

# CONNECT

Issue 64 - 24th November, 2011

## Seven Up Fresh Ideas Anyone?

*The birth of the seventh billion baby was celebrated with fanfare recently. It also exposed the contradictions and complexities of development and change in India. Chetan Sharma, Editor-in-Chief, Indo Dutch Connect comments.*



India made the headlines yet again for its population count when the seventh billion baby born in the world was symbolically selected to be from here. Notably, a cause for celebration, but given India's march to being the world's most populous by 2025 at the current growth rates, the occasion also calls for introspection. Chetan Sharma, Editor-in-Chief, Connect, ponders on the causes of this growth and suggests that there is dire need for fresh thinking!

Nine months is what it takes a mother to have a daughter. Typically, thirty times that is what it takes for that daughter to become a mother. India is different; it has taken 54 years. The last time the name Nargis made the headlines was in 1957 with Mother India (an epic film featuring the legendary star Nargis Dutt). Last week the name was back in the news, this time as the world's seventh billion baby. Given the great Indian itch to hitch its wagon to any star - she naturally becomes the "daughter of India". It is reflected in an offer for free education (which is incidentally a constitutional right), health and education till the age of seven. Mind you, it's not the government but an NGO that has made the offer. So what happens once seven is up?

It brings us to the state of affairs in India and should Nargis be a cause of celebration or introspection. First the symbolism. It is perhaps befitting that she be born in the most populous state of the world's most populous country. Well almost, given that by 2025 India should overtake China, only in terms of population, that is. It is ironical that the girl child is born in a state notorious for female foeticide, maternal mortality and one of the worst sex ratios. Be it mothers or factory workers, Uttar Pradesh has always been a state with labor problems. Not to forget, it is even ruled by a woman although her political strength lies in caste not gender.

India is a land of contradictions. Haven't we heard that before? Here is more evidence. Globally, rice eating nations tend to produce more babies than the wheat eating ones. India, quite literally, goes against the grain. The Southern states of India seem to fancy responsibility as much as they fancy rice. Their effort to stabilize the population with a replacement fertility of 2.1 children per woman is much higher in the north. Again, it took the world 120 years to get its second billion people and half that to get the next three and fourth of that to get the next two. India on the other hand has recorded a slow down, (thank fully only in population) over the last decade. Amongst the world's top 60 poorest countries India has also seen the fastest growth in billionaires (now almost 60). With Nargis, the world billion once again finds its association with India. So what are the underlying causes to the current trends in population? The argumentative Indian reasons as follows. Keeping the maternity wards in business are better medical facilities resulting in lesser deaths at birth and mid life even as it enhances life expectancy. This is complimented by advanced fertility techniques and the great Indian boy fetish. Despite all the anti gender bias talk we remain desperate for the nurse to say - You got Male! Balancing this rising trend is better education/literacy, aggressive birth control awareness campaigns highlighting advanced and easier contraceptive methods.



Then there is urbanization. With it comes lesser idle time, more work fatigue, obesity all of which deter copulation. You can add to the list aphrodisiacs like beer, fries and anti depressants, all of which have seen a significant rise in consumption. Not too forget condoms, flavored ones too – the bed spring need not lead to an offspring! At the extreme end the sadist slogans for lesser population would read -- Inflation is great!

Marry Late, if at all! Gays are a saving grace! I love mobiles- More Talk Less Time for sex! And when nothing works then go for the kill - Give me a tsunami! Get me a terrorist! Say yes to suicides! Ugh!

What now? India is the world's second fastest growing country. It ranks ninth in terms of contribution to the world's GDP and 129th when it comes to purchasing power per capita. This means we have grown fast but only some of us have. We need to distribute our wealth better. One way of doing that would be through better governance. That seems tough. At least the last 6 decades tell us so. The other would be increasing the growth rate of goods and reducing that of people. That seems tougher but more doable. At least the last 6 years tell us so. But the question is, should India try and control its population growth? On one hand, we are a global force to reckon with not only as producers but more so as consumers. The world looks at us as a land of populous possibilities. Not only are there many Indians, most of them are young too - half our population is under the age of 25 years. One way of keeping it young is to keep producing babies. India then becomes a natural production factory - a manufacturing hub for goods and babies alike, the latter to sell the former of course. However, resources have a limit, reproduction need not and so the need to curtail population shall remain. India just got a new race track with the Formula one. It now needs to closely track the population race and work out the best formula to keep it under control. Reminds me of the advertisement of a popular soda beverage which was launched to counter the cola war. It spoke of the need to refresh. The slogan said –“Fresh up with Seven Up”. We too need fresh ideas for sustenance given that seven billion are up and counting

**TOP**

---