

SAARC CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

Developing nations struggle to stay alive

SHEIKH HAFIZUR RAHMAN KARZON

A three-day SAARC conference on climate change was held in Dhaka from 1 to 3 July, where the ministers and experts of South Asian countries resonated the judicious demands of developing nations to adapt vis-a-vis the impacts of the climate change. In the context of global warming, faster sea level rise, frequent devastating cyclones, floods and droughts, the SAARC countries have designed an action plan to combat the environmental challenges.

The rift between the developed and developing nations exists from 1960s when environmental issues started to become prominent in the consciousness of the international community. The Drafting and Planning Committee for the Stockholm conference in April 1972 underlined that 'environmental protection must not be an excuse for slowing down the economic progress of emerging countries.' Further development took place in 1974 when UNEP and the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) organized a symposium of experts in Cocoyoc, Mexico. The Cocoyoc Declaration clearly expressed the agony of the poor and developing nations. According to the Declaration: "The combined destructive impacts of a poor majority struggling to stay alive and an affluent minority consuming most of the world's resources are undermining the very means by which all people can survive and flourish."

Though the developed countries are largely responsible for environmental pollution, but the poor and least developed countries have been subjected to irreversible loss. In the sequel of global warming, the exposure of extreme events like flood, cyclone, drought, sea-level rise, vector-borne diseases are appearing recurrently in least developed countries. The Brundtland Commission assumed a common future for all the countries, but the developed countries in the Earth Summit (1992) preferred further environmental regulation, whereas developing states accorded priority to development. The developing countries clearly conveyed that they were not ready to accept further environmental controls, without such financial assistance and transfer of technology as was necessary to offset the economic restrictions otherwise involved.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its fourth assessment report in 2007. As a result a series of political and economic meetings, including the G8 and World Economic Forum, took place and many countries updated their domestic policies to fight climate changes. In this context a good ambience has been created for international climate negotiations. China and India have played a significant role in determining future response of developing countries to global warming and climate change.

EU urged the developing

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nations not to prioritize economic growth ahead of environmental protection. Here lies the difference of opinion between the developed and developing nations. The developing nations want their development should take full pace which will help them to eradicate poverty, and ensure the basic needs of people, including food, shelter, education, medical treatment, employment, and social security. If the process of development is implemented at the cost of environment, the poor and developing nations do not hesitate to do so as global warming, ozone depletion, loss of biodiversity -- as a whole

tion of other South Asian countries is also not good. There is fair possibility of Maldives being submerged fully under the sea water, Sri Lanka may risk a similar fate. India, Nepal and Pakistan encounter up to 40 per cent drop in food production, frequent flood and erosion. The devastating memories of super cyclones Sidr and Nargis are still fresh in the mind of the people. (The Daily Star, 01 July, 2008).

In the first two days of SAARC climate change conference, climate change experts of eight SAARC countries drafted an action plan comprising seven thematic working areas to battle the impacts

and environmental regulation -- both have created formidable barrier for the developing nations to ensure sustainable development and achieve Millennium Development Goals. Dhaka Declaration sketched out an action plan to make sure that those were consistent with the national action plans. The action plan covers capacity building for Clean Development Mechanism projects, exchange of information on disaster preparedness and extreme events, exchange of meteorological data, capacity building and exchange of information on climate change impacts including



climate change is the outcome of the greenhouse gas emissions, and emission of other pollutants from developed countries. The industrialized countries have to shoulder lion responsibility of reducing the greenhouse gases and other pollutants. This reality has been reflected in the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility." The developing countries are very much clear in their views that the developing nations cannot afford the environmental standard pursued by the EU and developed countries and it will hinder their economic progress. They, therefore, are insisting the developed countries to fund them so that they will be capable to adjust with the aftermath of the climate change.

The climate change has posed a serious threat to the existence of the South Asian countries. Scientists predict that the sea level rise may reduce Bangladesh to 20 per cent of its present size, leaving only the highlands of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet stand out of water. The IPCC apprehends that 35 million could flee Bangladesh's flooded delta by 2050. The condi-

tion of climate change. The thematic working areas are: (i) adapting to the climate change; (ii) forming policies and finding out actions for climate change mitigation; (iii) actions for technology transfer; (iv) creating fund for investment in research; (v) working on climate change education, training, and awareness based on New Delhi work programme; (vi) monitoring, assessment and management of impact risks caused by climate change; and (vii) capacity building programme for the SAARC member states to deal with international negotiations. The expert committee prioritized clean development mechanism (CDM) projects. Currently India is implementing 342 CDM projects whereas Bangladesh is implementing only 2 such projects.

Finally Dhaka Declaration came after a ministerial level meeting of ministers from eight SAARC countries on July 3, 2008. They observed that climate change is the result of the greenhouse gas emissions by the developed countries for over last two centuries. The impacts of climate change

sea level rise, glacial melting, and threats to biodiversity, mutual consultation in international negotiation process and media briefing as and when required.

This climate change conference is significant as it has identified the reality that a large portion of the South Asian countries may be in undated within 50 years and that more and more cyclones, floods, and droughts can reduce food production, cause loss of lives and slow down economic progress. The conference is very spectacular as it courageously channeled the voice of developing nations which was very prominent in the Bali UN Climate Change Conference, 2007. It is no more a development-environment debate for South Asian countries as the impacts of climate change have posed threat to our existence. Now we have to go into all out action for saving our environment, and the flora and fauna, the sacred deposit of the next generation of which we are mere repository.

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Delimitation of maritime boundary brooks no delay

NURUL HUDA

A report under the headline "Seismic survey appears crucial to retain maritime boundary" published by some newspapers on July 22, 2008 said that the seismic survey of Bangladesh's territorial sea line appeared crucial as a UN set deadline for lodging maritime claims will expire in next three years exposing the country to the risk of losing a vast territory in the Bay of Bengal.

The report quoting experts and some relevant people underscored the need for establishing Bangladesh's claim in the sea for the huge resources -- gas, oil and other aquatic resources. It is also important from national security point of view, it said quoting Lt. General (ret'd) Mahabubur Rahman, former Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence.

It may be recalled that Bangladesh signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea called UNCLOS in 2001 under which it is under the obligation to lodge its claim on the maritime boundary by 2011.

According to General (ret'd) Mahabub, "Unfortunately we could not make any major headway in lodging our claims through seismic and other studies despite the fact that we could lose an area in the sea which is larger than the mainland Bangladesh." Sounding a note of caution he said that neighbouring India and Myanmar have already made progress in criss-crossing Bangladesh's territorial shoreline.

At least 13 organizations were asked to complete hydrographic survey of the entire coastline of Bangladesh and geographical survey of CS in 2004 but excepting our naval force none could finish their job. Meanwhile, both India and Myanmar have floated tender for seismic survey, the report said emphasizing the need for Bangladesh to undertake seismic survey of the country's territorial sea line.

The Navy completed the task of Bathymetric Mapping of northern part of the Bay of Bengal and mapping of the geology and geomorphology of the coastal areas and submitted the same to UNCLOS Desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other organizations attributed their lapses to shortage of skilled manpower, lack of fund or logistic support.

Nothing was heard about the tiny island in the estuary of the Bay of Bengal known as South Talpatty in Bangladesh and New Moore in India during 1996-2001. It was raised with India when Lt Gen (ret'd) H.M. Ershad was in power and again during BNP rule in 1991-96. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence with former chairman of the Committee Mahabubur Rahman recommended for strengthening the Navy for intensifying the security of maritime boundary and also tapping unexplored natural resources of the sea.

On the ownership of the island South Talpatty people have a right to know the progress of talks between Bangladesh and India on the question of establishment of

According to an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh neither India, nor Bangladesh or Myanmar can harness hydrocarbon resources of the Bay of Bengal (since claims are overlapping) without resolving the issue of delimitation of maritime boundary.

Bangladesh's claim on the island, which hit the headlines in the print media of our country during early 1980's.

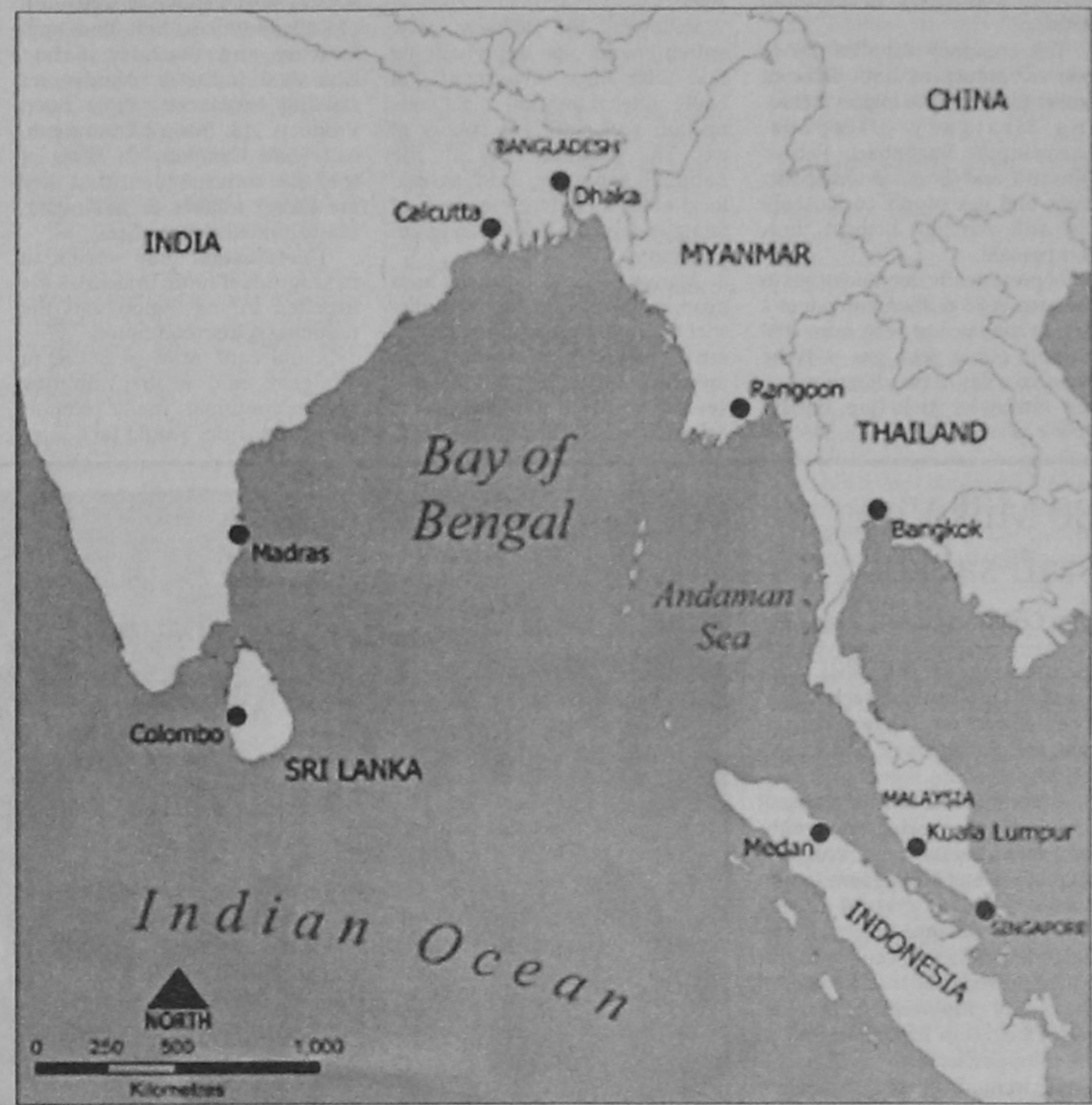
The issue was heard on February 10, 2003 when former Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan told newsmen that the government would discuss all bilateral issues including South Talpatty with

assessment of 1978. Excepting some fishermen from Bangladesh mainland using it seasonally for drying their fish nets it was uninhabited. The island is about 5.5 km from the Indian coast and 7.5 km from Bangladesh coast.

It was described by Bangladesh officials as a violation of an agreement reached between former

Bangladesh in a press statement issued on May 25, 1981 expressed its surprise over "the untenable and unilateral Indian claim."

Eric Gonsalves, the then Indian External Affairs Secretary informed Bangladesh High Commissioner in the same month that India had removed its personnel from South Talpatty/New Moore Island and



India. He identified seven unresolved issues with India in the Jatiya Sangsad including the South Talpatty.

According to Khan the demands for resolving these issues were not only raised from Bangladesh side, but in India itself some important political leaders as well as civil societies also want solution to those issues. Quoting the Indian civil societies he said as Bangladesh was one of the biggest Indian markets so New Delhi in its own interest should sit with Dhaka with an open mind and find solutions to those issues.

In this context, it needs to be recalled that during the then prime minister's official visit to India the Talpatty issue was raised in May 1992 in the joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit.

The ownership of the newly emerged islands in the estuary of the border river Hariabhanga between Bangladesh and India, has been claimed by both countries as forming an integral part of their respective countries.

Talpatty has a surface area at low tide of about 2.2 square km as per

Indian PM Morarji Desai and President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh for a joint survey, to determine the location and ownership of the island.

The commitment for a peaceful and early settlement of the issue was reaffirmed by the foreign ministers of Bangladesh and India on August 18, 1980.

On May 28, 1981 the Jatiya Sangsad adopted a resolution after debate on the Talpatty issue protesting against the illegal Indian action on May 9, 1981 in landing armed personnel, erecting structures, hoisting the Indian flag on this island and sending armed naval ships in the internal waters of Bangladesh.

On May 23, 1981 the Indian media reported that Bangladesh's claims to the New Moore island had been disproved by the first results of the survey conducted by INS Sandhayak. This had been done with the help of "sophisticated equipment" which had provided a "mass data on the location and features of the island and the waters surrounding it."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

also its ships. The then Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh had conveyed this in Dhaka.

Bangladesh, while welcoming the gesture informed the Indians that since nothing was conveyed in writing it would be better if an announcement was made publicly to defuse tensions on the issue between the two close neighbours. A joint statement was issued following negotiations between the two sides expecting that in a spirit of good neighbourly relations the issue of South Talpatty would be resolved.

Meanwhile, according to an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh neither India, nor Bangladesh or Myanmar can harness hydro carbon resources of the Bay of Bengal (since claims are overlapping) without resolving the issue of delimitation of maritime boundary. Bangladesh should take the issue to the international forum to establish its rightful claims if it fails to find negotiated settlement with the neighbours, he said requesting anonymity.

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Population growth: Environmental perspective

MD MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

ENVIRONMENT refers to our surroundings that include all things living and non-living. According to this definition, our environment consists of living plants, animals and microorganisms and non-living elements such as air, water and soil. The environmental scientists all over the world frequently blame the huge human population and its growing nature for degradation of environment. We will here have a closer look of the population problem and environmental degradation under the same magnifying glass and examine their relationships.

Carrying capacity of the earth: The harmonious co-existence of human kind and environmental soundness can only be ensured if the human population is limited to the carrying capacity of mother earth. Humans induce least harm to the environment when they do not alter the natural condition of the surrounding and, instead, remain satisfied with the naturally available goods and services to meet their basic needs. Let us consider the food sources of mankind. Just think about the amount of foods collected by human kind all over the world from the ecosys-

tems in comparison with the amount of foods grown through agriculture. Again fishes naturally available from fresh water and marine sources cannot meet the protein demand of whole mankind if sustainably harvested. If not sustainably harvested they will be disappeared very soon. So, we are bound to alter the natural condition of our environment when population is above the carrying capacity of the earth.

Agriculture and population: Agriculture popped the lid off natural regulation of human population size. No longer limited by the inherent productivity of local ecosystems, human agricultural societies began to expand immediately. And as populations

began to grow, as patterns of political control and the division of labour began to emerge, human life rather quickly took on a semblance basically familiar to those of us living in even the most advanced of modern societies.

Industrialisation and population: Industrialisation itself provoked the need of products among people because with goods from factories it was easier to meet the basic human needs e.g. food, clothes and housing. With the industrial mass production it is also possible to meet the demands of large population with less human intellectual cost and effort. So, the population grows relentlessly based on the foods from modern extensive agricul-

ture and commodities from the industries. In fact in the modern industrial process the high toll of huge production goes on the shoulder of pristine environment. Until recently world wide environmental deterioration was marching ahead in triumphant motion.

Geography changed with increase of population: Satellite images of the earth reveal the human settlement, agricultural land, roads, ports, industrial area and other manmade objects collectively called 'anthroposphere' is encroaching the earth surface very rapidly throughout the recent decades creating growing impacts on the natural landscapes. Growing human population and

efforts to improve the quality of life for billions of people are two major causes of widespread environmental degradation.

Population science important tool for environmental sciences: Population science can help us comprehend the environmental risk of population explosion with knowledge of intrinsic devastating force that remains in human population and also as tools to acquire the biological resources in sustainable manner. The humankind plays the role of an invading species for almost all sorts of ecosystems. Humankind is extracting resources from land and oceans. Scientific advances helped man in the process of empowerment. Modern medicine, food security and commodities produced from industries helped to reduce child mortality, adult morbidity and raised life expectancy for the mass people. As the net death rate decreased rapidly the population grew rapidly.

Human population over time: Human population is on a steady increase since the human history through minor fluctuations due to major natural hazards. Population of human kind grew gradually but steadily before the industrialization since the appearance of man on the earth. The total population

of the earth was nearly 60 million at the beginning of agricultural revolution about eleven thousand years ago. However, the population of the globe increased exponentially after the industrial revolution with an increase of another 20 millions in only 50 years making it a billion. After that the population doubled to 2 billion in only 70 years. Increasing another one billion population took only 30 years. The next one billion needed only 16 years. The consequence has been the continued pressure on woodlands, wilderness and the forested land. The ecosystems of both terrestrial and aquatic envi-

ronment are disrupted and environment all over the world is on verge of destruction.

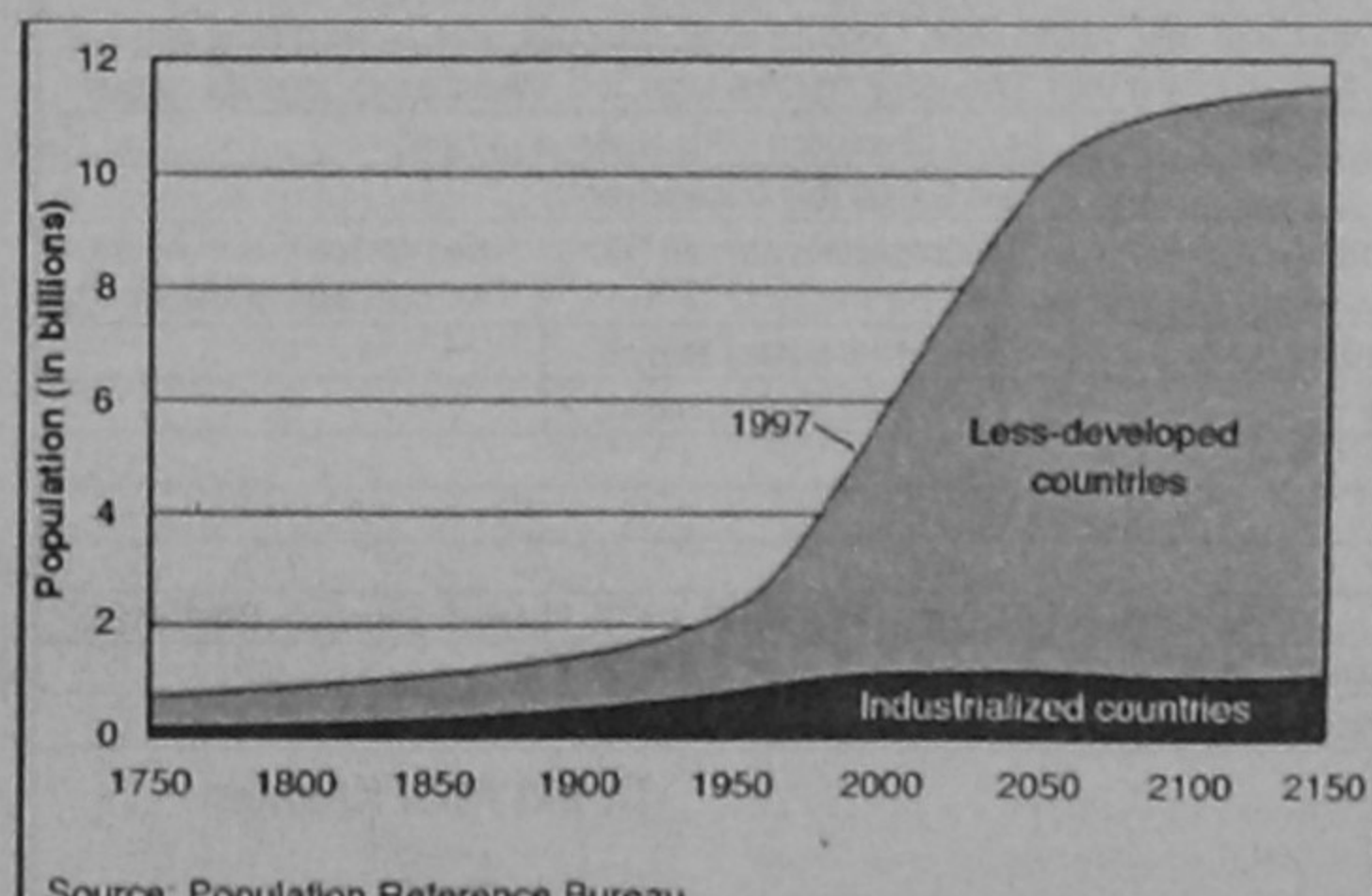
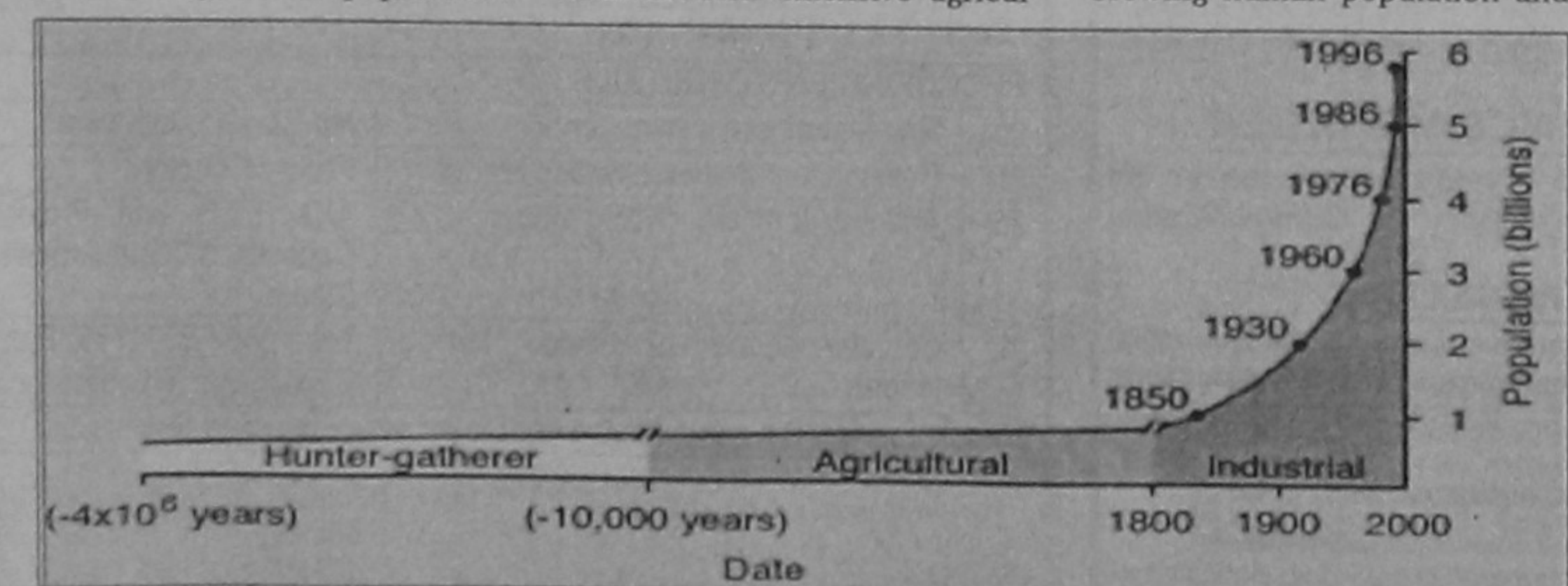
Human ecology: People are also part of ecosystems and inseparably linked with the ecological processes to meet their demands as living beings and as intellectual, rational, social and above all creative animals. But the growing number of human population is pressure on the natural ecosystems. The growing population compels to find out new food sources and to be the highest trophic level of the food chain. The case is such that "Man eats everything and nothing eats man" -- it is

the ecological viewpoint of population growth.

What will happen if we don't control? Death. Mass death from malnutrition, disease, accidents arising from the competition for limited resources and more vulnerability to natural disasters. Food, clothes, shelter and medicare facilities are in short supply already for the increased population of the earth. In fact before mass death we all must suffer a lot. And not only the poor will suffer but also the rich will be faced with hassle and tussle from the deprived section of the society. Aggravated natural disaster will not offer any exemption to a certain group of people.

An appeal to human intellect: Nature cannot control human population effectively in today's relationship of man with nature. Decision and actual control of population lie solely upon the human intellect itself. Would we like to die like starving microbes? Definitely not. We must try sincerely to find ways out. Our intellect should not fail us in our effort to find the cure as it did not fail us in finding the ladder to growth which also bred the ills.

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Source: Population Reference Bureau.