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Youth Bulge and its Implication on the National Security of Pakistan

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Population explosion and youth bulge is a worldwide phenomenon. However, the large chunk of population is usually shared by the developing nations and Pakistan has been ranked among the most populous countries in the world. According to the National Human Development report published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Pakistan currently has the largest percentage of young people ever recorded in history. More than 64 percent of the country's population is below the age of 30 while 29 percent is between 15 to 29 years¹. Pakistan has a burgeoning youth bulge since the 1990's and currently stands as the fifth most populous nation in the world². This larger chunk of youth can be an asset or liability for the country and has several implications on the national security of Pakistan.



Due to population mismanagement, Pakistan is at worrisome stage where its population is increasing at a fast pace of 2 percent every year³. At the inception, our country was ranked at 14th position globally with a population of 33 million. Nevertheless, in less than three quarters of the century population has mounted to more than 220 million. And with the current annual growth rate of 2 percent, highest in the South Asian region, population is expected to soar to 330 million by 2050 which is indeed an alarming situation⁴. However, it is a well-known fact that large population can be utilized as an asset. Just like China, having largest population in the world, has capitalized on its human resource and now is the center of the power regionally and globally. But the point is, are we investing and capitalizing on our population especially the young generation? More importantly, what practical steps have been taken to empower and mainstream the youth bulge?

The unmanaged youth population bulge has several implications on the national security of the country. The recent National Security Policy 2022 understands the intertwined relationship between the economic, human and traditional security. However, the threat that emerges from the population explosion and youth bulge is missing from the policy discourse. The unguided and jobless youth would augment the existing socio-economic inequalities which directly impacts the national cohesion. With the current employment rate soaring at 9.56 and lowest female labour force participation rates (LFPR) in South Asia across all age groups, Pakistan is presented with the daunting task to generate additional 1.3 million jobs⁵, each year for the next five years to fill this gap⁶. Unemployment and illiteracy go hand in hand creating aggressiveness and restlessness among the youth. Hence the economic frustration diverts them to unfair means of getting money due to which there is a significant rise in the street crimes, abuse, narco-trafficking and other malicious activities. This ignorant youth subsequently fall prey to radicalization and conflict and are soft target of the militant outfits. Resultantly, the paradigm of internal and human security is

severely being affected and there is rise in sectarianism, extremism and violent ethnic conflicts in Pakistan⁷.

These factors have a direct connection with the youth being unaware and uneducated. Pakistan's current education system is quite incapable of generating such people who can play active and leading role in the current uncertain political and economic times⁸. Nevertheless, some practical steps have been taken to harness the potential of youth. Firstly, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has been emphasizing on academia-industry linkages, chalked out in its vision 2025, to focus on the real organizational based issues and internships for the faculty and students. The local university students are encouraged to pitch their ideas and are funded by the HEC. Many top-notch universities like LUMS, IBA, GIKI and other national universities have already been replicating this model.

The youth bulge in Pakistan is a double edge sword which will determine the direction and destiny of this nation. Hence this issue should be dealt with immediate attention, seriousness and clear vision.

HEC is also considering implementing German-style two-track education which identifies students' abilities and aptitude after high school to counsel and encourage them to opt either for a university degree or vocational training considering their capacities and the job market. Secondly, HEC is planning to develop technology parks to create an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs. NUST has

already been implementing this plan in collaboration with the Malaysian government.

Few suggestions for ameliorating the current situation are:

- Education be taken as intellectual grooming rather than merely as means of profession.
- Requirement based education should be propagated through media and other institutions with focus be on the contemporary skills required in the country and world. This could be done through the Pakistan embassies outside. Then those skills and degrees should be promoted in the education sector.
- Promoting technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills.
- Encouraging the youth to do business and indulge in Agriculture sector.
- Promoting low-profile jobs like running machines, nursing, plumbing and remapping the social contract of the society where every profession is given due respect.
- Developing technology parks in maximum cities to create an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs to start their tech-based ventures and attract inter-business outlets for collaboration and funding.
- The social mindset prevalent in the society has to be changed that all jobs are respectable. This can be done through social media fabric, drama industry and educational institutions.

The statistical figures of youth getting out with degrees vis-à-vis through government jobs created is quite misleading. Government jobs even in the most advanced countries are less than the youth graduating. Most of the jobs are created in private and civil sectors. Therefore, there is a need to enhance the same through incentives to promote establishment of small sector enterprises. In addition, mindset of society needs to be changed through media and educational institutions that all jobs are respectable. We need to change our mindset/social norms to respect few jobs only. Hence the Youth bulge is a double edge sword which will determine the direction and destiny of this nation. This issue should be dealt with immediate attention, seriousness and clear vision.

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