**The exploding population**

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Fleeting moments

By Iftekhar A Khan

Iranian authorities recently deported 140 illegal Pakistani migrants. The picture of the hapless migrants squatting on their haunches has appeared in news reports; their dishevelled state evoked deep sympathy for their plight.

The reports also mention that the migrants were aiming to cross Iran in order to reach Europe, but why they chose to leave their homes and seek employment on another continent remains a serious question to answer. The problem is that there are too many of us relative to the jobs that Pakistan has to offer.

July 11, which is World Population Day, draws little attention from the media; some articles appear but there’s hardly any response from the government in power. Those occupying the seat of power, seemingly, have no time to think about our exploding population. Future planning for the nation is not part of their agenda. As a result, villages and cities in the country are haphazardly expanding in all directions, a consequence of the state neglecting population control. Overpopulation badly affects all facets of national life.

The very poor account for a disproportionate share of the population growth in Pakistan. This increases the share of people living in poverty and also fuels greater inequality as the children born to these families are often unable to acquire the skills needed to compete for better-paying jobs. Thus, prosperity in Pakistan is like an island for those born into an educated and reasonably affluent background, amidst a sea of poverty that keeps on rising.

Talking about family planning is not considered part of the culture and is frowned upon. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that there are about 3.8 million unplanned pregnancies in Pakistan per year, mostly due to lack of information and modern contraception. If the population continues to expand at the present rate, it could exceed 300 million by as soon as 2050. When our health and education systems are already in a poor state, can they afford to shoulder such a rapid increase in demand?

The exploding population is the main cause of our civic problems. The government hospitals and other public institutions cannot meet the needs of the public because the needy have multiplied over the years while the civic amenities have not kept apace. Moreover, overpopulation causes unemployment, which results in a higher crime rate.

A friend who has been running a recruiting agency for many years, said, “We have permanent clients in Saudi Arabia who import labour from Pakistan. Often people come to us begging to go abroad to earn their living. They are so desperate to get jobs outside the country that they even offer to bathe camels in the foreign land if given a chance to sustain themselves and send money back home to the families.”

Most of the Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are employed to do menial jobs. Many are from underdeveloped areas and started going to Saudi Arabia in the 70s. They managed to arrange jobs for their family members.

It is time to learn how the advanced nations manage their population and provide their people with all the necessary amenities of life. New Zealand is an ideal example. Its population has remained at around five million for the last six years while we add 5.28 million to our population every year. New Zealand is able to provide universal health coverage to its people, including the elderly. Will we, on the other hand, remain a semi-literate and poor country?

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