

20/1/80

Census Outcome

19

Imagining the difficulties that we as a nation will have to face, the stages we must pass through, the sordid or pleasant experiences we must gather is not perhaps difficult, but preparing ourselves for those certainly is. The last population census, the outcome of which has been made public now, will help us in this difficult task of preparation provided the knowledge and the insight that have been obtained are put to good and meaningful use. For that understanding and imagination would be necessary, and patience and courage too. Now that an updated, complete and new view of the basic facts of the nation's life is available, attempts must be made to summon these qualities and forces lest the benefit of the entire exercise of conducting a population census should go waste.

The population of this country is now estimated to be a little less than nine crores. This is a phenomenal figure and confirms the rough estimates that have been made from time to time. Given the geographical smallness of the country and the so far elusive hope of seeing new land emerge in the sea, this may, in a way, seem to be disquieting, but then all depends on how the problem is approached and what use is made of the talents of the people. It is perfectly possible that Bangladesh would be able to sustain such a seemingly huge number, and to continually enhance the quality of the life of the people, and to take care of an even greater number in the future. This possibility must, however, be realized fully and soon enough. Determination of the people, their awareness of the circumstances in which they live and the need for changing more and their unity would be the most effective weapons in this struggle.

The preliminary report on the census goes to show that the population growth rate has, in spite of the considerably larger efforts that have been mounted in the field of population control now, reduced only marginally. This is no reason for disappointment, however. The very fact that the trend for increase has been arrested speaks of a certain achievement which, un-

der the given conditions prevailing in the country, is by no means mean. During the period between 1961 and 1974 the population in this country had grown at an annual rate of 2.7 per cent. During the period between the first and the second census, from 1974 to 1981, this rate has been found to be 2.36 per cent. The success that has been attained, though small, should be inspiring. It may perhaps be assumed that the initial period of difficulty—one in which motivational work has to be done against many an odd—is largely over and that the stage has now been set for attaining more impressive progress in this field.

The report also indicates that there are at present 106 men for every hundred women in the country, the relevant figure in the first census being 108. This shows that the population is, in spite of a little increase in the number of women, almost equally divided into two halves from the point of view of sex. This is an important discovery and its implications should be understood well. If this nation has to make a significant progress, it would be impossible to achieve it without developing the inherent abilities and talents of one half of the population that the women constitute. This means that programmes for educating and training women and for turning them into a productive force will have to be made more vigorous and more extensive. Men, who dominate the society, must give women the attention they deserve and do so in their own interest.

Though the population of the country has increased considerably during the last seven years, the number of total households in the country has not. There were 12,679 households in the country in 1974 and now there are 15,135 only. The Planning Minister has admitted that the housing units in the country have not sufficiently increased in number to be proportionate to the increase in population. The housing sector therefore deserves special attention, especially in the rural areas. This is more so because the declared policy of the government is to meet the basic human needs first and to attain the goals of development through the process.