Getting and Staying Active in Later Life

On the occasion of International Day of Older Persons, **ASM ATIQUR RAHMAN** discusses the plight and prospects of ageing in 21st century Bangladesh.

OLD age is neither a disease nor an individual problem; rather, it has become a worldwide challenge that must be addressed globally. "Later life" is unavoidable, inevitable, universal and excessively troublesome. No one can stop the process of ageing. The quality of life and the rate of ageing both vary considerably depending on a number of factors such as education, occupation, purchasing capacity, lifestyle, food habit, residential location, belief and culture, etc.

Surprisingly, ageing takes place within the context of family members, kin, neighbours, friends, work associates and the state. Lifelong preparations, making intergenerational linkages, using appropriate technology, developing right-based societal relationships, upholding religious values at the personal level, political commitment and governmental undertaking at the macro-level can help ensure a healthy ageing and active later life. Policy responses to ageing until now have tended to focus only on the provision of medical care and income security for older persons, which remain important but have been inadequate compared to the rate of ageing occurring now and projected to intensify in the coming decades.

Population ageing is a by-product of scientific development in human societies bound to remain a dominant social problem throughout the 21st century. It is also gaining increasing recognition as one of the most influential forces of change in societies; becoming one of the defining global issues to shape the future of the world's societies.

Ageing has an influence on development and interacts with global patterns in labour and capital markets, governmental pension services and traditional support systems, all of which are further shaped by technological change and cultural transformations. Population ageing has a direct impact on socio-economic development, particularly in the case of countries going through economic transition such as Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, with its 10 million out of 160 million in the older age group, is not out of the current global ageing stream and is facing a daunting challenge in providing social security, health care and other safety net programmes to the seniors. At present, around 7 percent of Bangladesh's population constitutes the elderly population, but their absolute number (about 10 million) is quite significant, their rate of increase is also very alarming.

About 8 million of them live in rural areas. Due to a fall in mortality rate, accompanied with fertility decline over the last few decades, the elderly population of Bangladesh is continuously increasing. According to 1911, 1951, 1974, 1981, 1991 and 2001 decennial censuses, the elderly populations in Bangladesh were 1.38 million, 1.86 million, 4.06 million, 4.90 million, 6.04 million and 7.98 million respectively. Side by side, the projected number of older persons in 2025 and 2050 are 18 million and 44 million accordingly. About 85,000 new older people are added to the over 60-year age group each year, making Bangladesh one of the 20 countries with the largest number of elderly population and by 2025 Bangladesh, along with four other Asian countries, will account for about half of