

International Year of Older Persons 1999: Some Observations and Lessons

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Abstract: The paper has three objectives. First, the author gives an introduction of the International Year of Older Persons 1999. Then he talks about the activities and celebration of the Year which are going on in different parts of the world. Finally, the author focuses on what lessons can be learnt from the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. Significance of the Year is great. Many countries are observing the Year in different ways. Seminar, symposium, conference, rally, research, walk, negotiation, and so on are going on around the world. All these activities are sure to raise awareness about the problems of the elderly, as well as to find out ways and means to meet them.

International Year of Older Persons 1999

The United Nations General Assembly designated the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons (IYOP). The theme of the Year is "towards a society for all ages". On 1st October 1998, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan says, "A society for all ages means a society that does not caricature older persons as patients and pensioners. Instead, it sees them as both agents and beneficiaries of development. It honours traditional elders in their leadership and consultative roles in communities throughout the world. A society for all ages responds to the needs and capabilities of each age group. It promotes age integration and multi-generational reciprocity¹.

Although the meaning of the theme may be very comprehensive, the concept of "a society for all ages" must pay attention to the immediate and emergency need of the

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today's elderly, particularly income security, health care and gender dimensions².

The overall objective of the Year is to promote the principles for older persons that were adopted by the UN General Assembly (resolution 46/91) on 16 December 1991. Governments worldwide have been encouraged to incorporate them into their national programmes whenever possible. The main intents of these principles are specified in the remainder of this section of the paper.³

Independence

Older persons should:

1. have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help;
2. have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income-generating opportunities;
3. be able to participate in determining when and at what pace withdrawal from the labour force takes place;
4. have access to appropriate educational and training programmes;
5. be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities;
6. be able to reside at home for as long as possible.

Participation

Older persons should:

7. remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly

affect their well-being., and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations;

8. be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities;
9. be able to form movements or associations of older persons.

Care

Older persons should:

10. benefit from daily and community care and protection in accordance with each society's system of cultural values;
11. have access to health care to help them to maintain or regain the optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being and to prevent or delay the onset of illness;
12. have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection and care;
13. be able to utilize appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment;
14. be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their lives.

Self-fulfilment

Older persons should:

15. be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential;
16. have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

Dignity

Older persons should:

17. be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse;
18. be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.

Julia T Alvarez, the Dominican Republic's Ambassador (Alternate Representative) to United Nations is the person who fought for International Day of Older Persons, being observed on October 1 and the International Year of Older Persons set for 1999⁴. At the United Nations, she is popularly known as the "Ambassador of Aging"⁵.

Aging Issues and UN

In 1947 United Nations activities on aging began. In 1982 the World Assembly on Aging (Vienna, Austria) adopts the International Plan of Action on Aging. The plan, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, sets forth 62 recommendations for action in areas such as health and nutrition, protection of elderly consumers, housing and environment, family, social welfare, income security and employment, education (as well as data collection, research

and training). In 1991 the UN General Assembly adopts the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. The 18 principles fall into five categories: Independence, Participation, Care, Self-fulfillment and Dignity. Again, in 1991, The International Day of Older Persons, 1st October, is observed for the first time. On the 8th observance of the International Day, 1st October 1998, the International Year of Older Persons was launched. In 1999 the International Year of Older Persons is being observed. In order to achieve the objective of the Year the United Nations Organization is doing everything possible. In 2001 evaluations of the Year will be made and future programmes will be chalked out⁶.

Celebration of the Year around the World

To eradicate the problems of the elderly numerous projects are being implemented in **Chile** in the private sector by many NGOs, foreign communities, Churches, religious groups, universities, etc. In 1996, the President approved a national policy for older persons. To this end, a national committee for the elderly was set up to supervise programmes and coordinate activities. The Government has submitted a bill setting up the National Services for Elderly Persons to the Congress. The Government has taken measures to distribute the United Nations Principles in favour of Senior Citizens of the country. In October 1999 the Government is going to issue a post office stamp to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons⁷.

The **Danish** Association of Senior Citizens and Dane Age Association have established a joint secretariat to coordinate, collect and disseminate information about the activities in Denmark including a leaflet on the Danish perspective and plan of action for the International Year of

Older Persons. The leaflet contains the programmes for the celebration of the Year. This includes: a forum to discuss the role of older people in different cultures and the interaction between the generations in different countries; arrangements of sports for the elderly; an internet forum for older people; radio and television programmes for the wellbeing of the elderly. A Joint Final Conference will be held in December 1999 in order to set the agenda for future policy debate about older people. The activities undertaken by the secretariat are to be supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Danish Government⁸.

To celebrate the International Year of Older Persons, the Ladies Charitable Society (LCS) of **Iran** has announced their intention to organize Iran's First International Conference on aging in October (19-21 October 1999) in Tehran. Conference themes include: social role, position and potentials of the elderly; demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the older people; internationally practiced skills and techniques of helping the elderly; medical treatment of the older people; psychological problems and their solutions; principles and methods of care-giving to the elderly and creating awareness for old age⁹.

Malaysia has made a good number of plans to celebrate the IYOP including the launch of two Commemorative Stamps. One stamp depicts a cross-section of older persons looking at the map of the world and a side profile of an older couple. The second stamp shows older persons portrayed in graphic style looking at the map of the world for a better tomorrow. Both stamps carry the slogan of International Year of Older Persons in English and in the Malaysian National Language, Bahasa Melayu, the IYOP logo, as well as the theme "Caring families for the

happiness of Older Persons". Malaysia recognizes the role of family to uplift the quality of life and the enhancement of the social well being of older persons¹⁰.

China is the biggest country in terms of older population. The Chinese Government actively encourages the aging-related NGO working for the cause of the elderly. This body took part in drafting the national law on Protection of Rights and Interests of the elderly, which came into effect on October 1, 1996 after approval by the National People's Congress. The law provides legal ground for protecting the rights and interests of the elderly and for developing aging-related undertakings and this will produce far-reaching implications for the well being of the older people. The NGOs working for the cause of elderly will develop publicity and education drives to raise awareness and creating an environment suitable for an aging society. As the largest NGO on aging in China, the China National Committee on Aging will actively assist the Chinese Government in formulating a complete and systematic set of policies and guidelines. They will work towards a family-based support system for older support-namely, the safety network in family security, community service and a social security system. The Chinese National Committee on aging thinks that the support provisions is a common duty of Government, society, family and the individuals. And this organization will conduct research that will contribute to the formation of China's aging policies and programmes¹¹.

In **Egypt**, the concerned NGOs and private personnel having interest in the welfare of the elderly made a core group which is quite active for the cause of the older people in Egyptian society. They have requested the Ministry of Social Affairs to take measures for adequate housing with

provision of home care Social Welfare Services; increase awareness of the needs of the older persons; and to introduce necessary legislation and to establish a data bank. The Egyptian Government has already introduced a few improvements to their existing programmes. For social security beneficiaries the Egyptian Government has already issued the Golden Card membership for subsidized transportation and admission to recreational facilities. Also, the Government has increase the grants to older men and women to meet the increased cost of living. Presently, the Egyptian government is considering the possible opportunities of making use of experienced older people in training workers in both public and private sectors. The concerned Ministry is encouraging the NGOs to widen the scope of their activities for the wellbeing of the older people. The Egyptian Government seems to be very much concerned about the welfare of their senior citizens and has been thinking to undertake many other programmes for them¹².

The condition of the elderly in **Kenya** is not satisfactory at all. Traditionally, the elderly in Kenyan society do not talk about their problems. However, there are many families who would like to take care of their older members and do not like to send their older grand parents to the home for the aged. It was reported that in one Kenyan village an elderly couple had lost their land ownership rights to a son. The couple can neither read nor write. The son made them thumb-sign off their right to the only source of livelihood they had. In some nomadic communities of North-east Kenya, old is no longer gold. When a woman is considered a social liability in her old age, the husband acquires a younger woman to take care of him as tradition demands. The older woman is left without any inheritance or care. However, to reverse this situation.

the NGOs, in collaboration with the Government are working tirelessly to empower women through income generating activities... but they still need the right to protection. In view of this condition, the Kenyan Government has set up a multi-sectorial committee consisting of Government officials, NGOs, UN bodies and Public Universities to look into the problem of older people. This committee has been working on the following issues: Publicity and creation of awareness; policy research and legislation; development initiatives and fund raising¹³.

The government of **Sri Lanka** has already extended its pension provision to include those who are not covered by government pensions and private pension plans. For instance, a pension scheme for farmers, fishermen, for other self-employed persons have been set up. As an agrarian country Sri Lanka has done a wonderful job in extending its pension scheme to the farmers and other self-employed people. The people and organizations concerned with the interest of the elderly are trying to foster a rebirth of traditional values of filial respect and care for older persons. They are also thinking to utilize the skill and experience of the retired people in profitable way. This will be beneficial both for the society and for the retired persons alike. The concerned people of Sri Lanka think that a retired banker could set up a counseling service for fellow retirees who do not know how to invest their pension or gratuity-money in a sensible way. Some retired people might be highly productive as teachers of conversational English, much needed in Sri-Lanka (we also need it). They think that a day care center for the really older and feeble can be managed and run by young-old care-givers. It means that the retired people who are still active can be given works and they also need to be looked after¹⁴.

The people and organizations working for the welfare of the elderly in Cameroon have two top priorities in their plan for the International Year of Older Persons. First, they are urging the government to give loans to the retired people so that they can engage in business and thus support themselves. Secondly, they are urging the government to set up special medical centres for the older people¹⁵.

Hungary has declared its National Programme for the older people in view of the International Year of older Persons. A few of the long list of programmes are: creating awareness about the problems and requirements of the elderly; introduction of the geriatrics in the curriculum of medical science; conducting research with regard to care and safety of the elderly; creating positive picture of the elderly with the help of the media; communicating the result of scientific research in aging so that they can easily be usable in everyday life; and to make a "Charter of Elderly"¹⁶.

In **India** the number of older persons (60+) in 1991 was 56 million and presently the number is 70 million. The projected number of older persons in 2025 is 177 million. This is the fastest growing section of the population today. In India, like many other countries females have the higher life expectancy. Most of them are poor and as such vulnerable section of the aged population. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) of 1989, about 45% of the aged population are suffering from chronic diseases and 5% of the elderly are immobile. Approximately 6.5% elderly live alone and 18% are willing to shift to an old home. There are 800 old age homes in India housing 30,000 elderly which is a very small percentage of the older people want to be institutionalized. Helpage India (an NGO), has a number of welfare programmes for the elderly. Some of

them are: to undertake projects which will benefit the maximum number of older persons (such as income generating programme, mobile medicare units, day care centres etc); quality cataract operations, training of NGOs; monitoring and evaluation. They have undertaken over 1500 projects at a cost of approximately US \$30 million making an impact on the lives of millions of older persons¹⁷. India has also a National Policy of their older people¹⁸.

South Africa is also celebrating the International Year of Older Persons enthusiastically. Their vision is: "equal rights for older persons" and the mission is "ensure and promote the empowerment, dignity and value of older persons". In translating these mission and vision the strategic objectives they have set are: promotion of rights of older persons; rendering of services to older persons; new legislation on the status of older persons; and development of South African ten year plan on aging¹⁹.

Japanese society is aging very fast. By 2010, 20% of its population will be 65 and over; and by 2025 one-third of Japanese population will be older (65+). Their challenge for the first quarter of the 21st century is to set into motion the programmes that help ensure the elderly spend their golden years in good health and with peace of mind. To this end the National Gold Plan was drawn up in 1993. It extended service provision systems for the care and well being of the elderly. The programme was revised in 1994 to reflect the extended needs of the elderly. The present plan is titled as : "The New Golden Plan". One of the main principles of this plan is to ensure comprehensive services covering all major needs of the older people. Additionally, the government, along with the local and regional authorities, and the private sector, has also began to introduce pre and post

retirement education as well as vocational training and guidance counseling for their older citizens. At the community level, qualified people have been recruited to form a speaking bureau for the elderly, which will include physicians, nurses, nutritionists, firemen, police officers and others, to provide needed knowledge on topics of interest to an older population (like health, nutrition, physical exercise programme, personal safety and security). The Japanese elderly are not always in need of welfare-care and support. According to a recent survey made in Tokyo, 80% of those between 65 and 70 years of age, and 70% of those over 75 are still physically and mentally fit. They are cooperating with the younger generation to create a harmonious, friendly and welfare-oriented society. However, it is still necessary to prepare a structure that provides the needy or frail with easy access to information, consultation, both physical and emotional support²⁰. Although modernization is a challenge and often seems to be a threat to the elderly, the Japanese elderly are well-integrated into their families, and that serves their purpose better²¹. Japan gives much emphasis on mutual support and assistance for the welfare of their older people.

Portugal has an integrated support programme for the elderly since 1994. Very recently the Ministries of Health and Social Solidarity reconfirmed the objectives of the programme. The programme includes a number of projects. They are: home help service; human resources training; support centres for dependent persons; telephone alarm service; cards/tickets for transportation for elderly persons and medical treatment for the seniors. Portugal is trying to implement these projects²².

In **Pakistan**, the Year began with a celebration held in Karachi on 1st October (1998). The Pakistan Senior Citizens

Association in collaboration with the Rotary Clubs in Karachi organized the celebration. The President of the Association welcomed the guests and read special messages from several of the dignitaries. It was followed by a seminar on "Empowerment of Senior Citizens" in Pakistan, highlighting the work done in different countries relating to this topic. It appears that the country is working to improve the lifestyle of her older people²³.

In celebrating the International Year of Older Persons the **US Government** and many non-government organizations have undertaken diversified programmes. Some of the areas they are covering are long-term care of the elderly and disabilities, economic security, health care promotion and disease prevention. Numerous media are working to increase the awareness about the impact of aging on their society and to address the key issues associated with an aging society. Honour the Past, Imaging the future is the official theme of the White House Millennium Council, created in August 1997 by President and Mrs. Clinton. It reflects the collective efforts to pay tribute to millions of older Americans who have built the nation through their ingenuity, hard work and sacrifice. Imaging the future recognizes the need to prepare the United States for the gift of longevity, and to "enhance life for future generations"²⁴

How are we observing the International Year of Older Persons in **Bangladesh**? And how can we celebrate the Year?

It is very difficult to say how many non-government organizations are working for the cause and interest of the elderly in our society. **Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine** is the first and the oldest and largest of all. Since its inception in 1960 this

Association has been working for the well being of the elderly. It has a wide range of activities including health care, recreation, rehabilitation, and organization of seminar, workshop, training, research and publication.

The association tries to negotiate with the Government to materialize its recommendations submitted to the Government in different occasions. Very recently, the Association has completed the construction of "probin nibash" (Old home) where at least 52 elderly people can be accommodated. This is probably for the well-to-do people. It also observes the International Day of Older Persons regularly (1st October). To celebrate the International Year of Older Persons, the Association arranged and organized seminars, workshops, and discussion meeting throughout the country. This association has also submitted a proposal for the National Policy for the elderly people of Bangladesh. It is planning to do something more in the Year²⁵.

Bangladesh Retired Government Employees Welfare Association has been working since 1976 as a registered organization. It provides medical services to the elderly people. It has some financial support (grant) programmes such as, medical grant, education grant and lump grant. This association also provides interest-free loan to the elderly. This Association has been negotiating with the Government to increase the amount of pension, gratuity and for the introduction of recreational and festival allowances. It has a plan to observe the Year some time in October 1999²⁶.

Very recently, Resource Integration Centre (RIC), Bangladesh Girl Guides Association, Bangladesh Education Board Retired Employees Welfare Association, Mother and Baby Home, Old Home (briddha nibash) and

Bangladesh Society of Gerontology are also working for the cause of the elderly. To celebrate International Year of Older Persons the Bangladesh Society of Gerontology is trying to organize a seminar-cum-workshop in late September and on 1st October '99²⁷.

Boyosko Punorbashon Kendro is a rehabilitation center for the elderly, a generous gift of an individual. Mr. Abdul Zaheed Mukul set up this center in 1987. At present, it is situated in the district of Gazipur. It is more or less a full-fledged old home where elderly people (60+) from any religious faith can live. This is probably the first of its kind. Here, the elderly people can get shelter, medical treatment, and different sources of recreation. This center observes the International Day of Older Persons (1st October)²⁸.

Government Programme

The retired Government employees of all ranks enjoy pensions, gratuity and other benefits. According to our Constitution the needy elderly people has a right to social security. This is one of the fundamental principles of our state policy (see article 15 d). The first financial allocation (50 lac taka) for the wellbeing of the elderly appears in the fourth five-year plan (1990-95) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social welfare. After the Vienna Conference in 1982, National Committee on Aging was formed at the Government level. The committee played some role in allocating some financial assistance to the Bangladesh Association for the Aged. When the United Nations declared the International Day of Older Persons the Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh became more concerned with aging and society. Recently, in mid-1998, the present government of Bangladesh has introduced *boisko bhata* (Elderly allowance). Under this

scheme, 10 elderly persons (at least 5 will be women) in each Ward are getting taka one hundred per month. Although this is a meagre amount and the number of recipient are very few, yet this is a very good start and a pioneering effort by the Government. It has been highly appreciated by people of all corners. The Government is also planning to extend its financial support to the distressed elderly women. The Government has decided to build up *biosko nibash* (old homes) in six divisional towns of the country. Government's response to the Year is quite positive. Government has been supporting the Bangladesh Association for the aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine in terms of financial grant and encouragement²⁹.

Aging Issues in Academic Institutions

At least two of our universities (Dhaka, Rajshahi) and one institute (Institute of Social Welfare and Research of Dhaka University) have been offering courses on aging issues (social gerontology, geriatric welfare). Concerned teachers and students are conducting research on the problem. Hopefully, other universities will introduce such courses. Government may like to encourage Text book authorities and other concerned bodies to introduce gerontology and geriatric welfare in schools and colleges.

Concerns and Lessons

We have already talked about the activities going on the different parts of the world; and we have many lessons to learn from them. Therefore, it does not require repeating the lessons we have come across. However, I would like to add a few words more that may deserve one's attention.

According to Ambassador Alvarez the world is experiencing an "age-quake". Every month, one million

people turn 60. By the year 2001, one of every 10 persons will be over 60. By 2030, several industrialized countries will have one third of their population over 60. By 2150, the world as a whole will have a third of its population over 60. However, the fastest growth will be in developing countries³⁰. More than half the world's older population live in developing countries. Asia is expected to be the home of about 58 percent of the global total of older people by the year 2025³¹.

At the moment, growing older cannot be stopped but it can be delayed. Anti-aging elements have been identified that may increase the life span. Vitamin E for example is an anti-aging element. For, it works as an antioxidant and reduces the damage caused by free radicals³². There are also attempts to stop the process of becoming older and all these may eventually increase life expectancy beyond one hundred years.

Around 6 percent of our population are now elderly (60+). And in 2025 this figure will be about 11 percent. Interestingly enough a significant proportion of 60+ population will have almost usual work efficiency. How will we ignore their efficiency? What will they do after retirement? To some people retirement may be a comfort, but to many others, it is a psychological death sentence³³. We do understand the problem of unemployment. They must be employed. At the same time, we need to give the active elderly people their right to earn for themselves and to give them chance to contribute to the national economy. That is why, the United Nations Organization has kept this provision in its principles (principle No 2 "Older persons should have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income - generating opportunities". Therefore, we need either to rethink about retirement age or we must

ensure that the active part of the elderly population can work and earn.

Joint family is said to be the best place where the elderly get much comfort. But, it is breaking down. Some of the causes are Industrialization, Urbanization, Individualism, Poverty and Changing perception of life in view of growing competition and complexities of life. Can we restore our traditional joint family? Some say, yes. We can restore it by poverty alleviation. This is probably partially true. Others say, not possible. Even rich joint family is also breaking down. There are people who do not support joint family. Because, here, in joint family, one or two members work and others remain idle; therefore, it retards development. Misunderstanding and psychological war among the members prevail in the joint family.

Nowadays, the size of family is becoming smaller. There is a trend among the young educated couple to have only one baby. If this trend continues for some time then there will be one baby, two parents, and four grandparents in an emerging modern version of extended family which is now often called the inverse family pyramid. If this is the case then to what extent will it be possible for a couple to take care of all the members of their family? Therefore, while we shall be trying for the continuity of our traditional joint family we should also look for alternative means and ways.

We should leave no stone unturned to keep our elderly integrated in our family set up and to take care of them in the family level. In some cases, however, we may need to think of community care at the local level. Institutional care for some may also be necessary particularly for the poor, destitute and for those who need it for some reason or prefer it in place of their own family!

The physical and mental **health** of most of our elderly people is not at all satisfactory. The elderly are often found to suffer from some common diseases such as rheumatism, diabetes, hypertension, cardio-vascular diseases, cancer etc. They also suffer from some psychic problems such as dementia, paranoia, Alzheimer's disease etc. But we have no specialized Geriatric clinic and hospitals in our country yet. I am not sure whether we have highly qualified geriatricians in the country. Geriatrics as a discipline immediately requires to be included in the curriculum of our medical science. Meanwhile, we need to create awareness among the elderly about their natural psycho-neuro-physiological changes and probable health hazard³⁴.

Negative attitude towards our elderly is not unknown. Indeed most societies have mixed feelings about the aged-love, disgust, respect and fear. Older people are found to be teased or mocked in private life, but usually treated well in public place. They are honoured in theory but neglected in practice³⁵. Proper motivation and the role of media may be quite useful in tackling this problem.

The significance of the IYOP is great. Many countries are celebrating the year in different ways. Seminars, symposium, conference, rally, research, debate, walk, negotiation etc are going on. All these activities are sure to : raise awareness about the aging issues; to build up coalitions among the people and organizations working for the cause of elderly and to mobilize the resources and political will and commitment³⁶.

Women comprise the majority of older persons in all but a few countries. Therefore, they are more likely than men to be poor in old age, and more likely to face discrimination. Moreover, their contribution as caregivers are often overlooked and underpaid, if paid at all! Majority

of older persons lives in developing countries. It means developing nations will need international help and cooperation. For an active aging and an active old age much more investment will be necessary in childhood, youth and mid-life³⁷.

Julia Alvarez says that older people must be allowed and encouraged to see themselves as actors in the drama of their own lives and in the functioning of society -not just as people who are passive and needy. We must be aware that ability not age is the measure of how people can contribute to the society. Ambassador Alvarez feels that aging is not a tragedy, and that Older Persons must be looked at as a resource, not just as a burden. On intergenerational matter she reminds us that "We are all interdependent; we need to rebuild the solidarity with other generations. That is crucial"³⁸. In her message for the YEAR Ambassador Alvarez says that she fought for it (IYOP) but she does not want older people trapped, cornered and contained within the boundaries of the YEAR. She says that getting the Year proclaimed was quite a feat, but it would be terrible if it became a fetish, overshadowing all the work we must do after it ends. The year 1999 is merely symbolic, to make the people aware so that we may continue working for the elderly in the year 2000 and beyond. She says that the task is not to put older people on the calendar, but rather to put them on the map. Very recently the United Nation's Ambassador of Aging has given a proposal saying that the "Elders should become the world's peace-makers". She argues that the older people have the wealth of experience to know when to stop, think and reconsider. She says that their experience and vision can be the impetus to create the structure of peace³⁹. The proposal offered by the Ambassador of Aging" deserves our attention in view of all

sorts of conflicts going on here and there in the world, at the family, social and national level.

Significant proportions of the elderly people are quite capable of doing work. The system of retirement makes them pensioners or retirees; make them dependent or people without work. They can profitably be recruited in many jobs and thus they can still contribute to society.

Some people talk about "problems of aging". We should get out of this business of problems of aging⁴⁰. All people want to live long. In deed longevity is an achievement. The term "aging" is going to be gradually replaced by longevity. All we want is an active old age and healthy aging.

The young and middle-aged people usually exercise political power. They are the decision makers. They plan for children and young but seldom for themselves! They might know that their young are also going to be older. But they are not planning for the future version of their young or of themselves. Are they imprudent or too much philanthropic? Therefore, we may suggest that the people in power should make a holistic plan, a plan towards a **society for all ages** as the theme of the International Year of Older Persons demands.

The number of elderly is increasing everywhere in the world. It means that the number of elderly voters is also increasing. The elderly person has emerged as a sub-culture and therefore, they are now emerging as a very important political force or pressure group in USA. Indeed USA has long history of **Senior Movement** for the cause and interest of the older people⁴¹. Similar trend is not unknown elsewhere. Therefore, we may suggest that we need a political commitment, a mission and vision for the

wellbeing of our senior citizens and for a healthy and active aging for all.

How to celebrate International Year of Older Persons?

There are many ways indeed. We may like to hold a seminar; write an article for a news paper; hold a discussion session in the media say in television or in radio; arrange an essay competition on the role of elderly or our duties towards senior citizens - so on and so forth.

We may have a recreational event for older people --- like a picnic or a tea party hold a competition for older people --- a quiz, story telling etc.; hold a sports day for our village or community - with teams of older people - have fun races - a football or volleyball match-walking - or bicycle race; encourage our community or village to hold a "Senior of the Year" award; give a gift to him or her; arrange an essay competition - poster design-painting in school and college; encourage teachers to discuss aging issues with students and to invite older people to visit schools to talk to children about their **lives, experience and local history**; have a poster campaign-put posters in libraries, health centers, hospitals and schools-and create positive image for the aged and tell our duties towards them; print and distribute (or sell) calendars which show the slogans and proverbs about aging, statement made by older people about their lives; Print the message or theme of the IYOP 1999 including the name and address of our organization ; hold a public meeting for older people. Let them talk about their own problem. Let them suggest solutions to their problems; hang banners in the streets; approach places of prayer or worship such as mosque, temple etc. and tell them to discuss concerned religious instructions about the respect and care for elderly; if you

are a big national organization, organize a conference to discuss the implications of aging in our society and encourage politicians, social workers, members of NGOs and Government agencies and policy-makers to attend; send out a news release to the media - News Papers - Radio - TV etc. about your activities relating to the aging people; write articles for news paper; approach the media to arrange discussion session about the aging issues and the International Year of Older Persons, 1999; approach the media to arrange discussion session about the aging issues and the International Year of Older Persons, 1999; hold a seminar for physical and mental health professionals and ask them to talk about the common diseases the elderly suffer from and how to cope with them. Ask them to talk about **healthy aging** and the care of the older people at family and national level; print advice leaflets or tips on health of the elderly and publish them in the local dailies, or circulate them in the village markets and fairs or in any public gathering; arrange exhibition of the products of older people: such as nakshi kantha, bamboo or cane-made domestic items and give awards to them. This will help create good image of our elderly; make a video show on how our elderly at the age of 60 or even at 70 are working in agriculture, contributing to their family and our national economy. This will help us understand their importance in our society and our duty towards them when they become too weak to work. Most of the ideas are borrowed from Help Age International: UK (Ageways 49).

Some Ways to Help Older People

We can give up a seat to an older person on a crowded bus or train. While waiting to see a doctor or waiting for a bus or train, we can give priority to an older person in the queue or line.

Families can invite an older person to celebration like weddings, or cook a little bit more food, once a week, or once a month and invite an older person to share meals with them. Can we not help older people to repair their clothes? We can help an older person carrying his or her bag or luggage, or water. A community can easily repair an ordinary house, or even build a new house for an older person. Can we not help a retired person in getting his or her pension in time? Nurses and medical personnel can easily give assistance and priority to older people in clinics or hospitals. Children and young people can visit older people and spend time with them, give patient hearing or help them with small tasks. Parents and teachers can encourage the young to do so. Can we not give a lift to an old person while there is space in our car? We can help the elderly crossing the road. An older person may not be able to go to some place alone; in that case, we can escort him or her to or from the place; we can prefer an older person or middle-aged rickshaw - puller or a car-driver. Research says that an young driver will give you more speed but he may be more accident-prone, because he is often too fast in driving. An older driver may be a bit slow but he is less accident-prone. Whom would you choose? Choice is yours; (Some of the ideas borrowed from Help Age International; UK.)

Finally, it is to be said that the elderly has mainly three-fold problems: problems related to health (both physical and mental); problems related to economic security; and psycho-social problems. The first two categories of problems need to be solved by the direct intervention of the state. Indeed, the developed nations and welfare states are trying to ensure the solution of these problems. If these problems are addressed adequately, the third one will need less attention. Family and community

care may effectively deal with the third one. It will be then easier to integrate our elderly in family and society. If these are done life of the elderly will be more comfortable, meaningful and enjoyable. The celebration of the Year is just symbolic. We should continue to work for **a society for all ages** in general and for the welfare of the elderly in particular¹².

Notes

1. Information collected from a leaflet published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. Printed by the UN Reproduction Section, NY-DPI/1964/D-January 1999-20M. It may be mentioned that some of the data of this article also appear in one of my earlier papers.
2. *Ibid.*, UN Reproduction Section NY-DPI/1964/E January 1999 20M.
3. Information collected from a leaflet published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. NY: DPI/126/Age-August 1992-6M.
4. See *Aging Today* (a bimonthly newspaper of the American Society on Aging), vol. XIX, No 6, Nov-Dec 1998.
5. *Ibid.*, also see *Coalition '99*. AARP. Oct-Nov 1998, No 10.
6. See *Coalition '99*. AARP. March-April, 1999, p.8.
7. See The NGO Committee on Aging at the United Nations. NGO Global VideoConference at the United Nations: A Celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, 11 February 1999, p.13. I relied heavily on this precious source and therefore express my deep sense of gratitude to the concerned authors, personalities and reporters.
8. See *Coalition '99*. AARP. July-August 1999, No 11, p.8.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

10. *Ibid.*, p.19.
11. See The NGO Committee on Aging, p. 15-16.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 16-18.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 35-36.
18. See *Coalition '99*, AARP, March-April 1999, No 11. p. 8.
19. See NGO Committee on Aging, p. 40.
20. *Ibid.* pp. 36-37.
21. See Russell A Ward, *The Aging Experience*, New York: Harper and Row Pub, 1984, pp. 59-60.
22. See NGO Committee on Aging, p. 39.
23. See *Coalition '99*, AARP, March-April 1999, No 11, p.10.
24. *Ibid.*, p.11.
25. Based on information collected through personal contact with the concerned office.
26. Based on information collected through personal contact with the concerned office.
27. *Sharonika*, World Health Day, 1999. This edition is the joint venture by Bangladesh Girl Guide's Association, Bangladesh Education Board Retired Employees Welfare Association, Help-age International, Mother and Baby Home, Bridha Nibash, and Bangladesh Society of Gerontology. Information was also

collected from Choudhury Anwar Hossain associated with the Society of Gerontology.

28. *Bopuk Bichitra*, 1st October 1993. This was published by Boishko Punorbason Kendro, Azampur, Dhaka. Information was also collected over telephone talk.
1. See *Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, Part II: Fundamental Principles of State Policy, Article 15(d). p. 11 (as modified up to 10th Oct. 1991). Also see ASM Atiqur Rahman and Md. Hasan Reja, , "Probinder Kallanay Bangladesher Udjog: Akti Parjalochana", in *Dhaka University Patrika* (Bangla), October 1996 June 1997. See also *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics*, October 1998.
30. Data were collected from a leaflet, published by the UN Department of Public Information; and *Coalition '99*, March-April 1999.
31. Mouchiroud, A.P, Representative of UNFPA, Bangladesh, in his message to the celebration of the International Day of Older Persons, published in *Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics*, October 1998.
32. See David Decker, *Social Gerontology*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co. 1980. p. 51.
1. See G. M. Barrow and P.A. Smith, *Aging, Ageism and Society*, NY: West Pub. Co. (979), p.162.
34. See M. Ibrahim et al. *Health of the Elderly: A Survey on Health and Socio-Economic Problems of the Aged in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Assoc. For the Aged and Geriatric Medicine, 1998.
35. See Russell A Ward, 1984.
36. See NGO Committee on Aging: Voice from Kofi Annan, The Secretary General of the United Nations.
37. *Ibid.*
38. See *Coalition '99*, AARP, October 1998.

39. See *Aging Today*. Nov-Dec. 1998.
40. See NGO Committee on Aging. Report by Mr. Nitin Desai.
41. See Russell A Ward. 1984.
42. See Dr. Md. Humayun Kabir, *Local Level Policy Development to Deal with the Consequences of Population Aging in Bangladesh*. Asian Studies Series No 131- A. United Nations: NY. 1994; ASM Atiqur Rahman, *Dinkal*, 1st October 1998; MA Wahed, "Bangladesh Probin Hitaishi Shangha O Jora Bijnan Protishthaner Karma Tatparata Abong Er Bhabishat", in *Probin Shasio O Kallayan*. A Bangla Journal of the Bangladesh Assoc. for the Aged for suggestions and recommendations as to what our Government and concerned bodies should do. It should be mentioned that Professor Kabir is one of the pioneering figures in the field of population aging in Bangladesh. Mr. A.S.M. Atiqur Rahman has been writing on Aging Issues for a long time in Dhaka University Studies, Bangladesh Journal of Geriatrics and in local dailies.