

Coping with Population Momentum in the Coming Century

by Sarwat Chowdhury

HOW Many People Can the Earth Support? That was the title of Joel E. Cohen's 1995 book. In this well researched book, the author provides a thoughtful discussion of the global population issue. However, in the end, the overall debate remains rather inconclusive. Can we really decide on a magic number of human population for our planet? More importantly, can we even imagine what the numbers mean in terms of "real" people with faces, and their minimum sustenance needs? When considering our impact on the earth, the population number should be multiplied by the per capita resource use and their pollution effects.

Therefore, in theory we could have a high population with very low resource use and pollution, or a smaller population with a more reasonable resource use and pollution effects.

However, the reality is: our earth is very divided in terms of demography (population density, growth etc) as well in terms of consumption of the limited resources and in the resulting pollution and environmental degradation. On October 12, 1999 the population of the earth will reach 6 billion. At least, that's the projection of the United Nations Population Fund (in comparison to the day of 5 billion was in 1987, and the day of 2 billion was also in this century in 1971).

The 1998 State of the World Population Report of UN Population Fund identifies two specific trends in the global population growth. First, population momentum, and the second aging of population.

What is Population Momentum?

Population momentum is evident in the youthful age structure typical of the populations of developing countries. This occurs because large cohorts born in previous years move through the reproductive stages, generating more births than are offset by deaths in the smaller and older cohorts. Therefore, even if the fertility of a country reaches the replacement level of about two children per woman, with a large number of women in their reproductive years, the population growth will continue for some more years (each woman may have fewer children, but more women in total gives birth).

In India, the combination of above-replacement fertility and momentum is projected to double its current population, which will exceed China's population in 50 years. Studies show that one way to slow population momentum is to encourage later childbearing and more education for both men and women.

Ageing of the World Population

There are over 578 million

people worldwide over the age of 60, and this generation is growing at an unprecedented rate. According to the World Resources Institute, in some countries of the developing world, the population of over 65 may grow by as much as 400 per cent over the next 30 years. While infant mortality and life expectancy has increased in the developing world, the change in fertility level has not been as great as the other two changes.

Urbanisation and Life in Megacities

Another important aspect of the global population trend is: the world's population is gradually becoming more urban. As Bangladeshis, we are perhaps in a better situation to appreciate this aspect of population growth. Any one who has returned to Bangladesh after a visit abroad can probably relate to the initial shock of looking at "masses of people" who are seen gathered around ZIA. The second shock is proba-

ly our poor nutritional status (evident in the health and diminutive stature of Bangladeshis in general). Of course, the people gathered around the airport are there for specific reasons.

But, they do seem to represent the typical demographic situation in our homeland, at least to an extent. If anyone has the unfortunate need to travel perhaps to Motiheel in the middle of rush hour, all the charm of life in a "megacity" becomes very evident to that person. After all, we do live in a megacity.

A prominent feature of today's urbanisation is the continuing trend of expanding metropolitan areas. Megacities are defined as cities with at least 8 million inhabitants.

The number of megacities rose from just 2 (New York and London) in 1950 to 23 in 1995. Five of the 23 megacities are located in South Asia. They include Karachi, Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Dhaka. Statistics also show that an estimated 25-50 per cent of urban inhabitants of the developing countries live in impoverished slums and squatter settlements with little or no access to ade-

quate water, sanitation, or refuse collection. In such situations, both environmental quality, and human health and well-being are at risk.

Joel Cohen's book provides a brief account of the age-old notion that gods impose war and plague to control over population. In the post-Homeric epic *Cypria*, the beautiful Helen's birth is attributed to be a part of Zeus's plan to provoke the Trojan war which would ultimately lead to population control (apparently Zeus considered the war a better method of destroying human lives compared with other alternatives such as floods).

More recent accounts of epidemic include AIDS which has very serious destabilising effect on communities and families. According to the UN Population Fund, part of the global population decrease is due to the AIDS epidemic. Overall, one issue that all historians seem to agree on is: the nature's way of limiting population comes at a terrible cost in human suffering.

The Story of Bangladesh and other South Asian Countries

The Bangladesh Demo-

graphic and Health Survey, 1996-97 reports that the average number of children per woman in Bangladesh dropped from 4.8 in 1987 to 3.3 in 1997. Unfortunately, this trend of declining fertility rate is not applicable to all the South Asian countries. In fact, new data show that in some countries the fertility rates are higher than earlier estimates. A case in point is India.

The Worldwatch Institute's 1998 publication of *Vital Signs* refers to the Indian government's announcement of total fertility rate of 3.4 children per woman correcting an earlier projection of 3.2 children per woman. Considering the more than 950 million population of India, this difference in fertility rate is quite substantial.

Revisiting the Global Picture

We are all familiar with statistics that the richest 20 per cent of the world consume over 70 per cent of the world's commercial energy. As industrial countries overconsume and overpollute per capita, they are logically responsible for reaching the ecological limits to carrying capacity of the earth for

human population. The argument is reverse when we consider the question of population growth. U.S. Congress' Office of Technology Assessment projects that developing countries population growth would account for a 75 per cent increase in their commercial energy consumption by 2025, even if the per capita consumption remained at current levels (which is undoubtedly inadequate in most of the developing world). It seems safe to assume that, even after the "Day of 6 Billion", human numbers will continue to increase. In this demographically divided world, fertility has dropped and population has stabilised or is declining in some countries. But, there are countries where fertility is still high, and where population is projected to double or even triple before stabilising.

As far as projections are concerned, over the next 50 years, the world population will reach 9.4 billion with nearly 60 per cent of the projected population growth in Asia. In reality, whether the overall human population reaches 10 or even 20 billion will depend on policy decisions and individual actions in the next decade. Population control issues need to become a top priority not only in the developing country agenda, but in the agenda of donor agencies/countries as well. The case of Bangladesh provides a good model to demographers.

Therefore, the sooner we steer away from heavy dependence on old policies like infrastructure development as a means to poverty alleviation which would lead to decrease in population, and more directly invest in population control measures, the results would be more immediate. The rapid growth of adolescent and ageing populations will also require better healthcare and social support services for the elderly, as well as better reproductive health information and services; education and job training for the young. Unfortunately, the international population control assistance from the donor countries provides a disheartening picture.

The United States, considered the largest donor in global population assistance, decreased its funding of \$547 million in 1995 to \$385 million in 1998. These figures appear more outrageous when one considers the fact that the world as a whole, spends a greater amount of money every two weeks on military expenditures than the amount needed for population programs (according to UN estimates) on a yearly basis (Worldwatch 1998). If the declining trend in development assistance and economic crises continue in various parts of the world, the gradual progress in population control achieved over the past may soon become fruitless.

Rigoberta Menchu: From Trickle to Wave

by Shamsad Murtaza

WE are not moved, nor will we be moved, by vengeance or revenge, but rather the search of truth and the application of justice without any discrimination whatsoever. If in the course of the internal armed conflict there are civilians or members of the insurrection implicated in grave violations of the fundamental rights of Guatemalans, they should be treated with all of the rigor that the law permits.

Rigoberta Menchu in "No More Impunity" — An Open Letter to the President of the Guatemalan Republic, Congressional representatives, Members of Copaz and the general command of URNG, June 1996.

"Thank you for coming," said the 39-year-old 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner to the packed audience at the Gallagher Theatre of the University of Arizona. "I cannot speak English because I am shy," she added. And then switched into Spanish.

Two hundred translation kits available could barely satisfy a portion of the audience. Luckily I had arrived an hour ahead of the equipment that would give a simultaneous translation of Rigoberta Menchu, the first indigenous and the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Garbed in traditional Guatemalan dress, Ms. Menchu held her audience spellbound for an hour on November 3, 1998. She spoke of how the cold war era has labelled the women's liberation movement as a post-Soviet relic and a left-bloc propaganda. She spoke of how as an indigenous woman she had been doubly marginalised: first as a woman, then as a native. She spoke to point out why the mainstream needs to recognise and learn from the "minority".

"How can women be minority?" asked Menchu. "[When] Only few women are destined to be men" she quipped. Her subtle humour set the tone for her treatment of a myriad of contemporary issues. For me, however, it took a while to get the joke. After all, simultaneous translation is a funny process. It creates a domino effect. The audience, sharply divided between "Se habla Espanol" and

No Spanish," responded to jokes of Menchu in phases. My place in the "No Spanish" category allowed me to respond to Menchu's keen sense of humour only when the "Se habla Espanol" section of the audience had stopped laughing at her witty remarks.

Soon it became obvious that Menchu's humour was a sugar coating to the pills of human suffering. She reminded the audience of faculty and students that her "crazy idea" was to come up with a self-teaching knowledge and an education system that would pave the way for the future. Her definition of education was not confined to the "dark" classroom or laboratory.

Amid intermittent roars of laughter, Menchu urged, "Let us do something without offending the anthropologists, social scientists, and fanatics." Smartly, she underlined indigenous knowledge as an alternative but unexplored resource. For example, she recalled her Mayan ancestry and pointed that the Indians (indigenous people of America) have a dense knowledge base that has not been explored by the academics. "Scholars only took overwhelming interests in the [human] sacrifices Indians made." For the most part academics have silenced the Indians' world-view, essentially maintaining a disquieting peace and harmony.

Referring to violence across the board, Menchu said that there are at least 53 groups involved in armed fighting in the world right now. Regrettably, negotiations to resolve these crises usually are very "shallow" which makes the peace process very unstable.

Menchu maintained that in any war situation a certain group of people gets involved in the conflict in order to make a living. By the same token, other groups simply become victims. The war cannot end until these two parties are done with one another. Often this tricky relationship causes a relapse into warfare. Guatemala is currently fighting 20 years after the "end" of their prior war because the dissatisfaction of these two parties was never addressed. "The same thing is happening elsewhere in Central America. Now Mexico should not wait

20 years to learn this fact about the "relapses", Menchu argues, to underscore the need for learning from the countries and communities who have experienced the devastation and catastrophe of war.

"The pain in the world is not only a political pain. It is not only women's pain." The pain is due to the harm we have done to nature. Nature has its own way of settling scores. Menchu refers to the recent hurricane that rampaged Guatemala. But these political and natural catastrophes have something in common: faces of human sufferings. Things may or may not change in the upcoming century but we must start investing to bring these changes. Changes can only come through mutual understanding; that is, understanding our relationship to one another in spite of cultural, political, and geographical barriers.

"I have attended many seminars, conferences. I have crossed many boundaries. There is a serious lack of solidarity among women. In the conferences women come, take photographs or make statements. Somehow there is something lacking in all these meetings. We have made some progresses but are yet to reach any solution."

The ghost of the cold war still ascribes women's movement as a Soviet element. With the change of wind, these misconceptions should be broken. But they can be broken only if minorities and women are given the chance to prove themselves. "Invest in them so that they can make changes," concluded Menchu.

The standing ovation and the applause assured that Menchu was not alone in her mission. It is probably not too late to think of women as colleagues, not merely as objects of domestication.

SIDEBAR (downloaded from Rigoberto Menchu Foundation homepage)

Rigoberta Menchu Tum

Rigoberta Menchu Tum is a Guatemalan leader internationally known for her work in the promotion of the defence of human rights, peace and Indigenous Peoples' rights. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, becoming the first indigenous and the youngest person ever to receive this distinction.

For Rigoberta Menchu Tum, this Nobel Peace Prize acknowledges the struggle of Indigenous Peoples. It is also a symbolic recognition of the victims of repression, racism and poverty as well as an homage to Indigenous Women.

Rigoberta Menchu Tum was born in 1959 in the village of Chimal, Guatemala, a community continuing the millennium-old Maya-Quiché culture. In her youth she worked in the fields and later in the city as a domestic employee. She lived in the midst of the injustice, misery and discrimination suffered by the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala. Various members of her family were tortured and assassinated by the repressive armed forces. Perse-

cut, Rigoberta was exiled to Mexico in 1980.

Self-educated, she has shown herself to be a natural leader of great intelligence. She became an active political worker in labour, campesino and human rights groups as well as in the defence and promotion of the rights and values of Indigenous Peoples. In 1983 her testimonial book, *I, Rigoberta Menchu. An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, was published, followed by various of her texts and poems.

Through her work, Rigoberta has received world-wide recognition and several honorary doctorates. In 1993, she was nominated by the United Nations as Goodwill Ambassador for the International Year of the Indigenous Peoples. At present she is the Promotee of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples, mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations and was also appointed to be the personal advisor to the general director of UNESCO. Concurrently she presides over the Indigenous Initiative for Peace.

Great Apes Come Closer to Human Neighbours

For years, the gorillas of Central Africa's great Lakes region have fascinated both scientists and lay visitors, but as with elephants elsewhere on the continent, the humans who live near to sanctuaries often feel that the apes get a better deal than they do. Gemini News Service reports on efforts in Uganda to reduce the scope for conflict. David Blair writes from Kampala, Uganda

"S

EEING A gorilla is one of life's great experiences," say all the guidebooks to Uganda. And with the closure of the gorilla sanctuaries in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo due to civil-war, Uganda is now the only country where tourists can find the endangered mountain gorilla.

Every day, quotas of six visitors are admitted to Mgahinga Park and ten to Bwindi Impenetrable Reserve to enjoy the "experience of a lifetime".

Every tourist pays \$200 to track the gorillas, yet there is no adequate compensation for villagers who lose their livelihoods. A woman went to a park office. She had eight children and her entire plantation had been destroyed by gorillas, said Ms. Madden. "The park officials did nothing to help her."

While trying to defend their fields, six farmers have been attacked by the animals since 1996. Fear of gorilla attack can spread across an entire district. "On one occasion, a school was closed for two months because the people thought gorillas had left the national park," said Ms. Madden. "They were afraid to walk down the path that led to the school."

Faced with these problems, Ms Madden has held workshops with representatives of all those involved to develop new initiatives. Local people have been brought together with Park Wardens, officials from the Wildlife Authority and the Gorilla Conservation Programme.

Several key options for further action have emerged. "People need to be educated about gorillas so that you reduce their fear," said Ms Madden. Gorillas are naturally gentle, vegetarian creatures and only attack if provoked, but many people still view them as dangerous predators.

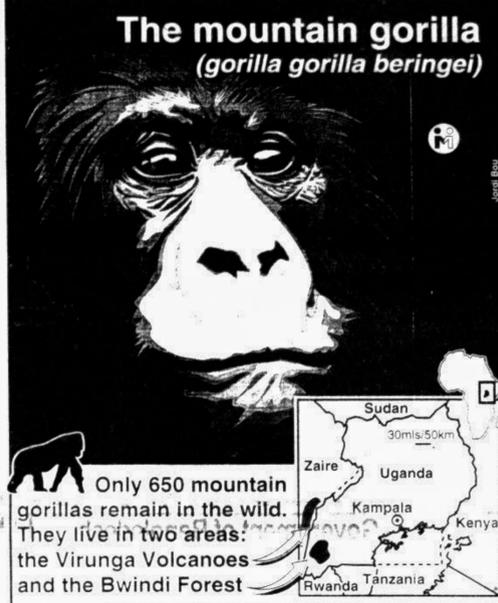
They need training on how to respond to a frightened gorilla. If an animal charges in panic, the natural instinct to run for your life may be a fatal error. If you stand still, the gorilla will stop short of harming you.

Once they have received this training, local people can then form "gorilla response teams". Monitoring the boundaries of the parks, they can report any gorillas straying outside them and drive them back if necessary.

To complement greater community education, the workshops discussed creating a buffer zone around the parks. Gorillas are frightened by open spaces, so a belt of land could be cleared to deter them from leaving the parks. Immediately beyond, people could be encouraged to avoid planting crops like bananas or coffee which gorillas find attractive.

"The most important goal is to minimise the negative effects the gorillas have on the local community," said Ms Madden. But the most important step towards accomplishing this is to have a fairer distribution of the revenue earned by the Parks.

Every day, the two gorilla sanctuaries make \$3,200 from tourists, an unimaginable sum to the people living nearby. A limited revenue sharing scheme



The mountain gorilla (gorilla gorilla beringei)

Only 650 mountain gorillas remain in the wild. They live in two areas: the Virunga Volcanoes and the Bwindi Forest

does exist, but as Ms Madden points out, "it does not benefit individuals. Occasionally an entire community may benefit from a project, but that can be very remote from most people."

An immediate need is the establishment of a proper compensation fund for people whose livelihoods are damaged by gorillas. An ambitious step would be to allow all local people a share of the revenue, giving them a direct personal stake in conserving the animals.

All these options have drawbacks, yet initiatives like these are needed if Africa's mountain gorillas are to have a sustainable future. Conflict with local people spells doom for the animals, because when strife occurs between man and beast, in the end, the beast always loses.

The writer is a British freelance journalist based in Kampala and specialising in the Great Lakes region.

Scales of Pay: The Unasked Questions

Amrik Singh writes from New Delhi

CONTROVERSY about the revision of scales has gone on for about a year. How long it will take to be resolved not only at the Centre, but also in the states, remains to be seen. There were certain questions, however, which were not raised publicly throughout this period. It is time to do so. Should, for instance, scales of pay both by university and college teachers be the same?

In 1973, the answer was that there should be no distinction between them. A quarter century later, there seems to be little justification for continuing with the status quo. The situation, however, is so complicated and the stakes are so high that in this game of pressures and counter pressures, some what loaded question has not been asked or debated publicly.

It would be better to amend the statement and say that the question has been asked and asked repeatedly but in private. Those concerned with policy-making admit it openly that it has blurred the distinction be-

tween undergraduate and post-graduate education was a mistake. It suited the then policy makers to blur the distinction. That was perhaps the only way to get the college teachers out of the pit into which they had fallen. Teaching was never a well-paid profession in our country at any stage. After 1947, the job became somewhat demeaning. But there was no way of redressing the situation except to do two things.

One was to overlook the distinction between the two categories of teachers and the second was to link up the whole issue with the revision of salary scales in respect of the Central government employees. By then, the system of appointing a Pay Commission every decade or so had got established in respect of the government employees. Nothing of the kind had, however, started happening for college or university teachers. In any case, it was time to detach the colleges and universities from the other categories of teachers and put them

in a separate league. This idea appealed to then Prime Minister. When she tried to get the Cabinet to agree to it, she was reportedly opposed by several important members of the Cabinet including Babu Jagjivan Ram and Swaran Singh. It is reported that C Subramaniam was a less than enthusiastic supporter of the proposition. Since he is around, it is for him to confirm or deny this report.

In the upshot, there was a remarkable turnaround in the salary scales of university and college teachers. School teachers were left far behind, it need not be added. It took them a whole decade to draw abreast of their seniors, so to speak. As to those at the primary and the upper primary level, things continue to be difficult except that in some of the states things have been improved. To say no more about it, two crucial mistakes were made in 1973. One was to bracket the university and college teachers together. The other was to detach them from other teachers.

Amrik Singh writes from New Delhi

As everybody would agree, an overall view of remuneration for teachers has to be taken. Those at the university level possibly represent the highest peak, while those at the primary level may represent the other pole. There has to be some differentiation amongst the different categories of teachers; however. But then this should not be all that sharp or radical so as to create fresh problems. Something of this kind has happened and it needs to be corrected.

Along with the revision of scales at the university and college level, certain other conditions were attached. One of them, for example, was that no remuneration will be paid for examination work. The condition has to be abandoned within a year or two. It was not possible to enforce it because public examinations were the order of the day and such a system would not work. Secondly, a doctoral degree was made

mandatory for recruitment at that level. It became clear in no time that this was unrealistic and could not be enforced.

A whole decade went by and it was time for another round of salary revision. Some further changes were carried out but one thing that should have been done after 1973 and was reiterated in 1986 and not done and that was to make teachers accountable for their performance. The Rastogi Committee (1997) reiterated the recommendations made by the Sen Committee in 1971 and the Mehrotra Committee in 1986. But the UGC, in an incredible act of misjudgment, decided to reopen the whole issue. The rest is history and does not have to be recalled.

A couple of other developments that took place also need to be identified here. One was large scale dilution in the quality of the PhD degree in the wake of the recommendation to make it mandatory for new en-

trants. Even though the condition was relaxed subsequently, a kind of rot set in and it has continued unabated. Throughout this period there has not been a single attempt to analyse as the how PhDs are being awarded and what needs to be done to stop further dilution of standards at this level.

Yet another factor which was underrated was the talent of some of our academics to dilute whatever they undertook to do, including postgraduate teaching. As of today, more than 50 per cent of students get their postgraduate degree from colleges and not from universities. Every state is not guilty of this aberration. Even a state like Bihar, for example, has not encouraged teaching in postgraduate colleges but UP is another story. So is Maharashtra and so is Tamil Nadu. Even if it is decided today that postgraduate and undergraduate teaching do not have to be bracketed together, those teach at the postgraduate level today will claim that they are entitled to the

higher scale of pay. Nobody has yet gone into the basic issue. That is our neglect of secondary education. In every country of the world except the Indian subcontinent, no one expects a clerk to have a university degree. Everywhere the requirement is that the candidates should be a school graduate. In our country, the senior secondary school education is not regarded as terminal in character. No wonder even in a state like UP, 51 per cent of students elect to go to college. In Maharashtra, the percentage is 79. In Chandigarh, it is 100 per cent.

In consequence, everyone wants to go to college or almost so. It all depends upon whether the family can afford to look after the child for another few years or not. The tuition fee is so nominal that nobody takes the quantum of the fee to be taken into account.

As if all this was not deplorable enough, our economy has been stagnant for such a long time that the best that the

country has been able to do for education is to allocate something like 3.5 per cent of the GDP. In 1966, the Kothari Commission had said that this percentage which at that point of time was around 2.5 per cent should be gradually raised to six per cent. That has not happened even after more than three decades nor is it likely to happen so easily or soon.

The issue is much too important to be left to people who are professionally not involved in these matters. The academic community has a duty to take an overall view and not make only sectional demands. It goes without saying that it is a certain kind of people who make noise. The contradictions of the system, however, have caught up with them and it is safe to say that the next decade or so will witness a shift of personnel in those who pass for teacher leaders today.

The writer is a former Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University.

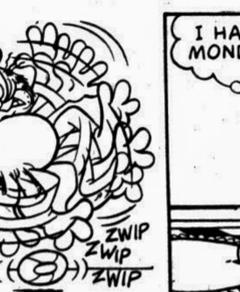
Garfield



James Bond



Beyond the Outcrop



Jim Davis



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