

Population problem: Forewarning of bigger ones

Unless addressed through non-conventional methods, population problem will trigger unmanageable physical and environmental problems which no government will be able to contain, despite sincere efforts.

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AN oversized population is a problem for any country irrespective of its stage of development. The problem is really complex for a developing country because of resource constraint. We economists at times downplay the problem and argue that developed manpower, whatever its size, will always augment welfare of the country. The argument is built on economic indices: GDP, per capita income, foreign exchange reserve, productivity etc.

Maybe there is a point; with proper education and training a large population may be rendered into an effective instrument of economic development. What the economists miss is that population is a real entity, not a nominal variable. Demands of the real entity are physical, and money cannot meet them all. Nominal instrument has its limitation in solving real problems.

What a human being needs most are food and space. Many other physical services are also needed -- sanitation, water supply, healthcare, transport etc. These may be put aside for the time being. A person needs some space and (s)he will

try to get it at any cost. A country will face an almost insuperable problem if it does not have the required physical resources, particularly land, to meet the physical demands. The position will be made clear if we deliberate on the issue in the context of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has the highest land-man ratio (normalised), or population density, in the world. Surely it is not the poorest country of the world, nor is it really a least developed country (LDC) in terms of all economic and social indicators. It, however, confronts a uniquely suffocating problem in terms of land per person. Upgrading the land is possible but augmenting the size is almost impossible. Only a small area can be reclaimed from the river basin if nature is not hostile.

The problem is further exacerbated by river erosion, which renders thousands homeless every year. The affected move to cities to dwell in shanties in subhuman conditions.

The pressure of population is palpably felt in the cities, particularly in the capital city. Traffic jam, over-crowded footpaths, high level of carbon emission, swarming shanties, and stampeding throngs in public places make city life miserable even for people with vast

reservoir of patience, let alone ordinary mortals.

Some argue that high-rise buildings, flyovers and elevated expressways will solve these problems. These are costly and time consuming to build. Moreover, by the time these are completed, new crowds will join to undermine the facilities built in the meantime. The crowds may go up or down; ultimately they will use land to move on and carry out most of their day-to-day business. Hell is let loose when too big a crowd descends on a limited space.

The author has observed that even in rich countries unmanageably big crowds are prone to creating disastrous situations beyond comprehension. All institutions, values and instruments of management control collapse instantaneously. Animal instincts surface, threatening civilised existence. Innovations can hardly help in such situations.

Some people contend that decentralisation would solve the problem of over-population and congestion in the cities. This may be true for countries which have large land mass and there are areas which are thinly populated. Not for Bangladesh, where district towns and even some rural areas are also overpopulated. In fact, the area now comprising Bangladesh was overpopulated when East Pakistan was created sixty years back.

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century this area was thickly populated, implying that the area was prosperous at a wrong point of time when the concept of border was not operationally enforced as



Many people, little land.

it is done today. Now Bangladesh is burdened with a huge population and there is no easy way to spread it around.

For a genuine solution, spreading of population has to mean permanent relocation or at least semi-permanent resettlement abroad. High remittance does not resolve the physical problems due to over-population. Remittance means diversion of agricultural land to homestead because with remittance the expatriates and their relatives construct bigger house, often on a newly acquired parcels of land. This in turn means loss of open space and more congestion.

The author has observed that expatriates from some neighbouring countries have moved to acquire properties in foreign countries and settle there permanently, perhaps keeping a somewhat tenuous link with the home country. One has solid reasons to be concerned whether Bangladesh will be able to physically sustain such a huge population even with a faster pace of economic development.

For the world as a whole population is not at all a problem. The world's population is 6.75 billion, which is likely to stabilise at around 9.5 billion; it will not

explode. Given the land size almost all other countries can sustain their populations. In fact, many developed countries are experiencing reduction of population owing to loss of fertility. Their land-man ratio warrants induction of more people through their borders. These countries can help Bangladesh export its manpower on a large scale. Cooperation with positive attitude between countries will render it infinitely easy to resolve the population problem of Bangladesh, but not to the disadvantage of partner countries.

Bangladesh accommodated foreigners as long as it could afford to do so. It is now the responsibility of the international community to accommodate Bangladeshi expatriates in their lands to ensure a balanced distribution of population world over. No other country should be included in this list because only Bangladesh suffers from such acute land-man imbalance.

The intention of the above discussion is to highlight the disastrous situation that population problem has created in Bangladesh. Unless addressed through non-conventional methods, population problem will trigger unmanageable physical and environmental problems which no government will be able to contain, despite sincere efforts. We are facing an alarming situation. Let us reaffirm our highest commitment to overcome the problem. No amount of sophistry will do.

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Faujdarhat Cadet College: Half a century of excellence

Faujdarhat Cadet College has so far produced famous professors, vice chancellors, Rhodes Scholars, a head of Bangladesh army, numerous generals, top civil servants, top journalists, actors, national record holders in track, top industrialists and philanthropists, members of the parliament, and a foreign minister.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

FAUJDARHAT (then "East Pakistan") Cadet College, the most prestigious public school in the nation, was inaugurated fifty years ago. The late Pakistani president, Ayub Khan, who, as the general officer commanding (GOC) of East Pakistan in the 1950s personally selected the site at Faujdarhat, and founded the school for the express purpose of supplying Pakistani armed forces with "East Pakistani" officers.

Over-ruling subordinates who wanted to hire the legendary British headmaster Mr. Hugh Catchpole, General Ayub picked an unknown New Zealander, Lt. Col. William Maurice Zealand, as the college's first principal. Ayub could not have made a better choice.

Col. Brown's goal was to make his students as accomplished as he was. Starting with the planning and construction of the infrastructure, through the selection of the very best students and faculty, to the setting of the glorious residential house traditions that persist to this day. His name is synonymous with cadet colleges in Bangladesh. He coined the school's first motto: "Love your country, tell the truth, and don't dawdle." Subsequently, he preferred the simpler "Deeds, not words." Col. Brown convinced his students that it was possible to excel in academics and sports simultaneously.

Although established as a feeder school for the armed forces, Faujdarhat Cadet College first captured the nation's imagination for its academic brilliance. Thanks to the foundation laid by Col. Brown, Faujdarhat Cadet College has so far produced famous professors, vice chancellors, Rhodes Scholars, a head of Bangladesh army, numerous generals, top civil servants, top journalists, actors, national record holders in track, top industrialists and philanthropists, members of

the parliament, and a foreign minister.

Offering classes seven through twelve, examinations for admission were conducted in Dhaka and Chittagong in 1957. With construction of the buildings still in full swing, the first of four batches of students was enrolled in 1958. The college was formally inaugurated by Brigadier Qurban Ali on April 28, 1958. Col. Brown arrived in September 1958.

An excellent school requires three essential ingredients -- excellent students, excellent faculty and an excellent administration under a dynamic principal. The very best students were selected through competitive examinations.

Col. Brown was aided in his mission by an excellent native faculty, many of whom were first class honours and masters graduates of Dhaka University. Several Faujdarhat teachers went on to become famous professors of Dhaka University.

An exceptionally gifted and visionary principal, Col. Brown attracted British teachers like a magnet. The first two were Mr. S. L. Croft who taught English, and Mr. O. N. Bishop, a teacher of science. Later, Mr. Watson and Mr. Harry Shutt taught English, and a Scot, Mr. Macbeth, taught physics.

Several British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) boys, taking a year off before going to college, lived with the students in the houses. Although an excellent geographer, Col. Brown did not teach classes. Blessed with such a stellar and inspiring faculty, students had no excuse for failure.

Col. Brown placed enormous emphasis on sports and other extracurricular activities. Everyone took part in football, cricket, rugby, hockey, basketball, boxing, swimming, gymnastics, and track and field. Every autumn, students ran the steeplechase.

Col. Brown would use his enormous clout to bring famous sports personalities to the college. Pakistan's Olympic gold medal-winning hockey team visited FCC

in 1960 and presented the college the hockey stick that had driven in the winning goal. In 1962, during the rest day of the Dhaka test against Pakistan, the English cricket team visited and gave students lessons in bowling and batting.

Camping and adventure were also mandatory extracurricular activities. Every year, students went to Rangamati for camping. In 1959 and 1960, we went to Old Rangamati before it was submerged by the Kaptai Dam. We swam in the Karnaphuli River and, in 1959, were invited by Raja Tridiv Roy to a sumptuous dinner. Every year, beginning in 1962, the students spent one full week at new Rangamati's Outward Bound and Adventure Training Camp, a wilderness survival camp on the Rangamati Lake, under the tutelage of Mr. MacGregor and the VSO boys.

Col. Brown envisioned that students undergoing full cadet college training would not become bookworms but be all-rounders, well read, and good in sports, who would be active participants in any gathering anywhere, at home or abroad.

Moulding students in his own image, Col. Brown attempted to make his students citizens of the world. Students were trained not only in the finest tradition of Bangladesh, but also in the best of tradition of the British public schools. While residing in Faujdarhat, they were tuned to the world, near and far.

When a devastating cyclone and tidal

bore hit coastal Chittagong in the autumn of 1960, Col. Brown suspended classes for a week and made students help reconstruct houses for the poor in the neighbouring villages, earning profuse praise from the press and then-governor Azam Khan.

When President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and Sir Winston Churchill died in January 1965, students observed a minute of silence in their memory. In February 1964, Col. Brown sent the wonderful news to every class: "Cassius Clay has knocked out Sonny Liston!"

Col. Brown taught his students gentlemanly etiquette: "When eating, do not put your knife in your mouth, (just as Herbert teaches Pip in Great Expectations)" and "When you shake hands with a man, look him in the eye and give him a firm handshake. Be gentle with a lady!"

Every morning, students were awakened by the bugle and went for the morning drill. After breakfast, if it was Monday, they would gather at the Assembly Hall for the principal's lecture. He would tell students about what they did right and what they did wrong, and about upcoming events. If sports contests had taken place over the weekend, he would congratulate the winners by name. Classes would be followed by lunch, rest period, afternoon sports, evening prep classes, dinner and "Lights Out!"

Realising that rich boys were showing off their fancy clothes on Sunday, Col.



Serving the nation.

Brown made students wear uniforms every day. "If you are a Muslim, you have to go to Friday prayers," Col. Brown would thunder at the Monday morning assembly, which would always follow the singing of the national anthem. On Fridays, students would walk to mosques in and around Faujdarhat. Fasting was optional. Christian boys went to a Chittagong church on Sundays.

In the early years, students went hunting birds with air guns on Sundays. Until 1960, students swam in the Bay of Bengal without lifeguards, blissfully oblivious of the dangers. Col. Brown put a stop to this when reports of sharks infesting the area reached him. Running to Faujdarhat beach as an afternoon drill was a regular feature.

The nation first learned of FCC through its excellence in public examinations. Mujibur Rahman placed within the first ten in the whole of East Pakistan in the Matriculation Examination of 1961; Salauddin stood 11th in 1962.

When the Matriculation evolved into Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination in 1963, the Intermediates changed to Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) in 1965, and the whole province was divided into several boards, Col. Brown used his extraordinary influence to force Faujdarhat Cadet College out of Comilla Board into Dhaka Board. "I want you to compete with the very best," he explained to us. Until his departure in the autumn of 1965, Faujdarhat Cadet College was in the Dhaka Board. "East Pakistan Cadet College" became "Faujdarhat Cadet College" only after Col. Brown's departure.

Five out of the top ten positions (including the first three, Adnan, Arshad and Mushfique) were claimed by the writer's class in Dhaka Board's 1963 SSC Examination, prompting the Ittefaq to exclaim on its front page, "Shabash, Cadet College!" Happily, this tradition of academic excellence continues to this day.

Faujdarhat Cadet College faced an existential threat after independence. The prime minister's political secretary wanted to introduce party politics in FCC. When the students boycotted his visit, he abolished cadet colleges in Bangladesh and renamed Faujdarhat Cadet College "Faujdarhat Sarkari College." Under the leadership of Minoo Khadem and his batch-mates, the students fought back. General M. A. G. Osmani, with assistance from General Ziaur Rahman, convinced

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib to restore cadet colleges in Bangladesh.

Col. Brown told his students that he wanted to see a Faujhar win the army's Sword of Honour, a Rhodes Scholar, and an Olympian. Ashraf Hussain of the writer's batch won the short course's equivalent of the Sword of Honour (C-in-C's Cane) and the only two "East Pakistanis" to win Pakistan's lone Rhodes Scholarship, the writer in 1970 and Gowher Rizvi in 1971, were Faujars. Col. Brown was a referee for both.

The writer used to correspond with Col. Brown regularly. An unfamiliar handwriting replied to one of the writer's letters in 1975 when he was at Oxford: "Maurice made a fine speech and then collapsed and died." It was signed Beryl Brown, FCC students' beloved "Mrs. Brown."

Last November 27, the writer visited his alma mater and addressed the students and faculty. The writer spoke for only 20-25 minutes so as to leave plenty of time for students to ask questions. FCC had switched to English medium recently and the writer insisted that students ask him questions in English. The writer was immensely impressed with the students' enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. They asked the writer so many very intelligent questions that, had lunch not intervened, we could have gone on for hours!

Nestled between the Bay of Bengal and the hills two miles inland, Faujdarhat Cadet College's setting is idyllic. It is connected by road, sea, railroad and air, not only with the rest of Bangladesh, but also with the rest of the world. If foreigners were attracted to Faujdarhat fifty years ago, they will find it far more agreeable today. In a globalised world, the college should not only recruit the cream of the crop from Bangladesh, it should also welcome foreign students.

The following epitaph of Col. Brown should serve as inspiration for every new generation of Faujdarhat Cadet College students, teachers and administrators. In seven short years, the genius of this visionary New Zealander transformed a fledgling rural school in Bangladesh into one of the finest educational institutions in the Indian sub-continent.

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10 new flight announcements



GOOD news for travellers. You don't need to pay for massages any more. As soon as you get to the airport, you get a free, full-body rubdown from the security guards. It's going to save some people a fortune.

Personally, I don't find paunchy, sweaty men in uniform attractive, but a large proportion of the six billion-strong population of planet earth, and I am talking about two, maybe three people, probably do. Or maybe not.

But that's the only good news. Life in the air is going to get way tougher. The nightmare has started. Here are 10 flight announcements that I expect to hear on my next journey.

1. "Welcome to New Delhi. We hope you enjoyed your flight. Remember to collect your underpants from the coat cabinet before you leave the plane."
2. "This is your captain speaking. We

hope to have you at your destination in two hours, or four if the co-pilot and I are having a really good chat about scheduling and forget to land, as sometimes happens."

3. "The temperature outside is a chilly minus ten degrees, but that's because we are way up in the sky. Actually, I don't know why we always tell you the outside temperature, as we recommend that you spend the entire flight inside."

4. "If you are seated near to an emergency door and there is a child or a Fox News viewer in the door-side seat next to you, assume that they are unable to

read and help them to follow crew instructions in the event of an emergency."

5. "Gentlemen, please note that if smoke or flames are seen coming from your trouser, you will be assumed to be a terrorist or a major stud. In either case, you will be arrested. This includes Mr. Woods, the golfer in first class."

6. "If the masks descend and you are seated next to a member of al Qaeda, put on your own mask first. Then hold the cord tightly around the terrorist's neck and pull tightly when you hear the command: 'Brace. Brace.'"

7. "The aviation authorities have

asked us to increase security on the flight, so please switch off laptops, mobile phones and game machines. Also, heart patients are required to switch off their pacemakers. Flight attendants will attempt to revive you with cardiac massage after landing. Just in case they fail, let me take this opportunity to thank you now for choosing American Airlines for your final flight."

8. "The captain has turned the seat belt sign off. However, members of terrorist groups are recommended to leave it loosely fastened for the duration of the flight, as it will impede any impulse you may have to set fire to your

lap. You will thank us for this later."

9. "We have now landed and would like you to disembark promptly. Due to the perilous state of airline finances, the last people to leave will have to clean the aircraft."

10. "Let me remind you that it is illegal to smoke in the toilets, and from this week, it is also illegal to smoke from the parts of your body associated with toilets."

Why are you smiling? You think I'm joking?

For more suggestions for your next flight visit: www.vittachi.com