

The Business

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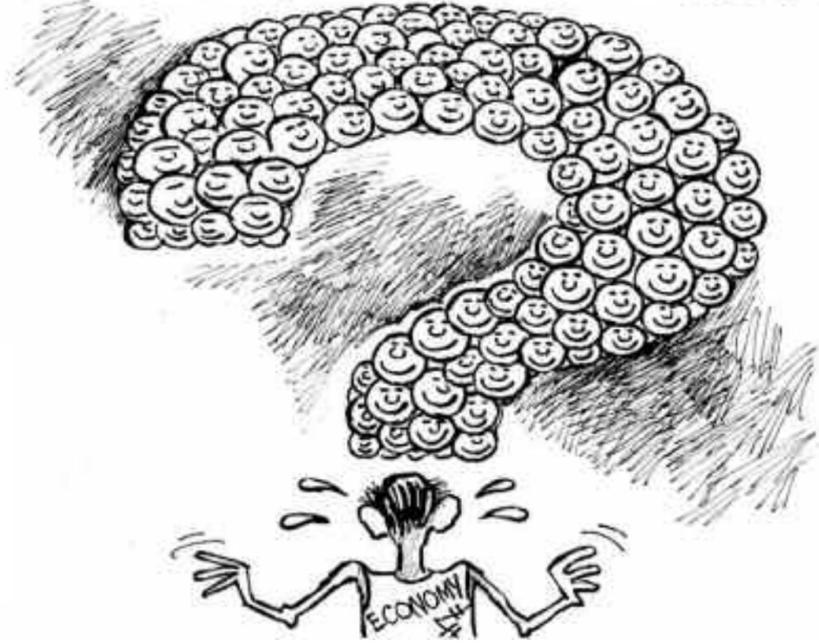
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PAKISTAN'S POPULATION TO SURGE BY 56% TO 366M BY 2050: UN



Sri Lankan debt default

In the past Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa emerged as hero under whose command the national army defeated the India-funded and supported Tamil Tigers' long-drawn insurrection. Now he has fled Sri Lanka to the Maldives, as there is countrywide unrest prompted by his failed governance, rampant corruption and economic mismanagement. For months people have been bearing the brunt of record inflation, currency depreciation and fuel and power cuts. But for how long — thousands of protesters finally braved bullet and broke through military-controlled barriers on way to the Rajapaksa's official residence. He was not there, as the intelligence agencies shifted him to an air base near the international airport. The parliament has decided to elect his successor for rest of the presidential term as an all-party consensus president. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was appointed prime minister in May to replace Rajapaksa's elder brother, Mahindra, after he stepped down and had his house burnt down too by angry protesters, had also resigned. Rajapaksa was certainly an astute political manipulator, but seems to have overlooked the growing public annoyance over his nepotistic style of governance. Perhaps, he could still be acceptable, but not after April when the country faced acute foreign currency crisis that resulted in debt default.

Sri Lanka's total debt stands at \$51 billion. But Rajapaksa did not realise the criticality of default. He was of the view that "at a time when successful solution have been achieved to the existing problematic situation, the programme of the opposition political groups to mislead the people is very sad and unpleasant." But there were not very many takers of his perspective on the crisis besetting Sri Lanka. His opposition was countrywide and by all sections of society. For instance, Wasantha Mudlidge, a member of inter-university students union, who led the march on the presidential palace, had declared: "... will not give up until this president and prime minister go home".

Rajapaksa is gone and so is his team, but there is no indication that road ahead for the island nation is not going to be tough. Sri Lanka had got to alleviate itself from the economic crisis and rebuild itself as a working democracy and this requires outside help, from its South Asian neighbours and international community, particularly of its segment which controls policies of international financial institutions. And last but not the least, in it there is a message for our political leaders who have drawn swords to strike Finance Minister Is-

Pakistan and the rising global population

DR IZZA AFTAB

Just as we were getting used to the fact that there are seven billion people in the world, the latest World Population Prospects report asks for a minor addition. In November of this year, there will be a resounding eight billion people in the world!

If things keep progressing the way they are, by the middle of the century we will be 9.7 and by the end of this century, we will be over 10 billion strong. The more punctilious reader will have discerned that the global population is growing, albeit at a decreasing rate.

So how does the population grow? Higher life expectancy at birth and higher fertility rate combined together lead to a growing population. We are living longer than we have ever before. The global average life expectancy is close to 73 years; it is 67 years in Pakistan. Other established patterns hold true as well — women continue to live longer than men. Fertility rate refers to the average number of children birthed by a woman. The global average fertility rate is a little over two children per woman; it is closer to three and a half children per woman in Pakistan. Population only really drops when fertility rates decline.

Should we be able to reduce the global population if countries like Pakistan and Ethiopia would have a fertility rate that matches the global average? Not really. Even if that were to happen, countries like Pakistan, which have a youth bulge, will continue to experience population growth. That is another way of saying population increases due to an excess of births over deaths. But there is another way of calibrating population — immigration. According to the WPP report, Pakistan was the leading country from where 16.5 million people emigrated in search of work. For those of us who take pride in robust worker remittances, please note that more Pakistanis than any other nationality have left their country in search of decent work. Fewer people have left conflict-ridden Syria,

Venezuela and Myanmar, combined. In the business-as-usual scenario, eight countries alone will account for half the increase in population between now and 2050. Pakistan is one of those. By 2050, Pakistan will still be the fifth largest country by size with around 366 million people. Imagine a day, less than 30 years from now, when there are 132 million more of us — in a country which is one of the most rapidly urbanizing globally. This means less food to go around, less potable water, higher demands on our social systems. It also means Pakistan will have more voters in 30 years than it ever has. Interesting times as the country will ring in its centennial.

Luckily for Pakistan, it is in a good stage right now — the stage of a demographic dividend where you have more people of working age, between 25 and 64 years, than you have children and the elderly. So what can we do to avoid the doomsday scenario of too many in Pakistan fighting over a declining pie?

There has to be a shift towards enhancing human capital. This seems impossible today when the country teeters dangerously close to an international default and the political uncertainty has reached dizzying heights. But bear with me. A little introspection tells us that the only asset that Pakistan can really and actually count on is its people. Not a power plant, foreign ally nor a road network. Seventy-five years have gone by and Pakistan is short of a half, is a nuclear power, yet over 20 per cent of the population lives in poverty. The contradictions cannot continue to exist without threatening the fabric that holds the country together. Pakistan has imported policies for decades now. It might serve the purpose to pivot and focus on Pakistanis for a change. So how do we do it?

Improve the quality of education before increasing access. You will see an increase in the latter when the former improves. Quality of education is improved if it is entrusted to people whose job it is to understand the science of education and not by

labeling a failed reform riding on a wave of political compromise as the change we have all been waiting for. Quality education does not automatically translate into distance from religion. Equally, religious education alone does not mean quality education. Couple the supply side solution with improving the social attitude towards education. Link up with industry, entrepreneurs and people who study the future of work to determine what quality education actually entails. Second, improve access and quality of healthcare. This will help reduce the adolescent birth rate as well which is very high in Pakistan. Provinces need to seriously reconsider how health is financed. Moreover, public health insurance needs to continue and be scaled up. Health is not a privilege, it is a right and should be treated as such. The number of practising physicians in Pakistan is abysmal. If you need a statistic more frightening than this one, look up the number of dentists in Pakistan. Third, and this cannot be stressed enough, norms and attitudes towards women in Pakistan need a major revision. Women are more than mothers or mothers-to-be. Women have the same capabilities to contribute meaningfully to families, work and society. Treating them as less than is not just to the country's detriment, it is just really bad economics. Women are almost half the population of Pakistan yet their participation in the labour force is insignificant. They continue supplying ample labour in low-paying dead end jobs.

Systematically, women in Pakistan have very little agency whether we look at their role in decision making in families, control over their bodies or owning assets. Approving a law here and there is no longer enough. The government can take the lead — at the federal and provincial levels — by having an equal number of men and women in cabinets. That ought to send a signal.

A good one, irrespective of which political party is in power. So while the population continues to grow globally and in Pakistan, there is still time to prepare. In a couple of decades, there will be a lot more of us. This does not mean they and we have to live poorer and more deprived lives. If we get our priorities right, we can be on the right side of history — for a change.



Constitution-makers or interpreters?

AASIYA RIAZ

In his dissenting note on the Supreme Court short order interpreting Article 63A of the constitution, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail invokes the fundamental constitutional demarcation of the roles of the judiciary, parliament and the executive: "The judges while interpreting any provisions of the constitution should limit themselves to a fair reading of the words of the constitution and the intention of its framers, and no more. Otherwise, judges enter the realm of creating, not just interpreting the constitution."

Justice Mandokhail has drawn attention to a straightforward, simple, yet key difference between the role of constitution makers (parliamentarians) and constitution interpreters (judiciary). Even though it is a fundamental constitutional line, it has become increasingly blurred over time, threatening the robust functioning of the state as envisaged by our constitution. Exhibit A, recently, is the Supreme Court verdict on Article 63A and its impact on the unending and unsavoury saga of the election of the chief minister of Punjab. Mr Hamza Shahbaz Sharif, MPA, was elected as chief minister of Punjab through a disorderly election in the Punjab Assembly on April 16. The election was marred by acts of violence perpetrated by Punjab MPAs owing to the failure of multiple layers of regulatory protections and checks because of negligence by the staff of the Assembly Secretariat. However, he was administered oath of office only on April 30 by the speaker of the National Assembly on orders of the Lahore High Court.

On May 17, interpreting Article 63A of the constitution, the Supreme Court gave a 3-5 majority verdict that votes cast by legislators in violation of their party's stance must not be taken into account while determining the outcome of a motion. Terming the majority verdict as akin to amending the constitution,

Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhal and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail had recorded in their dissent that Article 63A of the constitution is a complete code in itself. A member of parliament is aware that casting a vote contrary to the parliamentary party's direction in certain cases results in the severe penalty of losing one's seat. Nowhere in the constitution is it written that the vote of a member should be excluded from counting -- which shows that it is not the intent of the legislature to put a bar on the fundamental right of casting a vote. In the presence of such a comprehensive procedure regarding defection of a member of parliament, any further interpretation of Article 63A of the constitution would amount to rewriting the constitution.

Applying the majority verdict of the Supreme Court, the Lahore High Court, in a 4-1 verdict on June 30 on the appeals of the PTI filed against the election of the chief minister of Punjab, ordered a recount of votes on July 1 with the exclusion of the 25 defecting party members. However, overriding and amending the LHC verdict the next day, the Supreme Court ordered that the second poll for election of the CM Punjab would be held at 4pm on July 22, four (4) days after by-election scheduled to be held on July 17 on the vacant seats of Punjab MPAs on account of their defection.

Interestingly, the SC order was issued in response to a petition which had only sought amendment/modification of the LHC order to allow for the provision of adequate and sufficient time to hold a session of the Punjab Assembly. Even though the SC order itself noted that the respondents had not challenged the order of the Lahore High Court, it issued a 10-page long order regardless. Apart from amending the date of election of chief minister of Punjab from July 1 to July 22, the SC order went on to further re-enunciate already-well-defined constitutional and legal provisions. Take for instance the provisions of honest, just and fair elec-

tions defined under Article 218-3 of the constitution. The Supreme Court chose to reiterate the same anyway when asking that the by-election shall be held in a free, fair and transparent manner. The order further went on to re-emphasize Article 220 of the constitution when it asked for the ECP and state functionaries to ensure that all parties follow the election laws and refrain from any interference, inducement or influence in the affairs of the executive, the local administration and the ECP. The SC order regurgitated another point, already well-defined in the law, that no transfers or postings of officials of the local administration, police, provincial Election Commission, etc, shall be undertaken during the by-election. Once the election schedule is announced till the official declaration of results in the official gazette, the Election Commission practically assumes the role of government, a fundamental change brought about through the Elections Act, 2017 (clause 5 (4)). The law enacted since October 2017 defines that after the announcement of the schedule of any election programme, the Election Commission has the sole authority on postings and transfers and no government or authority can do so without prior written approval of the Election Commission.

The constitution of Pakistan is the supreme and fundamental law which clearly defines and demarcates remit, duties and powers of each branch of the state. This trichotomy of powers is the letter and intent of the constitution which is crucial for effective democratic governance. The constitution clearly defines that no court shall have any jurisdiction other than what is defined by the constitution or law (Article 175 (2)). The judiciary, therefore, is a creature of the constitution and has to operate within the confines of the constitution and not to exercise power beyond that. The decision of not counting votes cast by legislators in violation of their party's stance is but bringing a fundamental change to Article 63A of the constitution. Quoting from Justice Mandokhail's dissenting note again: "Judges have no authority to assume the role of the [sic] parliamentarians and to replace their wisdom by amending the constitution."



Gas prices

MIA DIFELICE

Gas has become a political tool that Republicans use to condemn the climate policies of the Biden administration. Pointing at the president is a convenient pretense as they defend the interests of fossil fuel corporations.

But media coverage of gas prices swings between incomplete, misleading and downright false. The truth is, gas prices have little to do with White House decisions, and there are few quick fixes.

Consumers — especially the most vulnerable — need relief. But that won't come from more drilling, as many politicians are demanding. In fact, more drilling would keep us at the mercy of future oil shocks. And it would attach our economic and environmental health to an industry with a long history of volatility and corporate greed.

Let's break it down. Citing economic principles of supply and demand, political pundits call for Biden to increase the US oil supply — that is, to drill more. We need more gas than we've got, the logic goes. Prices have risen. If supply grows to meet demand, prices will drop. This argument misses key facts. First, Biden is not blocking the flow of American oil. In fact, he's opened the tap more than Trump. The current administration issued more than 3,500 drilling permits in 2020 alone; that's a third more than during Trump's first year. And under Biden, US oil production has grown from 9.7 million barrels a day to 11.6 million.

Yet oil and gas corporations are staying away from new drilling projects. Currently, 4,400 approved and drilled wells have yet to produce oil. Oil and gas executives show no sign of ramping up production.

Oil executives themselves have revealed the reason for their inaction — profits. The oil and gas industry is seeing record cash

flow. In the first quarter of 2022, the five biggest fossil fuel companies made their highest profits in more than a decade. Last year, four major companies (Shell, BP, Chevron and Exxon) made \$75 billion. Their investors are demanding more of that windfall. So, instead of investing record profits in more drilling infrastructure, oil corporations are sending money back to investors through stock buybacks and payouts. In a March poll, 59 per cent of oil executives admitted that investor pressure for profit, not government regulation, is the real reason they're not drilling.

But blabber about drilling misses the mark. And it's not like we usually use lots of Russian oil that we're now missing. Of all the petroleum products used in the US in the last decade, only 2 per cent were Russian imports. So how do Russian sanctions affect US gas prices?

Oil is a global market, which means prices are set by global supply and demand. The market could be rocked by tons of factors outside of US control. Factors like natural disasters near production centers, the whims of oil-producing states and war. Such events create uncertainty about the future of supply and demand, which leads to more volatile prices. On top of that, speculators and their fleet of AI routinely bet on the future of the oil market. When prices go up, investors see dollar signs — and the more money they put down, the higher prices fly. In 2021, the US exported more oil than it imported for the first time. Our crude oil production is soaring to record highs. Yet the price we pay for oil has still fluctuated wildly over the past few years. We are still vulnerable to oil price shocks.

Excerpted: 'More Drilling Won't Lower Gas Prices — Price Controls and Renewables Will'.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org