme **11:40** Close down

BBC

6:00 BBC World Newsroom inc. World Business Report/ Asia Today/24 Hours **9:00** BBC World Headlines **9:05** The Money Programme **10:00** BBC Newsday **1:00pm** BBC World News **1:15** The Money Programme **2:00** BBC World News **2:30** Time Out : Top Gear **3:00** BBC World News **3:30** Time Out : More Rhodes Around Britain **4:00** BBC Newsdesk **6:00** BBC News Headlines **6:05** Correspondent **7:00** BBC World News **7:15** World Business Report **7:30** BBC Newshour Asia & Pacific **8:30** Time Out : Nature **9:00** BBC World News **9:15** The Money Programme **10:00** BBC World News **10:30 Time Out : Tomorrow's World 11:00** The World Today **1:00** BBC World Headlines **1:05** The Money Programme **1:50** Earth Report **2:00** BBC World News **2:30** Time Out : The Travel Show **3:00** BBC World Report inc. World Business Report/24 Hours **5:00** BBC World News **5:10** Newsnight

CHANNEL V

7:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya **8:00** Jump Start VJ Trey **10:00** Frame by Frame **12:00noon** The Vibe VJ Luke **1:00** By Demand VJ Trey **2:00** Rewind VJ Sophiya **3:00** Big Bang VJ Alessandra **4:30** By Demand VJ Trey **5:30** Rewind VJ Sophiya **6:30** The Vibe VJ Luke **7:30** First Day First Show **8:00** Lunchpad **9:00 BPL Oye! 10:00** Big Bang VJ Alessandra **10:30** First Day First Show **11:00** Rewind VJ Sophiya **11:30** The Ride VJ Trey **12:00mn** Over The Edge VJ Sophiya **12:30** Music Master Bos Shoof **1:00** Big Bang VJ Alessandra **2:00** By Demand VJ Trey **3:00** Frame by Frame

STAR PLUS

6:30 Voltron **7:00** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles **7:30** G I Joe **8:00** Saber Rider And The Star Sherrif **8:30** The Adventures Of Black Beauty **9:00** Aerobics Oz Style **9:30** Nanny and the Professor **10:00** Mr Belvedere **10:30** Mollie Kazen's Cooking **11:00** Videofashion News **11:30** Gabrielle **12:30** Santa Barbara **1:30** The Bold & The Beautiful **2:00** The Oprah Winfrey Show **3:00** Remington Steele **4:00** Mollie Kazen's Cooking **4:30** Videofashion News **5:00** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles **5:30** The Adventures Of Black Beauty **6:00** Lost In Space **7:00** Home and Away **7:30** Entertainment Tonight **8:00** MASH **8:30** Mystery Movies B L Stryker **10:30** The Bold & The Beautiful **11:00** Santa Barbara **12:00mn** Hard Copy **12:30** Hearts Afire **1:00** Grace Under Fire **1:30** Barnaby Jones **2:30** Entertainment Tonight **3:00** The Oprah Winfrey Show **4:00** Hard Copy **4:30** Home and Away **5:00** The Sulivans **5:30** Gabrielle

STAR Sports

6:00am Formula Asia Round 5&6 Fm Sentul, Indonesia **6:30** US PGA Tour Buick Classic Highlights **7:30** World Wrestling Federation Mania **8:30** Cricket 96 (Women's) International Series England v New Zealand 2nd One Day International **2:30** The Asian Football Show **3:30** Gillette World Sport Special **4:00** Formula One World Championships 1996 Canadian Grand Prix **6:00** World Superbike Championship, 1996 From Italy, Monza **8:00** Marlboro League '96 Chinese National Football Leauge Dalian vs Shanghai @ Dalian **10:00** A-Z Of Sport **11:00** Statesman Vintage Classic Car Rally **11:30** The Asian Football Show **12:30** Cricket 96 (Women's) International Series England v New Zealand 2nd One Day International

STAR MOVIES

7:30 Comedy Don't Lose Your Head 15 (Arabic Subtitles) **9:30** Family Little Man Tate PG (Arabic Subtitles) **11:30** Western Frontier Marshall 12 (Hindi Subtitles) **1:30** Family A Message From Holly PG (Hindi Subtitles) **3:30** Comedy Doctor At Sea 12 (Hindi Subtitles) **5:30** Family Jack The Bear 15 (Hindi Subtitles) **7:30** Film Fiction: Young Ivanhoe 12 (Hindi Subtitles) **9:00** Extreme Close Up **9:30** This Week That Year **10:00** Married to The Mob 18 (Hindi Subtitles) **11:30** World Cinema : Sam And Me? (Arabic Subtitles) **1:30** Action : Espion Leve Toi 15 (Arabic Subtitles) **3:30** Thriller Brubaker 18 (Arabic Subtitles) **5:30** Musical : Great Ball Of Fire 18 (Arabic Subtitles)

ZEE TV

5:30am Infotainment (TMM) **6:00** News **6:30** Jagran **7:00** ZED : Naya A To Z **7:30** ZED Networking **8:00** ZED : Naya A To Z **8:30** Dream Merchants **9:00** Hum Zameen **9:30** Gaane Anjaane **10:00** Zaike Ka Safar **10:30** Sailab **11:00** Daak Ghar **11:30** Gopaljee **12:00** Jaanbaaz **12:30** Suno Suno Tring Tring **1:00** ZED - Chota Byte **1:30** Asian Sky Shop **2:30** Tara **3:00** Filmi Chakkar **3:30** Mere Ghar Ana Zindagi **4:00** Mano Ya Na Mano **4:30** Naye Tarane **5:00** ZED - Chota Byte **5:30** Akbar Birbal **6:00** Cartoon **6:30** Positive Health Show **7:00** ZED **7:30** Gaane Anjaane **8:00** TMKB **8:30** 17 Shirley Road **9:00** TVS Saregama **9:30** Campus **10:00** Daraar **10:30** The News **11:00** No Problem **11:30** Close Up Antakshari **12:00** Tara **12:30** Andaz **1:00** 9 Malabar Hills **1:30** Tumhare Liye **2:00** FLU **2:30** Infotainment (TMM)

PTV

8:00 am Tilawat Aur Tarjuma /Hamd/Naat **8:20** Cartoon **8:30** Khabrain **8:45** Abb Pata Challa **9:05** Khat Farmaish **9:20** Sargam Sargam **9:45** Ilaaj-Bil-Ghiza Pakistan **10:05** Shab Daigh **10:35** English Film : Goof Troop **10:55** Milli Naghma **11:00** Khabrain **11:10** The Saint (Roger Moor) **12:00** Shama (Drama Serial) **12:55pm** Quran-e-Hakeem **1:02** Bismillah **1:15** Angaar (Drama Serial) **2:00** Shehrad (Drama Serial) **2:50** The Face Of Cultural **3:15** Roushni **3:30** Paimaney **4:00** Ghardari **4:35** Biology for 10th Geography/ Chemistry **5:55** Inter College Quiz **6:25** Aiou Courses **7:00** Taranum (Drama Serial) **7:45** English News **8:00** Potluck **8:20** Ali Baba **8:45** Tum Se Kahan Tha (Serial) **9:00** Break for Headline News **10:00** Khabarnama **11:15** Classics Drama Serial Janglee **12:20** Special TBA **1:00** Khas Khas Khabrain/ Close down

SONY ET

9:30am Yaadon Ki Baarat **9:00** The Three Stooges **9:30** Dennis The Menace **10:00** I Dream Of Jeannie **10:30** Raja Rani Aur Jokar **11:00** Sunday Ki Sunday (Serial) **11:30** Cine Matinee Hindi Feature Film **2:30** Kismat **3:00** Zamin Asman **3:30** Mere Message Meri Geet **4:00** Surf Wheel Of Fortune (Game Show) **4:30** The Rasoi Show **5:00** The World Cup Countdown Cricket **5:30** The Three Stooges **6:00** Dennis The Menace **6:30** I Dream of Jeannie **7:00** Mere Message Meri Geet **7:30** Premier **8:00** Surf Wheel Of Fortune **8:30** Ta[illegible] **9:00** Dekh Tamasa Dekh **9:30** Yeh Sadi Nahi Ho Sakti **10:00** Zamane Badal Gaye **10:30** Cine Prime Hindi Feature Film **1:30** Mere Message Meri Geet **2:00** Yaadon Ki Barat

DD 7

8:10 Puratani Gaan **8:20** Binodon **8:25** Classical Music **8:30** Dik Darshan (Serial) **9:00** Janani (New Drama Serial) **9:30** Saptahiki **10:00** Shastriyo Sangeet **10:30** Parikrama **11:00** Ghare Baire **12:30** Ek Silpi Onek Gaan **1:00** Janani (New Drama Serial) **1:30** Bengali Movie Club Film Show **5:05** Nepali Programme **5:30** News **5:35** Desh Bidesher Khela **6:00** Palli Katha : TV Report **6:30** Daibaddha **6:55** Troyee **7:30** Bangla Sambad **7:55** Dinindan **8:00** Dik Darshan **9:00** Pracheer **9:30** Ghare Bahire **10:00** Bengali Movie Club Film Show.

EL TV

00:30am Dance Dance **01:30** Jugal Jodi **02:30** R.D Burman Special **03:30** Party Time **04:30** Tarane **05:30** Dance Dance **06:30** Jugal Jodi **07:30** R.D Burman Special **08:30** Party Time **09:30** Tarane **10:30** Fantasy Kal Bhi Aaj Bhi **11:00** Teri Bhi Chup, Meri Bhi Chup **11:30** Wonder Wings Amar Prem **12:00mn** Dev Anand Special **1:00** Best of The Best **2:00** Geet Bahar **3:00** Shatranj **3:30** V3 + **4:00** Society Navras **4:30** The Music Show **5:00** Teen Do Paanch **5:30** Dev Anand Special **6:30** Best of the Best **7:30** Awaz Nayi Andaz Wahi **8:00** D 'Signer quartz top of the tops **8:30** Zandu Balm Dance Mania **9:00** Sorry Meri Lor[illegible] **9:30** Shudh Detergent Karz **10:00** Foltene Chalo Cinema **10:30** Newsline **11:00** Amitabh Bachchan Special **1:00** Sargam

ZEE CINEMA

8:30 Taraana **9:00** Hit Hai Fit Hai **9:30** Paramatma (Cast Shatrunghan Sinha, Rekha) **12:15** Movies Masti Magic **12:45** Insaan (Cast Vinod Khanna, Anita Raj) **3:30** Filmi Chakkar **4:00** Sushila (Marathi) **6:45** Goraa (Cast Rajesh Khanna, Sulakshana) **9:30** Songs **10:00** Neend Hamari Khwab Tumhari (Cast Sashi Kapoor, Nanda) **12:15** Aaj Anadi Kal Khiladi **12:45** Qaid (Cast Vinod Khanna, Leena)

TV's Sa Re Ga Ma on Zee TV, Tonight at 9:00

TOM and JERRY

James Bond

BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY NORAK