



Building better lives through a population and development agenda

NOELEN HEYZER and BABATUNDE OSOTIMEHIN

HALF a century ago, the world was warned of the imminent explosion of "the population bomb." There were fears that humanity would suffer mass starvation. And that societies would plunge into turmoil -- all because of overpopulation.

At that time, Asia was considered to be at the core of the population problem. The average woman in Asia could expect to bear five children in her lifetime. The region's population was projected to double within 33 years.

Many countries responded by embarking on programmes to control population growth. The landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), attended by 179 governments, shifted the discourse on "population control" to people-centred development.

The ICPD Programme of Action established, for the first time, inseparable linkages between population and development policies, with a clear focus on sexual and reproductive health from the standpoint of human rights -- in particular the rights of women and families to decide freely whether and when to have children.

The probability of every child surviving to adulthood was greatly increased. Families acquired better knowledge of sexual and reproductive health. Many more were given the means to make informed decisions about their fertility.



The Asia-Pacific region can be proud of its successes: an average woman today has around two children instead of five. Life expectancy has increased dramatically. Fifty years ago, the average person could expect to live until the age of 45. Today, a woman can expect to live to the age of 72 and a man to 68. Almost as many girls as boys enter primary school.

But success comes with new challenges. The concern today is not just about population numbers. Rather, it is about the complex interlinkages between population and development.

Putting people first to build better lives must remain the focus of efforts to address the population and development challenges that the Asia-Pacific region faces.

Increased life expectancy and lower fertility rates have resulted in rapid population ageing in the region that is unprecedented in human history. Some countries are at risk of becoming old before they become rich.

The population of older persons will triple by 2050 to reach 1.2 billion. In East Asia, one in three persons will be aged 60 or older. Furthermore, by 2050, there will only be 3.5 working persons to support one older person, as compared with 10 working persons today. There is thus an urgent need for the region to prepare for ageing societies.

While the opportunity for the demographic dividend has passed in some countries, in others there is still an opportunity to harness its potential. In South Asia, around half of the population is still below the age of 25. With appropriate mix of policies, including job-led growth and effective school-to-work transition, it will be possible to reap the youth dividend.

On issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, great strides have been made in strengthening policy. Yet programme implementation is lagging, particularly in targeting the most sexually active population group, namely youth.

Lack of information concerning sexual and reproductive health and limited access to

related services are contributing to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions. These gaps are also exposing millions to the risk of HIV, in particular key populations at risk, including people who inject drugs, people who buy and sell sex, men who have sex with men and transgender people. This means that comprehensive sexuality education and increased access to a range of contraceptives must be made a priority.

Furthermore, sexual and reproductive health programmes must also reach childless married women, unmarried women and girls, as also men and boys, as part of an integrated public health system that combines curative, preventive and health promotion services.

Despite overall progress on maternal health, in some countries the number of women dying during childbirth still remains stubbornly high. There are parts of the region where one in 200 mothers dies giving birth.

Asian and Pacific nations must do better in incorporating rights-based approaches to addressing population dynamics in their long-term plans for inclusive and sustainable development, including the impact of climate change.

And most of all, the response to the region's challenges must be grounded in a commitment

to addressing the unmet needs of women and all other groups that remain excluded from the development process.

How do we collectively tackle these new and persistent challenges? That question will be answered at the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC), which Escap is organising with UNFPA this week in Bangkok. This Conference is part of, and will contribute to, the global ICPD 20-year review mandated by the United Nations.

More than 400 representatives, including ministers, from over 45 countries and stakeholders from civil society will gather at this Conference. Meeting 50 years after the first APPC in 1963, they will seek fresh solutions to the region's population and development challenges.

The outcome of the Conference will shape population and development policies for the future we want.

As Asia-Pacific takes its place on the world stage, our governments have the means and the responsibility to build better lives for the region's 4.3 billion people. There is greater hope that the rapid population and development transformation will nurture the promise of a future that will be brighter than what had been predicted half a century ago.

The writers are Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap), and Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), respectively.

Tribute to late A.K. Azizul Huq

ASIF ALI

ABUL Kasem Azizul Huq, former Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of Bangladesh, passed away on July 19, 2013 in Dhaka. He was 84. He left behind two daughters and two sons besides many admirers. I had the rare privilege of having close acquaintance with him as a junior colleague while he was CAG from January 1983 to March 1989.

Late Azizul Huq had a chequered academic and professional career. He did Honours (gold medalist) and Masters in English from Dhaka University and served as lecturer there before joining the then Central Superior Service. He joined erstwhile Pakistan Military Accounts Service (PMAS) on January 25, 1954. Having been inducted in the Economic Pool of Pakistan, he worked as Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Finance of the central government. In Bangladesh he was Member, Finance, Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation, Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Secretary, Internal Resources Division cum Chairman, National Board of Revenue before taking oath as the third CAG in January, 1983. He did post-graduation on Advanced Theory of Economic Development at Manchester University, UK and course on Financial Policy and Analysis at IMF Institute, Washington, USA.

I had the opportunity of serving under him at the office of CAG in 1983. His working style and approach was dynamic, always aiming at resolving issues promptly with maximum care rather than causing unnecessary delay and indecision. His motto was "act, deliver and rectify" when required instead of remaining inert.

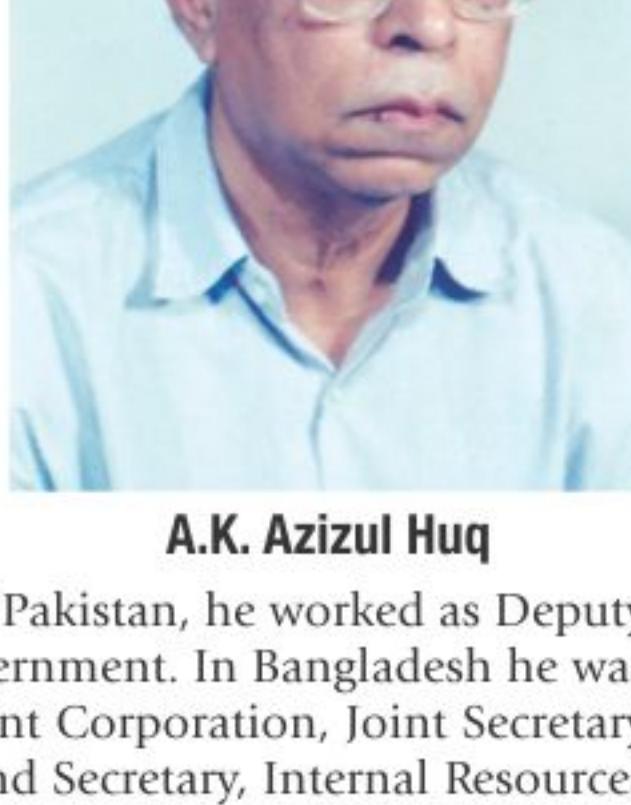
He undertook well laid down strategies to enhance the quality of audit to the expected standards by opening up doors of training, both domestic and overseas, for his personnel by convincing the government to allocate adequate funds for the purpose. In 1983, as one of the three members of the United Nations Board of Audit, he selected a good number of young officers in the UN audit teams to enable them to learn modern auditing skill and practices in the UN bodies like UNDP, Unicef, UNEP etc. to enhance their professional competence.

Azizul Huq played an active role during the discussions in the Ad-hoc Public Accounts Committee in the early eighties and later in PAC of the Parliament on audit report findings. He made great efforts to bring in a changed dimension in audit reporting by not merely raising audit findings but also addressing specifically the reasons behind the management weaknesses and recommending ways and means to minimise financial impropriety. He stressed on quality rather than on quantity of audit reports. This had a very positive impact upon the PAC deliberations.

He was very proficient in English literature and a voracious reader. Intellectually very enlightened, the natural beauty all around him was a constant source of his pleasant moments. After the sudden and premature death of his beloved wife Hamida Begum in 1985, he virtually lost all keenness to embark upon writing and even gave up posting entries in his personal diary. On the insistence of his children, he very recently agreed to start writing his memoir but the cold hands of death intervened.

While on an official visit to NY in 2006, it was my good luck to visit him. When asked about his pastime, his reply was: "Listening to the melodious music of the Hudson river." He pointed his finger at the river just adjacent to his house, but alas I did not possess the excellence of his inner-self to hear it murmuring. May late A.K. Azizul Huq's soul rest in eternal peace.

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A.K. Azizul Huq

Egypt: The return of assassinations

KAMAL GABALLA

WALTER C. Clemens wrote recently in the *New York Times* that the news from Egypt confirm Plato's gloomy speculations about democracy. Clemens explained that Egypt went from bad to worse ... from a moderate dictatorship to an elected dictatorship led by ideology to a third dictatorship that's even more oppressive and less tolerant.

On the morning of September 13, Egyptian newspapers reported the state's decision to extend the state of emergency by two months.

Meanwhile, the army's technical team has begun rebuilding the intelligence headquarters in Sinai's Rafah after it was blown up last week in a suicide attack that is suspected to have included foreign agendas.

The attack by groups of ambiguous nature, which killed six Egyptians soldiers and left 17 others wounded, is the latest in a wave of terrorism and organised violence that is facing the troubled Sinai Peninsula.

For whom these groups work remains unknown but reports linking them to al-Qaeda and other jihadist movements have become quite common as they forced the authorities to take intensive measures not seen since the '80s and '90s.

These terrorist groups kept a relatively low profile during the past year, but their true colours were revealed hours after the ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood as they (terrorists) began their war against the Egyptian state and the army in particular.

Sinai is being staged to seem to the world as the hub of lawlessness, violence and terrorism as militants have announced a war on the state through their aggressions and smuggling of arms and drugs.

In a television appearance, prominent journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal said that Sinai has been under the mercy of Israel since the 1979 peace treaty and is now Egypt's most exposed area with 18,000 to 24,000 jihadists, outlaws and terrorists residing in it.

About a week before the attack on Rafah's intelligence headquarters, a group that goes by the name "Ansar Beet al-Maqdas" had taken credit for the failed attempt to assassinate Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim in Cairo's Nasr City

neighborhood -- where the bloody Rabaa al-Adaweya events took place in August as the state dispersed a pro-Morsi sit-in.

According to reports, 390 terrorist hideouts have been demolished, 101 vehicles and 90 motorcycles have been confiscated or destroyed, and 393 tunnels have been leveled since the army began its operations in Sinai after Morsi's removal.

Meanwhile, reports also show that 107 terrorists have been killed, 353 have been wounded while 617 were arrested, and 73% of all arms smuggled through Gaza have been confiscated.

Reports also show that the Egyptian authorities have succeeded to a great extent in halting the funding that was being sent to terrorists in Sinai from outside and inside -- in terms of both manpower and finances. Their communication channels were also cut in the army's operations.

Indicators show that the Egyptian army's war



on terrorism in Sinai is in its final stage despite the large amounts and danger of these arms that these groups had their grip on.

These arms that were smuggled into Sinai during the past two years, especially through the Libyan and Palestinian borders, with the help of gangs, militants and regional and international arms and drugs.

Their intention was to create a terrorist state in Sinai and separate the peninsula from Egypt to pressure the Egyptian state and threaten national security through terrorist activities.

A report in *Al-Ahram* newspaper on Friday morning suggested that those responsible for the attack on the intelligence headquarters are plotting yet another vicious attack.

Similarly, a report in the local newspaper *al-Watan* predicted that the terrorist activities in Egypt will increase on a wider scale and not just in Sinai in the upcoming period in response to

the ouster of Morsi.

It also speculated that these activities will peak around the 40th anniversary of the October 6 War of 1973 to put the authorities in a critical position to step up their efforts to chase these fundamentalists who announced their war against the state after the June 30 uprising.

Security reports suggest that terrorist groups will use new tools and strategies in the upcoming period, including attacking ships passing through the Suez Canal with RPGs and explosive devices.

The history of fundamentalist organisations in Sinai began at the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s after the emergence of three groups -- the Salafi Jihadists, the Jihad and the Muslim Group which later became known as "al-Takfeer wa al-Hegra."

The numbers of these terrorists did not exceed 1,000, and during Morsi's rule their number went up to 24,000 according to Heikal. They include 14 militant groups in which Ansar Beet al-Maqdas is the most dangerous followed by Ansar al-Jihad, and Shoura al-Mujahideen, and the carriers of the black banners who announced Sinai as an Islamic state after the January 25 revolution in 2011.

The terrorists, according to security reports, include jihadists from Sinai itself and also from other governorates, Palestinians smuggled through Gaza, and extremely dangerous criminals.

It's also worth pointing out that the terrorist operations in Sinai include sectarian activities such as the kidnapping of Christian Egyptians by armed gunmen in Arish, Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid.

This led many Christian families to flee the city until security is restored. Also, prayers have been suspended in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid completely and are performed only in one church in Arish now.

Meanwhile, the terrorist activities in North Sinai have put an end to all normal daily activities and stability of the residents and families. It also forced many families to flee and many investors to step back, which affected tourism.

I really hope Clemens' conclusion about Egypt is wrong and Egypt will not be dragged into an even gloomier fate during its search for democracy.

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by Mort Walker

BEETLE BAILY

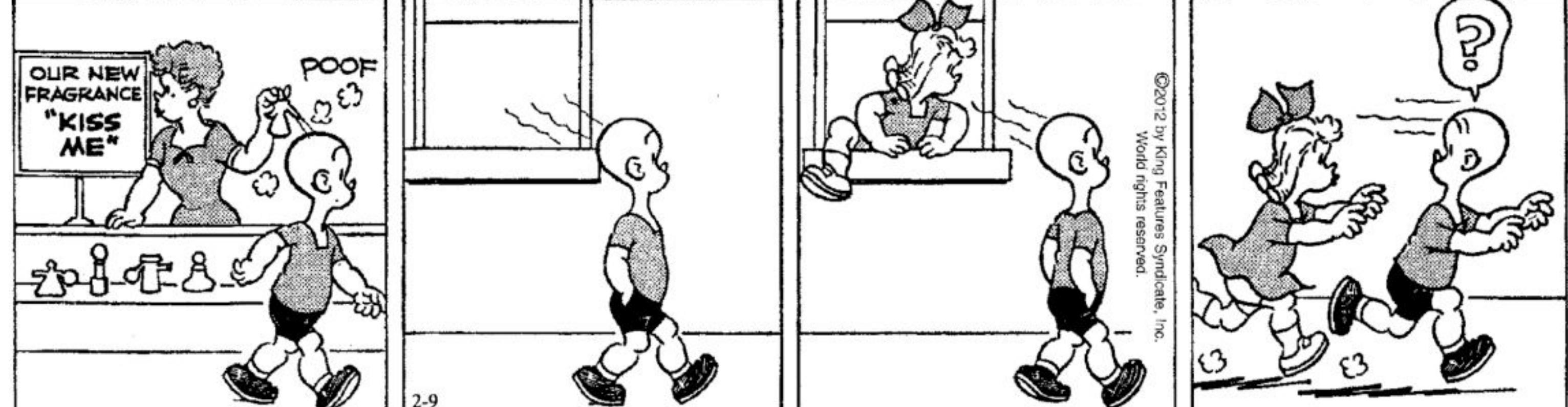


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by Don Trachte

HENRY



By THOMAS JOSEPH
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