

## Census findings

The preliminary report of Census 1981, much needed as it was to test our development plan assumptions and to prepare for the future on the basis of the present, leaves us mainly with the satisfaction that population-size calculations made earlier by our statisticians and demographers were not far wrong. The head count, taken on three days of March, turned out the figure 87,052,024 but post enumeration checks revealed the range of undercount to be 3.3 per cent taking the population estimate to 89,940,000. After adjustment which is only about three million less than the projections made in the Second Plan. The census performance has shown that given the effort, statistics collected and collated by us can be reliable.

As for the revelations by the census, these confirm what were being feared. Population has increased fast, by 18 million 461 thousand, in last seven years. Not only has per capita land availability decreased and population density increased but housing too has failed to move apace leading to crowding in the home. There is also the unhealthy trend towards 'over-urbanisation' of a few cities and towns. Greater Dacca is now host to more than 3.2 million people with a sizeable chunk of floating population among them.

The rate of population growth is seen to have declined to an average of 2.36 per cent per annum since 1974, year of the previous census, registering a drop by meagre 34 per cent from the rate of the years before but that can be of little solace. Even with a relatively lower growth rate a large base population can add to itself a dangerously burdensome actual number with the added potential of multiplying further.

So, in the end what Dr. Fasihuddin Mahtab, Planning Minister, has said as a confirmation of policies already enunciated in the Second Five-Year Plan should really sound as a stern warning. There cannot be any let up in our development efforts aimed at increasing the opportunities of economic activities, taking urban facilities to more of the rural areas and most important hurrying the pace of family planning. The complete report of the census and the detailed sample survey proposed to be carried out towards the year-end about the demographic and economic facets of the country ought to tell us more precisely where to put the finger. To this end all those who worked in Census 1981 have already made a valuable contribution. They should earn congratulations in their next assignment too.