

Impact of population on national economy

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THE population growth (about 1.47%) is one of the most serious problems we are facing at the moment. The present 162.2 million people, crammed in about 56,977 sq. miles (1,47,570 sq. km), and high fertility rate are a challenge to our economic and ecological viability. All our economic efforts for national development are nullified by the ever-growing population every year.

In the next decades, if steps are not taken now, we will not have sufficient land to cultivate to meet our increasing demand for food grains or for building industries, and urban expansion.

In 1600 AD there were only 4 million people living in Bangladesh. It has taken thousands of years to reach the present number. We do not have any record of population prior to 1600 AD. It is found that after the end of the Sepoy Mutiny there was a sharp rise in population.

In 222 years (1650 to 1872 AD) the country's population rose by 12.6 million (1.26 crore), which, in fifty years (1931) increased by 15.2 (1.52 crore). From the last census report of 2001, it is evident that between 1961-2001 the population increased by 123.1 (12.31 crore). In forty years the population increased by 77 million (7.70 crore). The population was in 75 million 1971, and in less than 40 years it has crossed 152 million.

Out of the total population (162.2 million), men and women were about 82.8 million and 79.4 million respectively. The age structure of the population is not favourable for economic development since about 42% are under 15 years of age. This increases the dependency ratio and creates pressure on various social sector services.

As age is the prime determinant of labour force, population growth leads to an increase in the working-age population over a period of time, which exerts pressure because of high levels of unemployment.

The urban population is growing at a faster rate (about 7%) than the rural population -- slum dwellers are distressed migrants from rural areas and most of them live below the absolute poverty line. In the slums of metropolitan cities, tens of thousands of people shelter in huts made of cardboard with polythene roofs.

There is no running water and no sanitation. The stench is overpowering: garbage and human waste heap up in piles. The poverty of the slum population is further aggravated by the fact that the government's development efforts devoted to the slum population are less than those for rural population.

Fertility rate and its implication for economic growth have become increasingly important in our predominantly agrarian economy because our development plans aim at increasing per capita income and standard of living of the majority of the people of the villages. Thus, the problem of population growth in relation to economic development of our developing economy involves consideration of:

- Size of the population;
- Rate of population growth and
- Age distribution pattern of the population.

Age distribution pattern of the population.

Our rural as well as national development depends on population growth. Since long, our population has been overwhelmingly rural in character. In 2001, 77% of the population of the country was rural (about 7%3 now), but in 1961 the proportion was 94.81%. Because of the magnitude of the rural population our economic structure is agricultural. As such, it would be worthwhile to examine the general age structure of our society to understand the characteristics of socio-economic phenomena, which are directly related to it.

One of the main problems of socio-economic development of our



level.

Industrialised nations are attempting to distribute their considerable wealth more equitably, but the underdeveloped as well as developing nations are struggling simply to achieve a bare subsistence level for most of their people. An agrarian country like Bangladesh has to contend with other serious internal problems as well as the problems of education, health, involvement of women in development work, political stability and people's participation.

Population pressure has already created additional demands on the scarce land, water and other non-renewable resources, thereby making it increasingly difficult to support the increasing number of human beings. The declining land to man ratio as well as the limited absorptive capacity of agriculture have pushed a vast number of people from rural to urban areas. Without any concomitant industrialisation and creation of urban amenities and facilities, most of the migrants end up in informal sector jobs and live in deplorable conditions in slums and shantytowns.

Whatever issue the society attempts to solve -- hunger, environmental disruption, economic growth or stagnation in its various forms -- it seems safe to say that unless the problem of population is confronted first or at least simultaneously, a satisfactory solution is unlikely to be found. Without substantial decrease in fertility, improvement in socio-economic conditions will be difficult if not possible to achieve.

A significant change in fertility pattern will not occur unless overall development strategies are designed to involve both men and women equally. So, the organisational and management structures of family planning and population control programmes have to be strengthened to achieve the desired goal.

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society has resulted from its unbalanced age structure and the large dependent population. If the dependency ratio is about 1% a country is said to be over-populated. The dependency ratio in our country is high, which is alarming in view of the economic and demographic condition.

The high agricultural density together with a massive population growth potential puts tremendous pressure on the existing land and resources. In addition, it has become difficult to meet the nutri-

tional demands of the people. Because of the growing number of the poor, it has become even more difficult to get them within the reach of development programmes.

To increase economic growth, population must be regulated through capital formation, which can ensure a greater rate of productivity at the existing standard of living. Taking into consideration the rate of population growth at about 1.5% for feeding 1.5% more people, we require 10.2% increase in capital formation. But capital formation

does not exceed 5%, and it is difficult to keep pace with the population growth with so little capital formation.

The development interventions do not incorporate any concern about maintaining demographic balance through streamlined population policy and conservation of environmental resources. When the population base is extremely high it harms per capita well-being and per capita consumption. The fundamental condition for economic growth is population growth at the desired

The time of Justice Murshed

A. M. MAHMUDER RAHMAN

JUSTICE Murshed was born on 11 January 1911 in Calcutta in a distinguished Muslim family of Bengal. He passed the matriculation examination in 1926 securing first position. He passed BA with Honours in Economics from the Presidency College in Calcutta in 1930, and MA in 1932. He obtained LLB degree from Calcutta University in 1933 securing first class. He enrolled himself as an advocate of the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal in 1934, and soon after went to England to study for the bar. He was the lone student from British India to secure honours in the Bar at final BAW examination in that year.

On his return from England he again took up legal profession and made his mark as a lawyer in the Calcutta High Court. He was Senior Government Counsel for Improvement Tribunals, Calcutta Improvement Trust. He was also associated with those who tried to form a coalition ministry in Bengal composed of representatives of the Congress and the Proja Party, and with the progressive Muslims who formed the Muslim Majlish with the purpose of bridging the Hindu-Muslim divide. Murshed was one of the champions who wanted to keep Bengal undivided. In 1947, he took active part to resist communal violence.

After the partition of India he came to the then East Bengal and joined Dhaka High Court as an advocate. He was elevated to the Bench in 1954. He was also involved in the Language Movement. He helped draft the manifesto of the United Front in 1954.

As a judge, Murshed was uncompromising, and a firm believer in the rule of law and democracy. He resisted the imposition of military rule by General Ayub Khan in 1958. I shall be failing in my duty unless I make reference to some landmark judgments delivered by Justice Murshed. These are:



SYED MAHBUB MURSHED

- Abdul Haq vs Fazlul Quader Chowdhury and others, popularly known as the "Minister Case." Because of the judgment President Ayub Khan had to amend the Constitution regarding appointment of ministers;
- The Dhaka University Convocation Case, popularly known as "Zakir Ahmed Case." The doctrine of audi alteram partem, which he aptly applied in this case, is still followed by the highest judiciary of our country with the highest esteem;
- Col. Bhattacharya's case.

Another outstanding decision was given in what is known as "Pan Case." In this decision Justice Murshed struck down the Inter Provisional Trade Ordinance, 1969, as void and illegal. Justice Murshed, in his reply to a Full Court Reference on the occasion of his becoming the Chief Justice of the then High Court of East Pakistan, cautioned the judges about their duty. He said: "A judge is nothing but the law speaking with uncompromising justice, for it has been truly said that the best government is that in which the law speaks rather than the law-givers. This is where the judges come in. But where the law ends tyranny begins and there is no worse tyranny than judicial arbitrariness and no misfortune can be worse than judicial subservience. When a judge departs from the

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spirit of the law and from a fearless independence in its application, he becomes the worst lawbreaker."

Regarding lawyers, he said: "The essential characteristic of a lawyer is that by interest and predilection, and often by birth, he belongs to the people; by habit and taste he belongs to the aristocracy. He is thus a happy connecting link between the two. They are very properly co-sharers of the Court not so much as law-givers but as interpreters of the law."

Justice Murshed, even after he resigned, did not stop thinking of the people and the country. He said in one of his writings: "The countries and the peoples of this subcontinent should draw closer and work together because they have so much in common. They have to overcome the prejudices that keep them apart. The nations of the subcontinent have to unitedly work together in order to approximate a common goal. Unity in our part of the world, however, has to grow from within. It cannot be imposed by any external agent."

"We may say that he foresaw the birth of what is today called Saarc. A learned man as has was, he never failed to identify the problem of the times and world with the people.

Justice A.M. Mahmuder Rahman

Comments on The Daily Star Leadership Colloquium

Quest for energy fix

Kudos to *The Daily Star* for hosting a Colloquium on the quest for energy fix in Bangladesh, probably the very first of its kind, at this critical juncture of our time! Congruent with other developed and developing countries in the world, measuring up to the increasing energy needs are central not only to our future economic growth but also to the socio-political stability. Within the framing narrative of depleting resources, including coal and natural gas, sustainable development in Bangladesh is contingent upon our ability to tap into alternative and renewable resources ranging from wind and solar power to biomass, fuel cell technologies and nuclear power before the rhetoric of action fizzles out and turns out to be too little too late. Although any quick fix for this holy grail is nowhere in the offing, Cost-Benefit (CB) as well as Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological (PEST) analyses should be our effective tools to set the short and long term strategies in order to achieve the target of 14,000 megawatt by 2020. What struck me most about the colloquium is the absence of government functionaries, legislators and policymakers, although I have no doubt that they are resorting to active listening and taking notes. I am sure there is a consensus across the political spectrum and party lines that meeting our energy needs brooks no delay, simply put.

FARIDUL ALAM, PHD

Good job. Look for immediate necessity. Give a regional view of future planning. The decentralisation must take place of regional and upazila basis of all activities.

The role of the private sector need to be more highlighted and should gradually take over the job of the super electric company in the public sector, invented under the banner of autonomous institution. We need to know more about urban and rural sector future plan-

ning for power sector separately and its economic viability to operate on its own.

Political killing of the initiative by regime change also need to be addressed for sustainability of any good efforts including the one by the DS.

Quadir, California USA

I would like to add, if I may, the following thoughts on the energy resource development scenario for Bangladesh.

1. By trying to meet the energy needs from indigenous resources (coal and gas), Bangladesh has suffered a lot. Our resources, meagre and few, should only be developed if it is cost effective in terms of land use and the required time for such development.

2. We should take into consideration how other developing countries like India and China have approached the problem. India is heavily investing in coal mining in Australia (\$7B), China has signed \$50B worth of gas supply with Queensland, Australia and \$30B with Western Australia, not to mention other signings elsewhere. If Bangladesh imports its gas for electric power from other countries, the investment should be more than returned through increased exports and internal wealth generation. We should have this confidence in ourselves.

3. Because of our small land mass and high population as density, nuclear power plants should only be considered as a last resort. An accident arising from faulty equipment, human error or insidious terrorist activity may call for the whole population within more than a hundred kilometres from the plant to be relocated.

4. The lack of land may also limit our prospect for renewable energy sources like wind turbines and solar PV. However, these resources should be exploited to the fullest extent.

for producing electricity should be weighed against the cost of not using these as fertilizers. I will be surprised if the latter use is not more productive.

Professor Fazlur Rahman
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The NRBs are renowned researchers. Research is good for thinkers and readers. Bangladesh needs performers. For Bangladesh to adopt latest technologies will require a lot of capacity building. Small nuke plants, bio mass, fuel cell will not solve the prevailing and emerging energy crisis. Bangladesh must explore and develop its own gas and coal resources in environment friendly manner.

Gentlemen who kindly participated in the seminar have not much experience about ground reality of project formulation and implementation in Bangladesh. Bangladesh needs home grown experts to plan and implement own resources based energy generation through appropriate technologies. Electricity conservations, use of energy efficient bulbs, incentives to renewable projects are good suggestions.

Mahmud

Alternative sources like windmill and others are very costly. So exploring these types of energy won't bring any solution for Bangladesh. Rather we can reduce the usage of gas particularly CNG because oil is available to run car. Government must think about the pipeline gas to house this system wastage of huge amount of gas daily and by taking such measures I think we can produce more than 400 megawatt electricity. We have to remember that in cricket saving one run is equivalent to doing one run. This theory we have to apply.
Khondkar A Saleque