**World population day**

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The world celebrated a Population Day on July 11 to enlighten the immense need to limit human population so that the conditions of the earth’s environment and resources improve. The day was first observed in 1990 by more than 90 countries. The world population soared by a billion in merely thirteen years from four billion in 1974. It jumped to seven billion in 2011, and is projected to reach eight billion by the end of this year. Food scarcity, housing, health, hygiene, social and economic facilities are becoming a lot more challenging, particularly in developing countries.

Another graver aspect of this population explosion is disprop\ortionate effects. Countries like Pakistan have it tougher due to high populations whereas Japan and Italy have a declining birth rate. Pakistan’s has experienced a quite rapid rise as its population has exploded almost seven times from 33 million in 1950, making it the fifth most populous country of the world, trailing behind China, India, USA and Indonesia. Its present population exceeds economic and industrial giants like Japan, Russia, South Korea.

Pakistan, primarily being an agricultural country and net exporter of produce like wheat and cotton, is now forced to import even its basic food commodities like wheat, pulses and oils. Last year, it imported wheat worth over a billion dollar and became its 13th largest importer in the world. It suffers from serious food insecurities affecting about 37% of its population and is ranked as 92in the Global Hunger Index comparing 116 countries. The lack of health, hygiene, housing and sanitation facilities have similarly become yet another challenge. Its Human Development Index (HDI) demonstrates the standard of living conditions like income, education, food, health, life span of the population of a country is lower than 153 countries of the world. The ranking, in access and provision of health care facilities, interestingly is also the same.

Overpopulation also hampers the care, education and grooming of children and the youth which is a critical prerequisite for creating competitive human resource capital that is capable. Almost one out of five children do not go to school and the illiterate and unskilled labour mostly moves to larger cities worsening the urban environment. Many big cities and towns have ghettoes with dismal living conditions. Karachi, the largest city, has about 500 such settlements sequestered in and around it followed by about 300 in Lahore and over 50 in Islamabad. Karachi is also the only mega city of its size in the world that lacks a public mass transport networks or an efficient drainage system.

Even some coastal areas have also been reclaimed for housing sectors. The growing pressure on land for housing and cultivations has created many critical environmental problems like deforestation, erosion and desertification, leading to quite serious climatic swings. Its deforestation rate at 5.77%, is the second largest in Asia and abysmally below the minimum 25% land under forests stipulations. It is the fifth most vulnerable country to weather, climate and environmental vagaries. Many areas are being quite mercilessly buffeted with stormy rains and subsequent floods. The glaciers melting in its mountains have created about three thousand lakes and 33 of them are feared to cause quite feral floods affecting several million inhabitants around them.

Such mounting dangers and devastation evidently make it imperative to understand and rationalise the factors to regulate the excessive population. Improvements in health, diagnostic, treatment and life-saving facilities that reduce mortality rates are more advanced, accessible and they have enabled family planning. Some factors like polygamy and early marriages need proper education and social awakening. A larger percentage of the younger population, higher fertility rates and a preference for boys often leads to higher birth rates and larger families. Some religious circles are also quite antagonistic to planned families that have become an imperative reality of the circumstances. A lack of female education and their empowerment also undermines the trend for planned families.

World Population Day emphasises health and the rights of the women and girl children. The government, media and the social organisations thus have to make a more concerted effort to create a realisation for planned families and ensure better means and facilities for this purpose.

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