

Overcoming the problems of population growth

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SHAIRUL MASHREQUE

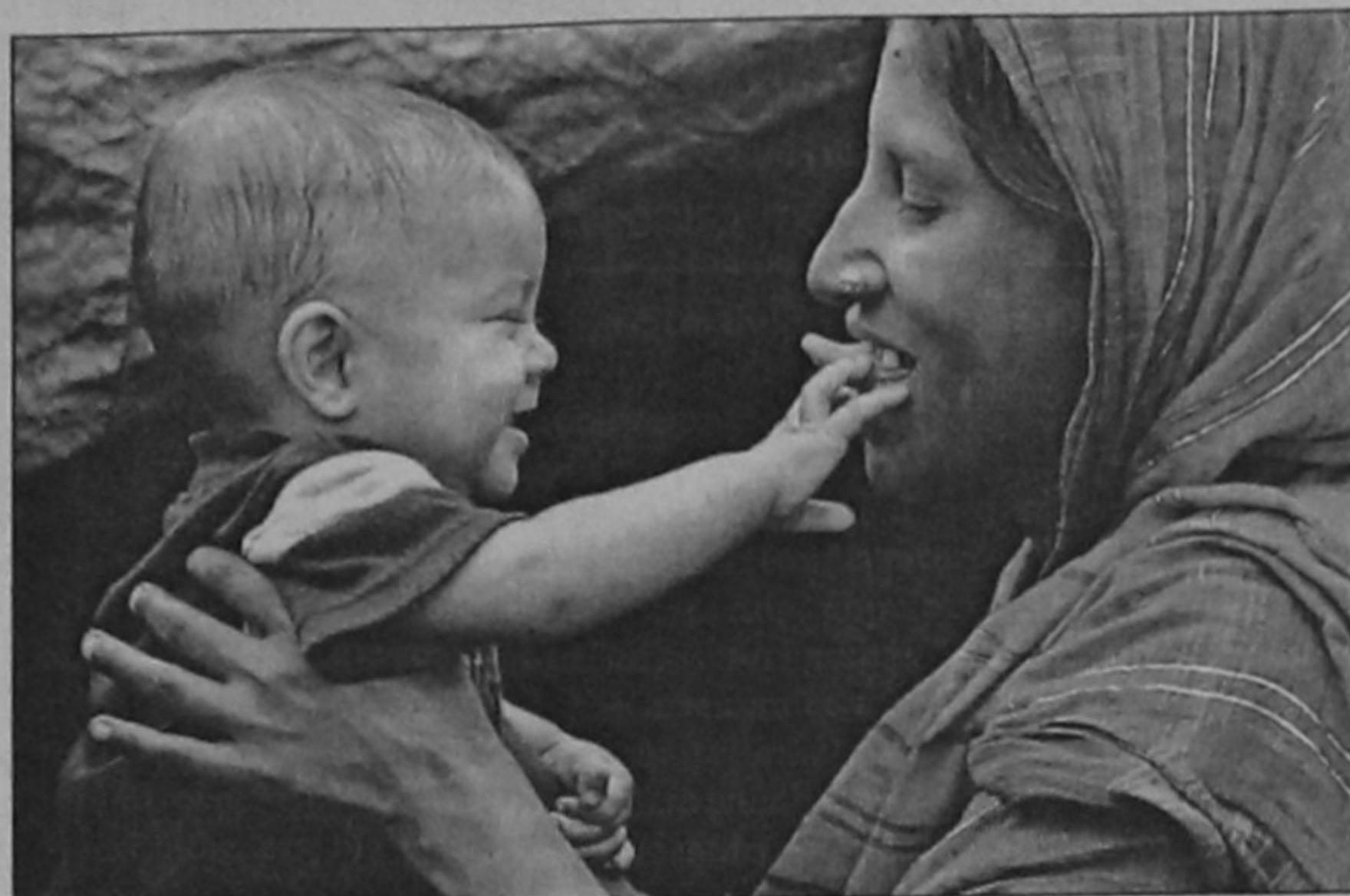
IMPLEMENTING any human development programme has become a daunting challenge due mainly to the increasing population. Demographic transition over time paints an alarming picture of the state of population. The country's population growth has been showing an alarming trend over a couple of decades and has now reached the height of overpopulation with 14.45 people. If there is no attempt to arrest the growth of population the total population will double. With this growth of population it has become difficult to meet the nutritional demands of the citizens. With the growing number of poor, it has become even more difficult to get them within the reach of development programmes. The reproductive health sector is also deficient.

The dire consequences of rapid population growth is the depletion of natural resources. We now see devastation of resources caused by non-ecological human behaviour. Demographic imbalance, unplanned settlements and economic growth tend to harm the natural order of

things dismantling ecological settings.

Public policy through resource mobilisation and allocation cannot do much in determining which way things should move unless the government plans to combat overpopulation. Only observing population day on 11th July is not enough. Of course this day is a reminder to all the citizens thinking rationally at the level of awareness with the global policy community reaffirming its commitment to sustainable level of population growth. There can hardly be any argument with the fact that a swelling population threatens to put at risk all implementation strategies of development in the substantive areas of public policy. Even a high budgetary allocation against any policy moves for a change can hardly be implemented in a country with a rising population.

The policymakers may look at demographic transition over time -- bulge and decline of population on a comparative scale in all groups respective of age, sex, class, religion and sect or location. Time series data is available to surmise population growth at various levels. Nevertheless it is more important to probe the fact that we are lagging behind the western countries



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as far as population control measures are concerned.

With advances in science and technology come new challenges. In fact tangible progress of the nation requires institutional capacity to combat them. It has been increasingly important for the state to comply with fiscal demands of the increasing number of young people and their share in economic participation. The energetic youth can be used to deal with birth control measures if it can be put into a productive force.

The current development intervention does not incorporate any concern about maintaining demographic balance through a streamlined popu-

lation policy and conserving environmental resources. When the population base is extremely high it harms 'per capita well being' and per capita consumption. The fundamental condition for resilient economic growth is population growth at the desired level. It cannot be done only by allocation on reproductive health.

The government has a plan to formulate a 'pragmatic population policy' realising the weaknesses in the family planning intervention. Its new policy move is to increase the contraceptives prevalence rate upto 80 per cent by 2021. The government has earmarked Tk 498 crore, development and non-development combined, for

the procurement of birth control related materials and equipment.

The theme of Population Day this year (2009) is 'Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in women is a Smart Choice.' The comment of the UNFPA representative, Bangladesh, deserves mention: "In time of economic hardship women in developing countries are likely to be disproportionately affected which in turn inversely impacts their children and communities. That's why it is so important that people's basic needs, including for reproductive health and family planning are being addressed even more urgently..." The situation of women nowadays presents the world with an opportunity to generate income and reduce poverty. Because of human development achievements of the past decades many young daughters are going to schools and combating childhood diseases. But to succeed in competitive global economy they should be equipped with better skills. Despite rising awareness about gender equality and birth control resulting in lower fertility rates in many developing countries the family planning movement has yet to attain any remarkable success. It still remains to be seen how population control measures are being managed in patriarchal societies. There is a need to test the level of acceptability of birth control methods considering the variables of sex, class and outlook.

Family planning in Bangladesh needs to be strengthened as a movement involving a large number of rural and urban women as activists. Fiscal demands for reproductive health for mother and child, education for the vulnerable and employment should be redeemed all within a broad brush of social security net. What is urgently needed is persuasion through motivation. It's high time to enhance social security of the disadvantaged group.

The state should compensate those women who cannot have children. The state should also provide all logistics and support including allowances and social insurance for health, education and old age to the parents blessed with only one baby. Confidence building measures to be institutionally dealt with of course has a positive impact on the married couples willing to take contraceptives. The new health policy may incorporate a special section on family planning with indices like reproductive and protective health services including safe birth, safe abortions and prenatal and antenatal services in clinics and proper nursing of the newborn baby. There should have been a provision for the prevention of early marriage and premature pregnancy. I think with well thought measures of birth control in the proposed health policy voluntary family planning movement will be reinforced.

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Will the crisis reverse global migration?

It is only to be expected that when economic activity slows or contracts in destination countries, migrant workers are the first to be laid off and sent home. Since a lot of recent economic migration has been explicitly short-term with respect to meeting specific labour shortages in the host economies, this is even more likely.

JAYATI GHOSH

MIGRATION has been one of the more important means of greater global integration, and, as the economic crisis has gripped the developed world, many have worried about its impact on such integration, especially falling remittances. A closer examination of the nature of migrant workers' role in the economy suggests more complex outcomes, with somewhat less of an impact than feared.

The UN estimates that the global stock of migrants is now more than 200 million, even excluding temporary, irregular and illegal migrants. Most of these migrants hail from developing countries; in the developed world (excluding the former USSR) the share of migrants in total population more than doubled between 1960 and 2005, from 4 percent to nearly 10 percent, while it has declined in less developed countries. As the crisis unfolded, there was fear that international migration and associated remittances would be among the first casualties.

It is true that most of this migration has been driven by economic forces and has given rise to rapidly expanding remittance flows, which have become the most important source of foreign exchange for many developing coun-

(which are dominantly from workers based in the US) were already down 12 percent compared to the previous year. There was also evidence of declining remittances from other countries that relied strongly on them, such as Bangladesh, Lebanon, Jordan and Ethiopia.

But as the crisis unfolds, it is also becoming clear that the patterns of migration and remittances may be more complex than was previously imagined. In several countries (such as India) remittance inflows have actually continued to increase. To some extent, this too can be expected because even if the crisis leads to large-scale retrenchment of migrant workers who are forced to come home, they would obviously return with their accumulated savings. In such a case, there could even be a (temporary) spike in remittances rather than a continuous or sharp decline because of the crisis. Eventually, as the adverse conditions for overseas employment worsen further, this would then lead to a decline in remittance inflows.

However, it is not inevitable that there should be a sharp decline in migration and remittances. One important aspect that is frequently ignored in the discussions on migration is the gender dimension. International migration for work is highly gendered, with male migrants finding dominant representation in manufacturing and construction sectors, while women migrants are concentrated in the service sectors, such as the care economy (including activities such as nursing and domestic work) and "entertainment."

The different nature of work also affects remittance flows. In the first place, female migrants are far more likely to send remittances home, and

typically send a greater proportion of their earnings back. Also, male migrant workers find that incomes are much more linked to the business cycle in the host economy, so their employment and wages tend to vary with output behaviour. Thus, job losses in the North during this crisis have been concentrated in construction, financial services and manufacturing, all dominated by male workers.

By contrast, the care activities dominantly performed by women workers tend to be affected by other variables such as demographic tendencies, institutional arrangements, and the extent to which women work outside the home in the host country. So employment in such activities is often unaffected by the business cycle, or at least responds to a lesser extent. Therefore, female migrant workers' incomes are more stable over the cycle and do not immediately rise or fall to the same extent.

This, in turn, means that source countries that have a disproportionately higher share of women emigrants (such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka) would tend to experience less adverse impact in terms of falling remittances. Indeed, in the Philippines, the most recent data indicate that remittance flows are still increasing slightly, at an annual rate of around 2 percent. This does not mean that there will be no impact at all, but certainly the adverse effects will be less and will take longer to evolve than if the migration had been dominated by male workers.

There are other reasons why the crisis has had limited impact on patterns of migration. For example, one expectation was that return migration would be dominated by the worst hit workers who, in turn, were expected to be the undocumented, irregular or



It is not inevitable that migration and remittances will decline as a result of the economic downturn.

illegal migrants who are mostly in low-wage and low-skilled occupations, and do not qualify for any kind of official support such as welfare benefits or social security from the host country.

But the initial evidence belies this expectation because, for one, such migrants may be unwilling to return home to face possibly even more fragile and insecure employment conditions in their own country. Many developing countries have been hit worse by the financial crisis that originated in the US economy. So the push factors that operated to cause international migration in search of work remain as strong as ever. The unwillingness to return in such a context may be even stronger in cases where the undocumented migrants have already developed some local social networks that allow them to survive for a period while they look for other employment.

In the host country, undocumented

migrant workers may even be preferred by employers who see in them as a cheaper source of labour than legal migrants or local workers. In the context of this crisis, preference for cheaper labour may become even sharper. This may be yet another reason why women migrants may be affected less severely, since women migrants dominate in the undocumented and illegal category.

In any case, one of the basic pull factors still remains significant; the demographic transition in the North is increasing the share of the older population that requires more care from younger workers, who must, therefore, come from abroad. So the current crisis may temporarily slow down the ongoing process of international migration for work, but it is unlikely to reverse it.

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Sometimes, cats are just plain impulsive



IFE is changing so fast we need new words to keep up with it. University lecturer Jenny Eagleton wrote to me: "I wonder if you have made up words for the following situations? I tried to get my linguistics students to do this, but I think they were stumped. Thanks."

She sent me a list of interesting situations for which there should be words,

but aren't. How do you describe battles for umbrella-space on crowded pavements? Or the politics of escalator-use? Or elevator etiquette?

Fearlessly I took on this assignment -- and gave it to the smartest network of people on the planet -- that's you, the readers. And the result was a whole list of new words worth adding to the dictionary.

AUTOPSY: Cutting open a crashed car to see what went wrong.

BUSINESSIE: The Loch Ness business-man.

BUNDAMENTALIST: Person who will commit terrorist acts in the name of his favourite bread roll.

CAT-ASTROPHE: When your kitten knocks over your Ming vase.

CEMENTERY: Rubble-filled patch of ground where bits of concrete go to die.

CELEBRAT: Obnoxious kid having a party in a restaurant.

CYBERATTAX: Attempt to add a levy onto internet surfing fees.

DIN-GEROUS: Rock music loud enough to damage your ears.

DISKOVERY: Finding a long-lost computer disk.

DUSTRACTION: When you're supposed to be listening to a speaker but your attention has been caught by a speck of dust in a light beam.

ESCALBLOCKHEADS: People who stand on the left on escalators, blocking people who are in a hurry.

ESCALBLUDGERS: People who storm up escalators knocking Escalblockheads

aside. EMERGENTSY: When you desperately need the gents' toilet.

FERTI-LISA: Young woman who gets pregnant easily.

FLOPPACCINO: Your cappuccino when the foamy part overflows down the sides.

GLOBAL WORMING: Computer virus that spreads across countries.

HAWKWARD: The uncomfortable feeling you get when you realise that someone behind you is getting ready to spit.

HUMONIOUS: A group of workers who are so happy that they sing while they toil.

HYPERPRESSERS: People who think pressing the lift button lots of times will make it come more quickly.

IMPOSSIBLE: Cat who won't do what you want it to do.

INTERNUT: Stupid person in an internet chatroom.

PENTHUSIASM: Enthusiasm about your favourite writer.

PARKITECT: Low class architect who always gets assigned to design car parks.

POORCHASE: Buying something so expensive it leaves you feeling broke afterwards.

PUNION: Multi-layered pun.

MALLIGATORS: Dangerous people who hang around in shopping malls.

MOPERATIVES: Team of cleaners who appears after a spill at a supermarket.

RESIDUNCE: Building with a stupid name, such as Tycoon Heights.

SMELEVATOR: Lift in which a previous user has left a bad odour.

SHOCKSPEARE: Shakespeare plays jazzed up so much that you don't recognise them.

TERRORISTS: Terrorists who do a bit of sightseeing before blowing a place up.

UNKINDERGARTEN: Preschool with unsympathetic teachers.

UNFORMATION: Untrue information designed to mislead.

UMBRAGE: The feeling of irritation you get when too many people with umbrellas are clustered too close together.

Big thanks to readers who contributed by email or other means, including Mark, Eddie, Sin-meng, Angela, Fardel, Limbu, Thomas, Cookie, David, Sham and others.

Add new words to this list at www.mrjam.org.