

## 266 million population by 2025

By A Staff Reporter

The population of Bangladesh with its present fertility rate figure of 6.3 will be nearly three times the present population or 266 million by the year 2025.

The world's population, now about 4.8 billion will increase by 1.5 billion by the end of this century. China will account for 1.2 billion of the 6.3 billion total and India for 990 million.

These are a few projections drawn from the World Bank's latest development report. According to it, during the past decade, the number of people on earth increased by 770 million. The World Bank estimates that in 2025 global population could nearly double, to about 8.3 billion. Of that total, about 7 billion will be residents of the undercapitalised, undernourished Third World.

The much bigger worry, according to the report, comes from overcrowding at the family level. Almost by definition, rapid population growth means that parents have many children. Larger families are typically the choice of poor people — and help to keep them poor. Parents do not have enough to spend on each child's food, health and education to ensure that it will earn more than they did. Growing up to be a poor adult, it may therefore follow the pattern of its parents and have many children itself — to ensure some survive the hazards of infancy, to help on the land and later to provide a pension for their parents' old age.

That micro approach helps to explain why the poorest countries tend to have the fastest population growth. Taking the developing countries as a group, their populations are increasing by around 73 million people a year. Asia and Latin America began slowing their growth rates in the 1960s, but Africa has yet to slow down at all. Its population grew at 3.1 per cent a

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year in the 1970s. The average number of children born to a woman is now eight. Mozambique rate of 4.3 per cent a year, probably the fastest in the world.

The economic consequences of rapid population growth can be huge: first, they change a country's age structure, giving it many more dependents — those aged less than 15 or more than 65. For all developing countries, 39 per cent of their population was below the age of 15 in 1980, compared to only 23 per cent in developed countries. The rich world faces the medical and pension costs of an ageing population; poor countries have huge education bills for a young one.

Looking ahead to the year 2000, the Bank calculates that its standard rate of fertility decline can be achieved if total public spending on family planning rises to 5.6 billion US dollar, an increase in real terms of 5 per cent a year. To achieve a rapid decline would need spending of 7.6 billion US dollar, a real rise of 7 per cent a year.

The chances of getting even a 5 per cent annual increase look slim. Almost all poor countries are strapped for cash; rich countries are doing little to increase their aid budgets. In real terms, aid for population programmes in 1981 was smaller than at any time since 1973. And the United States, which provides a quarter of the total, may cut its sharply. In such a situation the big losers would be Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt and Morocco, all of whom receive over 20 million US dollar of American aid for population programmes a year.

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