

Cited in The News, Pakistan's largest English Daily published by the largest news organization of Pakistan, The Jang Group.

http://www.thenews.com.pk/arc_news.asp?id=8

The silent bomb

Monday, December 08, 2008

A recently-released report by the Islamabad based **Centre for Research and Security Studies** (CRSS, quoted below) has linked the uncontrolled growth of the population to a decline in the quality of internal security both now and in the short-to-medium term future. This is the explosion that nobody heard and it is going to cause havoc, chaos and casualties for generations to come. We were a nation of just 34 million people in 1951 – when we still had East Pakistan – but by 2000 there were 144 million of us, an additional 110 million people in just four decades. The birth-rate (currently 2.1 per cent) has dropped a little in recent years but even allowing for the most optimistic projection there will be 224-6 million by 2020 and a crippling 333 million by 2025. This is a mere twelve and seventeen years hence respectively, a tiny period of time when one considers how any government of this poor and mostly illiterate nation is going to feed and house a population whose needs already exceed available resources. Seventy per cent of the current population is living just over, just on or just under, the poverty line; making less than \$2 per day and 49 per cent of the population lives in absolute poverty.

An ongoing population explosion lasting for the entire history of the nation is going to inevitably lead to chronic socio-economic problems, political instability brought on by successive governmental failures to address the needs of the mega-population and civil unrest fuelled by famine and/or persistent food insecurity for most of the population both urban and rural. Already 31 per cent of all children suffer from malnutrition, and our infant mortality rate at 78 per 1000 is worse than some of the worst of the failing African states. A paltry 4.38 per cent of Pakistanis are university graduates and a miniscule 1.58 per cent has a Masters degree. A mere 17.29 per cent struggles through ten years of desperately poor quality education to reach matriculation, dwindling to 6.25 per cent who go the last mile and achieve 'Intermediate' after twelve years. Unemployment as of the end of Sept 2008 is 25 per cent and can only increase as the power crisis continues throwing people out of work and into penury. Poor or non-existent planning and an institutional lack of ability to think further forward than the next junket suggest that this situation is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future; and Pakistan's love-affair with all things military is going to have to end with a shift of budgetary focus from defence to one that is health and education-oriented. Fail to do this and at the end – which may be closer than we like to think it is – we will be left with nothing but a puzzled army guarding an empire of skeletons.