

# Untangling our collective chaos

#ResearchMesearch



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

**T**HE trauma that people of Bangladesh are feeling is palpable. The vulnerability and fear is real. Indeed, that is even expected. In the meantime, let's discuss why we are feeling as a way to process both the attack and the events that followed.

Many of us feel that our city will never be the same again, while many are predicting a sinister "new normal."

That is perhaps because many of us are feeling horror, real horror, for the first time in our lives – especially if we've never seen anything like this before. And with it, we are feeling grief; but we don't know how to process it. We haven't learnt how to deal with grief, after all. Something as inevitable as death should be easier to process, one would think, but it isn't.

Psychotherapists often cite the Kübler-Ross model of grief (also known as the five stages of grief) in which humans go through five disparate emotions when grief stricken: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But all of these emotions, but acceptance, make us feel like we're losing

control. They make us feel unlike ourselves. And we try to stop it; and therein lies the problem. We don't need to stop the feelings. The idea is to feel those feelings, understand them, and make sense of them.

Before our collective grief turns into collective chaos.

Because when death comes in the manner it did on July 1, in which grief combines with horror, we are at risk, in popular parlance, of "losing it." Add to that all kinds of angst. Class-based angst. Moral angst about inequality. Existential angst. All of a sudden, we have a perfect recipe for conspiracy theories based on our class/race/religious positions.

But no matter how many conspiracies we hatch, we can't but face the reality that our children – of all walks of life – are at risk of being radicalised. Either at home or abroad. At coaching centres, at schools, and universities. And as we realise that certain groups are offering up enough incentive to the right recruits, enough to convince them that their lives are not worth living unless they prove themselves by partaking in these risky, life-threatening endeavours, let us take pause. Because the fight ahead of us is a difficult one, but one that must be won.

Without mass-surveillance.  
Without impinging on freedoms.

Without help from international bodies with vested interests.  
Without police brutality.

I know, it's hard to think about the macro when the micro, our children, are at stake. But without addressing the system, individuals can't be helped. I know, we want our children to know better; we want them to

sympathetic to the families of the attackers. But only to the ones with upper-middle class backgrounds.

The parents of the attacker from rural Bogra somehow don't deserve our sympathy. So we sit silently as they get arrested.

Maybe we maintain this silence because it's easy to fit the narrative that individuals from disadvantaged groups are more susceptible to being radicalised in exchange of money and/or other resources. We like that narrative. It protects our children, too, for the most part. And even when they end up being killers, we blame radicalisation. Not class. Not class-privilege. Not entitlement. Not even them. Or their vacuous lives that make them yearn for meaning. Maybe some of us have even convinced ourselves that they are outliers. But they're not. The world's most famous terrorist, Osama bin Laden, was a very rich man, after all (and he's no outlier either).

But we're not new to disproportionate experiences based on class. So when class dynamics unfolded in the aftermath of the attacks, we yet again remained silent. We watched as Saiful, the pizza chef who died during Operation Thunderbolt, was first identified as one of the attackers, and then, when it was revealed that he was one of the victims of the tragedy, quickly forgotten. He

remains the only one who didn't get national honour. Perhaps the injustice of the situation adds to the horror, grief, and guilt.

Maybe this "terror attack" is particularly horrific for us because we can see that they're (whoever they are) fighting a war. An ideological war. A war with foot soldiers consisting of our children. They want an Islamic state run using their version of Islam.

We can keep saying that IS is actually anti-Islamic State. We can say that IS is responsible for killing millions of Muslims. We can say IS has created Islamophobia. Indeed, we can say IS and its franchisees are in the business of defiling Islam – not promoting Islam.

But we also know that such truths don't matter.

Not in a country where the Quran is read but not understood by a majority of the people who read it; where reading translations are often thought to "not count" because it's not in Arabic. IS clearly likes this special brand of Muslims who don't understand Islam, because they can then feed them their own version. And maybe that knowledge comes together with the horror, grief, guilt, and injustice to create the collective chaos that we find ourselves immersed in.

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be able to resist such lucrative offers. Even though we haven't taught them how. And, maybe, that guilt adds to the grief and the horror that we currently feel.

Maybe some of us can laud ourselves for being human because in the post-attack period we have found it in ourselves to be

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## WORLD POPULATION DAY

# Rethinking the population problem

MUHAMMAD AZIZUL HAQUE

**W**ITH the knowledge that Bangladesh's population - which was about 75 million in 1971 - now stands bloated to more than 160 million, all crammed into a land area of only 50,260 sq miles and that the population density is already five times that in any other 'mega' country, contemplate the following scenarios and see if you want to picture the country with any further addition to its population. A population that renders running trains to become invisible under loads of humanity spilling out of their interiors and clinging to all over their exteriors, while carrying people to their homes in the countryside on the eve of Eids; traffic jams resulting into prolongation of say a 30-minute trip in the cities to an absurd three-hour trip; unbridled population increase that has already brought down the per capita land to 24 decimals or less and cultivable land to some 11 decimals; law courts reeling under the unwieldy burdens of hundreds of thousands of civil and criminal suits; innumerable daily occurrences of land-related disputes, countless crimes and murders; dying and moribund rivers; desertification and salinity intrusion from the sea; dire inadequacy of water supply causing distress to an enormous segment of the urban and rural population; a catastrophe from the rising sea-level looming large and threatening to submerge one-third of the land area of the country, which could thus engender the need to move and rehabilitate over 50 million internal migrants in the remaining two-thirds of the country's land territory, which could in turn raise the already high population density to an absurd level; fast-shrinking agricultural and cultivable land due to unplanned and uncontrolled urbanisation, industrialisation, infrastructural and development projects implementation; increasing cost of living, healthcare and education, and rampant and ubiquitous corruption and unscrupulousness; admission of even infants to schools depending on lottery and parents' capability to pay donations and; myriads of such other woes afflicting our daily life.

The root of nearly all our socioeconomic agonies can be traced back to the overpopulation of the country. Bangladesh's population has long ago exceeded the combined population of Myanmar, Thailand,

Sri Lanka and Singapore. We do not have enough land even to properly house the existing population, let alone housing any additional people. All the strides and all the remarkable successes that Bangladesh has achieved in various socioeconomic sectors since its independence, and particularly under the present government since 2009, will be nullified if the population growth remains unbridled.

With population growth remaining unbridled, no government can implement development programmes and ensure their long-duration benefits to people. And with



ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL MORGENSTERN

hundreds of thousands of young people joining the ranks of jobseekers every year, there is bound to be unmanageable unemployment problems and the resultant negative impact on the society. The world may not keep its doors wide open to perennially absorb our additional manpower and emigrants. There could be many impediments in the receiving countries, including racism and cultural repulsion.

During the first two decades after it came into being, Bangladesh was deemed by the West as a perfect example of a nation 'whose poverty was a direct consequence of over-

breeding'. It was considered a basket-case that barely subsisted on handouts from rich and developed countries. Notable ecologists and leading biologists, like Garrett Hardin, wrote in The New York Times and scholarly journals, that all aids to Bangladesh should be ceased. Very few Bangladeshis were aware of those write-ups and they just occupied themselves resiliently with rebuilding their war-ravaged country. And belying all sinister predictions, today Bangladesh has graduated itself to a lower middle income country.

However, in order to sustain and further augment our socioeconomic progress, we urgently need a sound and effective

The government should recognise overpopulation as a priority issue. And in order to address it aptly, a permanent national council or body, comprising eminent demographers, efficient public officials, notable scholars, experts and planners, should be in place to advise the government on the actions to be taken in its bid to manage and regulate our population size, its growth, and its age groups composition, so that it does not show any further significant increase. At the same time, such measures can enable us to avert serious impacts of the ageing of our population on the size of our workforce, which should be as

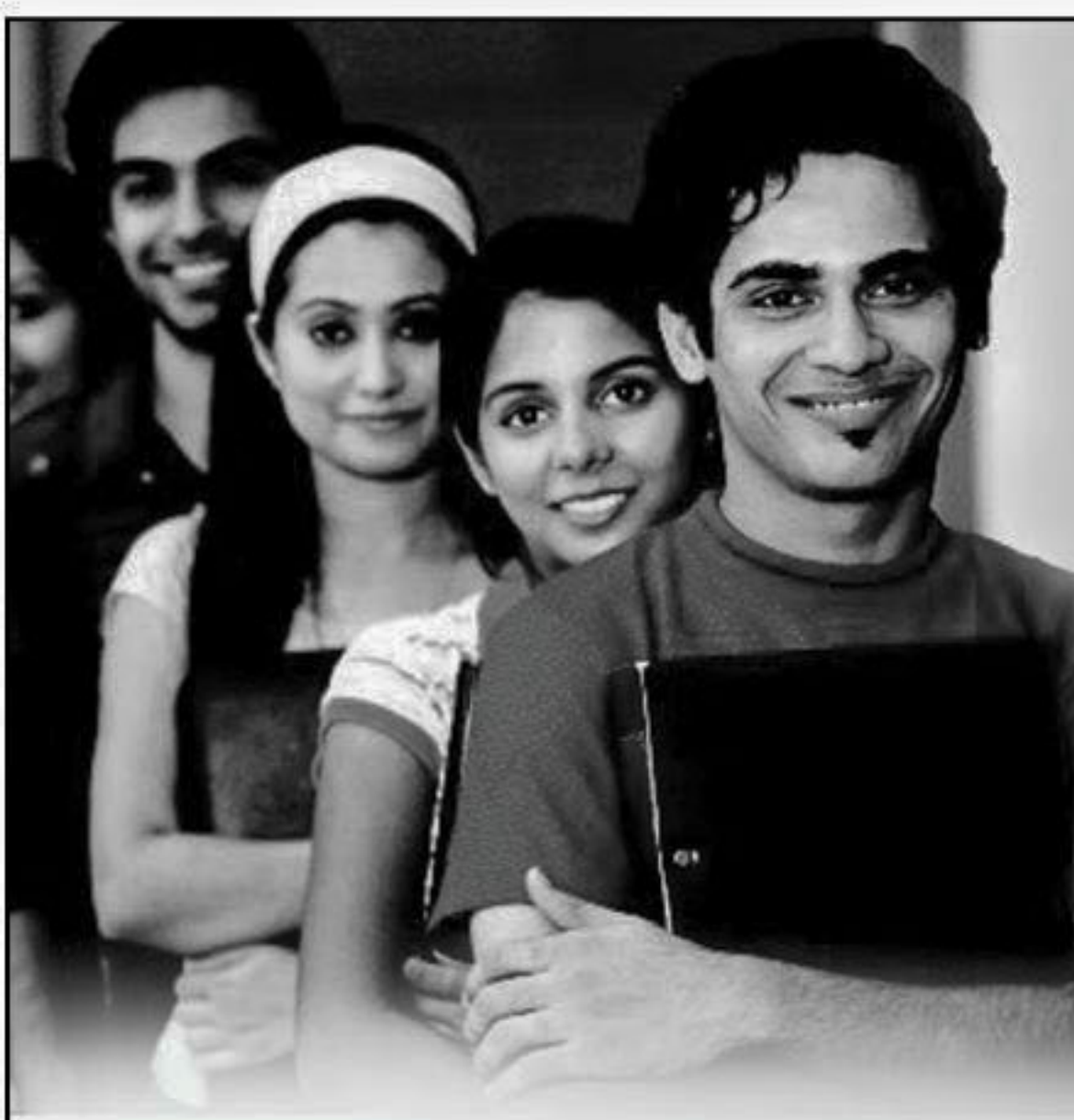
the land and polluting its environment.

How can one imagine this little country of already teeming crores to have, say 25 crore people, in the future and still ensure decent lives for them? No government, for all its best intentions and efforts, has the power to do that if the population grows to such a ludicrous size. And every political party in the country, if it calls itself patriotic, must extend unstinting support to the government to forthwith adopt the strictest possible measures to control the growth and size of the population.

With growing cities, townships and urban centres across the whole country, Bangladesh is likely to become a huge city-state in about three decades from now, if the current rate of economic growth is sustained. That, however, will gluttonously swallow the country's invaluable agricultural land, unless we determine the minimum amount of it that we must unwaveringly protect to ensure food security in times of global food shortage, akin to what we witnessed in 2008.

While many of our neighbours are doing extremely well, progressing and consolidating their progress, we cannot live under the shadow of an existential threat due to the still growing overpopulation. Even our immediate neighbor, Myanmar, under its nascent and still shaky democracy, is showing great promise. In FY2015-2016, Myanmar received an FDI of US\$9 billion. The total amount of the FDI received by Myanmar from 1988 to 2015 was around US\$60 billion. And the country is expected to attain an economic growth rate of 8.4 percent in the current fiscal year (April 2016 - March 2017). Territorially, Myanmar is more than 4.5 times larger than Bangladesh, with an area equal to about half the country under rich forests. It has natural resources of all kinds, including gems, valuable minerals, oil, and offshore natural gas reserves estimated at 10 trillion cubic feet as well as huge areas of rice producing fertile agricultural land. Yet, it has a population of around 50 million, i.e. less than one-third of the population of Bangladesh. I strongly feel that Bangladesh must keep pace with its neighbours in the matter of progress in socioeconomic areas and other spheres. Bangladesh needs to sustain the progress it has attained so far and achieve more. There cannot be any falling back to our past.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.



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