

Pakistan Focused. Independent Questions. Independent Answers.



Focusing Pakistan on the issues of:

- Democratic Governance
- Security and Terrorism
- Environmental Issues

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Population Growth is a Security Issue for Pakistan

Population Affecting Healthy Living: Pakistan was a country of 34 million people in 1951, including the then East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. By 2000, the population had risen to 144 million. Pakistan added 110 million Pakistanis in just four decades, and despite the recent decline in the rate of population growth from 3.2 percent to 2.1 percent, Pakistan is expected to have a population size of 224 – 226 million by 2020 and by 2025, population is estimated at a staggering 333 million. From 1981 to 1998, the rate of population growth was 2.69 percent criss-crossing all the way to 3.2 percent in 2002. At present, there are confirmed estimates that 70 percent of the Pakistani population is living either under, on or just above the poverty line and make two or less dollars a day. Forth-nine percent of the population is living absolutely below the poverty line. According to a Population Welfare study, “the impact of population growth on poverty is obvious, since poorer families, especially women and marginalized groups bear the burden of a large number of children with much fewer resources further adding to the spiral of poverty and deterioration in the status of women.” The same study established that the contraceptive prevalence is 30 percent which is nearly 120 percent lesser than the required standard to help reduce Pakistan’s population growth to an “acceptable level” of 1.2 percent. Because of repeated population explosions, Pakistan is faced with serious a socio-economic and a political crises.

Take the housing sector, as an example. Pakistan has nearly 7 persons per housing unit as opposed to 3.5 persons per housing unit in the developed world. At an average, 3.13 persons share a single room per housing unit. Pakistan also has one of the highest “single room accommodation” average in the world with 38.11 percent followed by two rooms housing units at 30.54 percent. Housing units that have five or more rooms are less than 7 percent. Nearly 46 percent of the total housing is informal or “kucha” (mud) housing with cement and brick housing ratio at 54.64 percent. Around 32 percent of all families in Pakistan have ten or more people living in one unit. Nearly 51 percent of the total housing units do not have built-in toilets.

Literacy-Population Connection: In spite of the recent media boom in Pakistan, total access to TV is 35.32 percent followed by radio at 23.94 percent and newspapers at 21.20 percent. No wonder a whole host of government initiatives to control population growth have failed to achieve much. With an established rate of literacy at 43.92 percent, government finds it extremely hard to evolve and develop campaigns and mechanisms to convey the critical nature of the problem that population growth is. These campaigns then also are faced with fierce resistance from a

dominant part of religious circles who not only oppose population control but also claim that any contraceptive practice is against the will of God. Their stance is not helping Pakistan evolve into a vibrant social-welfare democratic state that it was originally set out to be.

State of Affairs: Even with a population of nearly 170 million in 2008, the State is finding it very hard to provide its citizens with a healthy living environment and other basic amenities of life. Shortage of electricity, water and wheat flour has become serious challenges and things are bound to deteriorate further particularly if and when population reaches 333 million in 2025. In a recent study of World Population Council, it was found that China’s one-child policy had prevented the births of nearly 400 million children over the past three decades. The prevention of birth of every child saved the state 1,200 dollars annually and helped create a balance between resources and consumption. In Pakistan, unemployment continues to be rampant; 25 percent as of Sept 30, 2008. Then there’s the power crisis, gas, water shortages, increased diseases, lack of medical facilities, security, terrorism and law and order crisis. Our policy makers must seriously ponder about the implications of an unplanned population growth. Right now, Pakistan has 872 government hospitals and 9,892 basic health units and they are all heavily burdened, unable to cope with the current population.

Our future is our children but 31 percent of our children under the age of 5 are suffering from severe malnutrition. Mortality rate per 1,000 is 78 (worse than some of the poorest African countries). Imagine; a mere 4.38 percent Pakistanis are university graduates with a paltry 1.58 percent holding a master’s degree. The technical corps among the educated is 0.41 percent. Only 17.29 percent of the school-going population qualifies the “matriculation” (10 years of education) examination and this figure further shrinks to just 6.56 percent qualifying as “intermediates” (12 years of education).

Education or Arsenal: Pakistan’s future is nothing short of a Himalayan challenge. The government and the state machinery can only overcome these challenges by turning the country into a progressive and a forward looking state and that would only be possible if we begin investing in education and health. The State needs to re-define its priorities from a defense focus to a welfare orientation.

PS: According to estimates, nearly 5.5 billion people in the world live in underdeveloped nations while the developed nations’ population is 1.5 billion. India, with

an expected population base of 1.7 billion by 2050, will be the largest country on the face of the planet.