

Our Population, Our Asset

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

We are a land-short country, somewhat proverbially, as it seems. Bangladesh does not exactly have a galloping population but a growing one. The situation has

provoked an undeserved, even if unintentional, name-calling for the country.

When our country's small contingent was marching past on the opening day of the Olympics, high on the alphabetical order, the narrator introduced Bangladesh with a terse statement: "The most overpopulated country in the world." I would say it was an abrasive one-liner lacking in niceties expected from one in her role.

This is not to, however, underplay the large critical mass of the population we had inherited until the time that the net reproductive rate settled on a declining course. There is no gainsaying the fact that we do need to be watchful on a growing population lest it becomes unsustainable through any periodic slacks. Yet, my emphasis here is on the missing respect for the sensibilities of a participating country. That's all.

We need not be skin-deep. Actually, we are ninth in terms density of population among the ten most populous states of the world. The list includes, almost in its entirety, barring Bangladesh, city states and tiny island countries. If, quite a few of them, could prosper in spite of a more adverse land:man ratio than ours, why can't Bangladesh?

The size of our population, therefore, must not be viewed as a liability but an asset. In fact, we have the distinction of being a large nation with a huge reserve of substantially untapped human resource within a relatively small country.

One of the major obstacles to good FDI inflows is identified as the difficulty in land

acquisition. The question is not so much about availability nor is it procedural, as it is about litigation or other forms of resistance inherent in the extensive land-grabbing phenomenon. Nothing short of implementing a rights-based, assertive and participative land management and utilisation policy package can bring about a transformative regeneration of public wealth.

In this backdrop, our being the largest deltaic country in the world promises a largesse. We are in a constant state of land accretion and depreciation through river erosions with the former outstripping the latter, according to a latest study. In fact, the loss is by and large notional because what is lost resurfaces as shoals developing into

The size of our population, must not be viewed as a liability but an asset. In fact, we have the distinction of being a large nation with a huge reserve of substantially untapped human resource within a relatively small country.

charlands. This is one aspect of the Nature rebalancing itself; another more solid feature is the new accretions in the sea-board districts: Chittagong, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar, Patukhali, Feni and Bhola. Research indicates that the average addition to the mainland is 16 km per year. At that rate, over the



PHOTO: STAR

decades, the landmass may have exceeded one-tenth of mainland Bangladesh.

An interesting geological fact of relative obscurity centres on The Swatch of Noland, the bottomless pit at a tangent with the south-western tip of the coastal belt. Huge alluvial deposits were said to be funneling into the so-called pit with new land formation in prospect.

The tasks are well-identified the core of which is rapid development of soil capital through consolidation of the rather fragile swathe of land by intensive mangrove plantations. Already, landless peasants are relocating in the emerging parcels of land.

The shifting of the sands reflective of an interplay between the Nature's forces of regeneration and decay needs a modern management and expertise structure to be put in place. It will focus on, among other things, river training, for optimisation of benefits out of the natural processes. With experience gained in the fundamentals of hydrological asset management, we would be better poised to harness the blue technology for unwrapping the seabed bonanza.

It will be unrealistic though, not to spare some thoughts on the predicted rising sea levels, not quite a distant thunder as experts would have us believe. For its part,

Bangladesh is known as a low carbon emission country, a status it must maintain. Yet it faces the prospect of having to take the brunt of global warming, largely the handiwork of the advanced industrial countries, who themselves are not immune to its deleterious effects. While Bangladesh scrupulously meets its part of the bargain, big players must go beyond carbon swaps to help the smaller countries with adaptation and mitigation measures. To end on a slightly positive note, the ozone layer depletion seems to have been partially halted. Clearly, much more needs to be done – on this front.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star. He can be reached at shahhusainimam@gmail.com.

Adaptation to climate change Need for a human rights approach

ARIF CHOWDHURY

THE memories of Cyclone Sidr and Aila are fresh in the mind of Razia Begum, a victim of climate change, of Dacope Upazila, Khulna. The standing field crops and houses of her community were destroyed, and they suffered the loss of cattle as well as people who perished in these natural disasters. She says mournfully that Saturkhali, Kamarkhola, Koilashganj and Baniashanta are the most vulnerable unions where access to necessary human rights is disrupted.

Furthermore, salinity, flood, river erosion, heavy rain, cyclone, water logging and seasonal variations etc. are the most devastating impacts of climate change in those areas.

Seasonal, temporary, permanent migration is increasing in these areas due to climate change, while illegal trafficking is also a noticeable concern. Locals believe that the reasons behind their misery is the decreasing rate of natural resources at the Sundarbans, high rate of salinity (more than 80 percent soil has some form of salinity) and increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters. More men than women migrate to other places from these areas, and thus women, fall victim to vulnerable, hazardous situation. Although, some adaptation and implementation authorities such as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Shushilon, Heed Bangladesh, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) etc. are working for the betterment of the local people in Dacope, lack of good governance,

existence of salinity, non-sustainable embankment, lack of killas, poor communication systems, lack of economic assistance, etc. are seen as obstacles for sustainable adaptation.

A human rights approach to migration and adaptation is related to the core points of governance issues in the context of increased climatic factors. Bangladesh is one the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, and every year a large number of people are displaced from their place of origin due to the impacts of climate change. According to the United Nations, "A human rights approach to migration places the migrant at the centre of migration policies and management, and pays particular attention to the situation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups of migrants. Such an approach will also ensure that migrants are included in relevant national action plans and strategies, such as plans on the provision of public housing or national strategies to combat racism and xenophobia".

Representatives of over 190 countries gathered in Paris for COP 21, to discuss on several issues related to climate change and environment. While touching on the effects of climate change, participants also focused on the practical importance of ensuring human rights. As John Knox stated: "Every State in the climate negotiations belongs to at least one human rights treaty, and they must ensure that all of their actions comply with their human rights obligations. That includes their actions relating to climate change".

An increase of 2 degree Celsius temperature will not only impact the environment but also affect human rights of developing countries. Thus, the Climate Vulnerable Forum countries at COP 21 suggested following a target of 1.5 degrees rise in



PHOTO: AFP

temperature, as it could human rights. The government of Bangladesh needs to address proper approach in governance, so that the human rights of marginalised people can be protected with proper adaptation. To cope with the effects of climate change at place of origin or destination,

adaptation can be addressed as one of the major mechanisms. It is mandatory to specify concerns and scopes of legal practices in Bangladesh, and to address local people's climate change concern, adaptation challenges and safe

issuing displaced people with all the necessary documents (e.g. passports, personal identification documents, birth certificates, marriage certificates, irrespective of gender etc.) to enjoy legal rights and protection against discrimination in the destination

settlements, to ensure medical care and attention for wounded and sick internally displaced persons, according to their requirements. Again, several issues should be managed by national authorities in case of displacement during emergencies, and adequate measures should be taken to fully inform those who have been displaced regarding the reasons for their displacement while also making them fully aware of the process of displacement. It is also important to involve the affected people, particularly women, in the planning and management of their relocation, and afford them the right to an effective remedy, including making review of such decisions by appropriate judicial authorities available and providing the means through which internally displaced people can voluntarily return to their place of origin in safety and with dignity.

The effective governance system encounters major challenges as it encompasses multiple policy areas, such as development approach, community, livelihood, climate change, and environment. At present, there are no legal guidelines for protecting land and other immovable property rights of climate refugees. The necessity of legal practices is certainly the most important to promote the rights of the displaced people.

The writer works as Research Associate for the Institute of Water and Flood Management (IWMF), Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET). Email: arifchowdhury065@gmail.com



QUOTABLE Quote



VINCENT VAN GOGH

For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream.

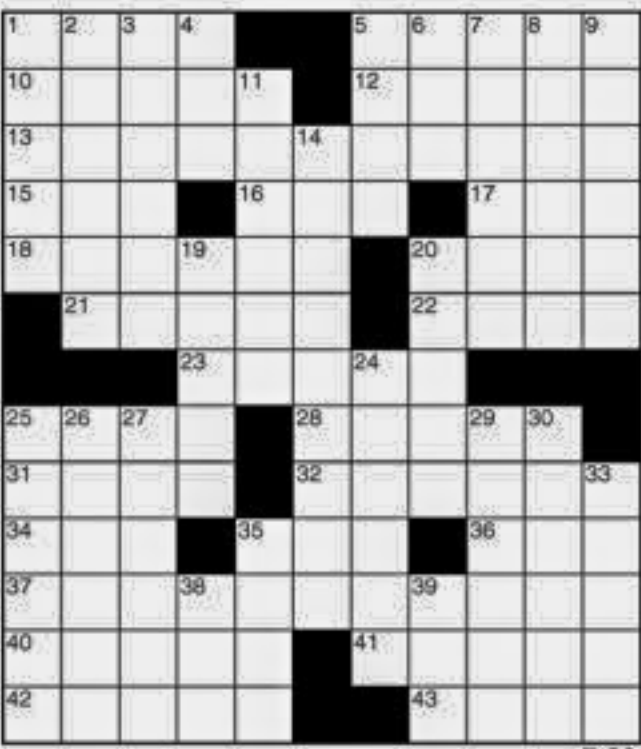
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Indian music
- 5 "Meet John Doe" director
- 10 Washington's successor
- 12 Assumed name
- 13 Group of 12
- 15 Kin of assn.
- 16 Back muscle, for short
- 17 -- out a living
- 18 Land, as a fish
- 20 Stallion-to-be
- 21 Position
- 22 Addition column
- 23 Honeydew, for one
- 25 Flight part
- 28 Poet Guest
- 31 Farm layers
- 32 Preparatory stage
- 34 Colony member
- 35 Pop's daughter
- 36 Santa -- winds
- 37 Motorists' reading
- 40 Macbeth, for one
- 41 Stellar ram
- 42 Rockies resort
- 43 Tender

DOWN

- 1 Barber's tool
- 2 Cherishes
- 3 Gizmo
- 4 Parisian pal
- 5 Group of players
- 6 Boxing great
- 7 Urban bird
- 8 Irritate
- 9 Desirable qualities
- 11 Like tears
- 14 Like some romantic dinners
- 19 Reading aids
- 20 Dance in a line
- 24 Black Sea port
- 25 California peak
- 26 Decimal fractions
- 27 Snare
- 29 Slow passage
- 30 Track athlete
- 33 Out of style
- 35 Pictured
- 38 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 39 Tax agcy.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

