POPULATION AN ASSET

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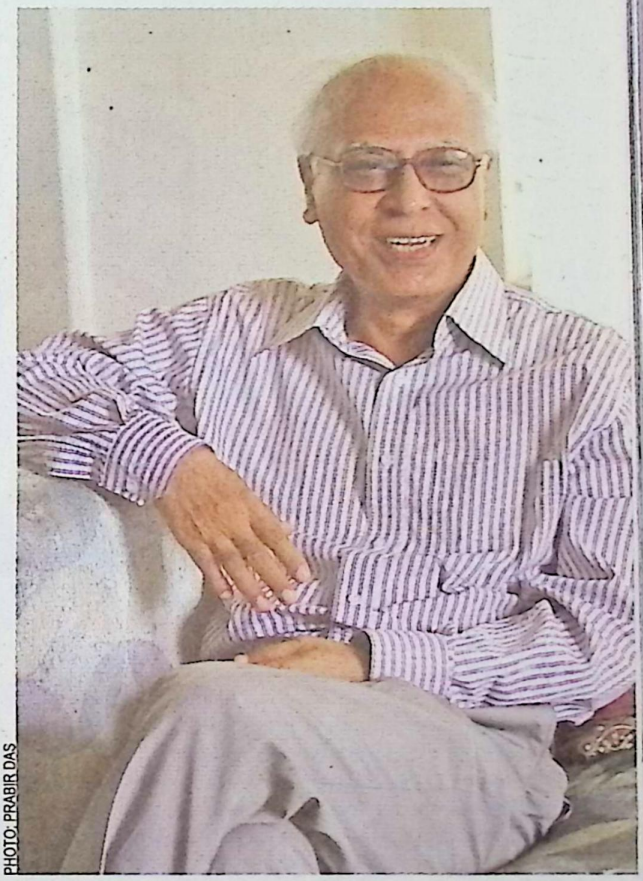


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Demographic projections suggest that our population may stabilise, under the present kinetics of population growth, towards the end of this century at about 300 million people. This will present a biological phenomenon of great significance – highest population density in natural setting that has no parallel in human history. The negative effects of high density are many. Disregard for rule of law may rise leading to a high level of social entropy. However, there are some advantages as well. In a high density population, *per capita* service delivery cost is less and process efficiency high. Notable examples of success include our population control, primary education, immunisation programmes, communication and several other human development indicators.

Land and is our scarcest commodity. Agricultural land is being lost to high level human activity at the rate of about 1000 sq km per year. Our total agricultural land (72,000 sq km) will be less than half in three decades. Where will we grow the necessary food crop? Maybe we should start protecting agricultural land from non-agricultural use by legislation. Otherwise our food security will be severely compromised. Food will someday be the scarcest commodity for sale globally; we may have the purchasing power but no food to buy! Food security would only be ensured if we can grow what we need.

Our preparedness to face the effects of climate change should focus on development of food crops with less demand on water. Inevitably *per capita* fresh water availability will decrease globally with an increase in population. Controlling the adverse effects of high population density in a country with limited natural resources is not easy. We have to plan carefully. Economic development is essential but we must take measures to reduce pollution. ■

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