**Existential threats: Stop and redressal (I)**

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Something is generally considered as an existential threat, when it is massive in scale such as climate change or nuclear surface. An existential threat can be a threat to something that is not actually alive, such as a business, a technology, or even a country. Joe Biden, the President-elect of USA called President Donald Trump as an existential threat for America, due mainly to Trump’s economic and social policies.

Our elected and imported leaders, though claim to work selflessly for the welfare of the people and progress of the country but neither take any responsibility for their actions or lack of them and have never been held responsible for the faulty policies made, sometime with ulterior motives, which have brought the country on the brink of unsustainability where the decision makers unfairly burdened the paying ability of our future generations. The politicians and bureaucracy jointly made decision, in the past, especially in the 90s and thereafter which unfairly compromised the ability of the people who are now in their 20s and are now facing the snowballing of the patently faulty decisions.

The existential threats, most of them are of our own making, which have snowballed into gigantic proportions and give an opportunity of exploitation by local oligarchies and foreign powers are broadly;

1) Agriculture, 2) Population, 3) Water, 4) Corruption, 5) Fiscal Profligacy; I shall discuss briefly the above main points and then suggest ways and means to halt such threats and then reverse the threats in a peaceful manner.

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Not only the productivity of the crops in the last 20 years is almost stagnant but the inter-changing of crops has played havoc with the only crop which has export potential with value addition of upto 400%. And that is cotton which was 15 Mill bales in 2013-14 but is reduced to 7 Mill bales in 2020 due to the fact that sugar became the darling of all rulers who developed this crop, even bypassing the laws of the land, at the cost of other crops and to the utter disadvantage of the local population who are constrained to buy sugar at a price double than the international price. The value addition for export of sugar is MINUS; i.e. people of Pakistan have to pay to the sugar millers, in the form of subsidy, to export the extra production while at home, the sugar companies now sell @ Rs. 100 Kg against Rs. 42 available in the International market.

The total cultivated area remains the same which was 22 years ago, to cater to 132 Mill people while in the same area now grow crops for 224 Mill people in 2020. Population has grown by 62% while the wheat crop has grown by 33%. That explains the high prices of all eatables.

The variety of certified seeds is the basic problem for the cotton and wheat crop. In the past, various varieties were developed which could withstand the vagaries of weather. Slowly, in tandem with degradation in all other sectors, the Government’s deptt tasked with development of seeds which had a workforce of 100 scientist/agriculture specialists, is now reduced to just 40. That shows the importance of this sector by our Ministers of Agriculture who have always been themselves agriculturist.

The Pakistan population in 1998 was 132 Mill, increased to 224 Million with a (CAGR) rate of 2.43% which was 2.40% from 1981-1988. Politicians during their fiery speeches, in and out of parliament, never talk of the serious issues like overpopulation, which is likely to adversely affect the economy and security of the Country. The fact that its onset is so surreptitious and subtle that it cannot be politicized or exploited to discredit/embarrass the government of the day; Secondly they cannot discern the disastrous consequences of overpopulation, being majority of them, from affluent class (or who later join the club) which do not generally effect their lifestyle.

The VISION 2025, a brainchild of our venerable Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Then Minister of Planning &amp; Development, talked about restricting the population growth to 227 Mill by 2025 and stressed on “need for lowering the growth rate of population is more urgent than ever”. Not a single step was included in Vision 2025 to achieve his rhetoric towards this end.

The effects of overpopulation are harsh and distressing. Rapidly growing population creates economic and social problems such as food, housing, education, transport, power, etc. The existing infrastructure cannot provide basic needs for current population of around 224 million people, how can it provide to 460 Mill populations in another 30 years. With more people, you need more industries to produce more goods and its transportation to satisfy their needs, resulting in increased use of fossil fuel like coal, oil, gas, wood which pollutes air, water and soil.

People who were born in 2000 (which are around 3.5 Million) will be looking for jobs now in year 2020? But with minus GDP growth after adjusting with true inflation, there are hardly any new jobs. Promoting mega constructions projects which sink the national wealth into a bottomless pit after generating some employment for one year and no value addition thereafter. The low cost housing which was an excellent idea is now relegated to a back burner. At this CAGR, Pakistan’s population shall be 264 Mill in 2027 i.e. we would have doubled our population in 29 years, and will be around 460 Mill till 2050 (403 Million, as per UN report) if no drastic population reduction measures are taken. How you will feed them, house them, transport them and keep them employed is not even being considered. There are lot of talk in the town surmising that the current policy makers and their next generation is not likely to be in Pakistan to witness the horrendous times in another 25 years, or may be earlier.

**(To be continued)**

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