**Why are people leaving Pakistan?**

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 “It’s not just the younger lot – people of all ages turn up to my office daily. They are so tired and frustrated; it literally seems they want to run away from here”: this is Nasir Khan, an experienced immigration agent working in Islamabad.

“According to the latest report provided by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, more than ten million Pakistani citizens have bid adieu to the country. As this news acquires light and all its specificities are divulged to the world, the question that lingers is not just about numbers, but about the very essence of what makes a nation thrive – its brain capital.

“As the spotlight shines on this mass exodus, it’s hard to ignore the implications: Pakistan might be on the brink of losing its brain capital. While inflation and economic uncertainties grip the nation, an increasing number of skilled individuals are leaving the country for greener pastures. One might wonder what’s causing this wave of despondency. Is it the economic instability and surging inflation, or is there a deeper injustice eroding hope among the people? And why should we all be concerned about this?”

In the intricate web of causes that contribute to the phenomenon of brain drain, the eloquent interplay of the push-pull model comes to the fore. Push factors, stemming from the homeland’s struggles, have compelled the cream of our talent to seek solace beyond borders. Meager salaries and a lackluster training environment drive the dire exodus of people from Pakistan. Terrorism, economic turbulence and surging inflation have added to this flight of brilliance. Graduates long for greener pastures, better jobs, and opportunities, as unemployment haunts the highly skilled.

Conversely, the magnetic allure of developed nations, the pull factors, seduces Pakistan’s intellectual treasures. These lands promise ample resources for research, fatter paychecks, and a brighter future for families. The gap in living conditions between homelands and recipient countries is a siren song.

In this intricate ballet of push and pull, Pakistan’s intellectual exodus finds its complexity, a symphony of aspiration and circumstance. But it’s not just about money, economic stability, well-paid jobs, high standards of living, and professional advancement beckon. People seem to have lost hope in the future of the country and ‘nothing erodes hope like injustice’.

“Limiting the scope for freedom of expression, lack of tolerance, religious oppression, stifling of press freedom, abduction of journalists, enforced disappearances, short-term abductions as a means of coercion, obstructing the livelihoods and enterprises of opposition figures, and employing legal measures to burden individuals with numerous court cases, thereby entangling them in legal proceedings and imprisonment are examples [of why people are losing hope].”

The migration of intellectual manpower from economically challenged countries to their prosperous counterparts is a global phenomenon but what makes this a cause of our contemplation? To me, it appears not merely a matter of statistics but a threat to Pakistan’s potential and progress. In Pakistan this trend has gained alarming momentum over the past few years and the ramifications of brain drain are far-reaching and multifold.

Pakistan is losing an irreplaceable asset- its human capital. PIDE economist Faheem Jahangir Khan says that “67 per cent of Pakistani youngsters want to leave the country. The youth are Pakistan’s future leaders. "At a time when the European and Chinese populations are aging, the youth bulge here is an advantage if they can participate in the development of their own country rather than serving societies abroad.”

The reverberations of brain drain and the influx of intellectual manpower bear testament to the shifting tides of human capital across borders. As the petals of intellect and innovation are plucked from their native soil, the homeland is left bereft, its intellectual garden withering. The consequential shortfall in expertise and the loss of creative fervor often stagnate progress.

So, what can be done to stem the brain drain? First, the nation requires a steady political environment, an economic framework that commits political administrations to ensure continuity of economic policies, and a business-friendly environment for investors, traders, and industrialists. Second, emphasizing the importance of job creation. Since governments have a limited capacity to create employment opportunities, it is the industrial sector that can absorb educated and partially skilled young individuals. The education system should shift its focus toward technical and vocational training to supply the workforce for the industry and IT sector.

Third, we need an efficient judicial system at all levels. Above all, the country needs a climate of justice, equal opportunity and dignity for every citizen.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Remember this quote from Martin Luther King Jr as we move forward. These are dark times and the idea that departing one’s homeland can single-handedly illuminate the path to a brighter future is a notion destined to remain in twilight.

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