



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

Mitigating Pakistan's Population Growth & Urgent Need for Reform

Press Release

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The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad, successfully concluded a seminar on 'Mitigating Pakistan's Population Challenges.' Distinguished speakers included Senator Dr Sania Nishtar and Ms Samia Liaquat Ali Khan, Director Impact, Tabadlab, Islamabad, Pakistan. Air Marshal Farooq Habib (Retd), Senior Director at CASS, delivered the Concluding Remarks; while Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd) moderated the proceedings. Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), Advisor on Aviation to the Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan and President of CASS, presented mementos to the distinguished speakers.



In his *Opening Remarks*, **Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd)** underscored the intertwined significance of Water, Education, Economy, and Population as fundamental pillars influencing the well-being and security of a nation. Drawing attention to the National Security Policy 2022, hailed as 'citizen-centric', he acknowledged its emphasis on human security. However, he expressed concerns over the existing gaps between policy creation and its subsequent implementation, especially in the mentioned domains.

Reflecting on Pakistan's demographic journey, he highlighted the country's exponential population growth, from 32 million at its independence in 1947 to a staggering 250 million in the present year, marking an almost eightfold increase in 76 years.

Senator Dr Sania Nishtar, in her address on *Population Dynamics and Socioeconomic Impacts*, underscored the pressing challenge of population growth as a pivotal factor in Pakistan's development trajectory, affecting vital sectors such as infrastructure, economy, and security. Highlighting the exponential growth in population, she illustrated that Pakistan had witnessed a growth rate that is notably higher than many other Asian nations. A primary concern she broached was Pakistan's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) which, alarmingly, has remained stagnant since 2005 at 3.6. This statistic becomes especially concerning when juxtaposed with countries like Saudi Arabia, traditionally conservative societies that have nonetheless managed to significantly reduce their TFR. Dr Nishtar shared factors influencing fertility rates, spotlighting elements like female education, participation in the workforce, and societal standing. She fervently emphasised the urgency to engage with and address these variables to devise effective strategies against rapid population growth.



Shifting the focus to the crucial role of family planning services, she affirmed that their accessibility can greatly mitigate the challenges posed by population growth. She further championed the importance of robust family planning programmes, stressing underlining Pakistan's low Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR), especially when compared to countries like Iran. Reflecting on the past, Senator Nishtar reminisced about a time when Pakistan was at the forefront of family planning initiatives, backed by dedicated budgets and institutions. However, she said that administrative issues and the devolution of powers to the provinces had adversely affected this infrastructure, resulting in the present-day problems.

Despite these challenges, Dr Nishtar expressed optimism about Pakistan's future, emphasising its vast potential. She remarked on the hardworking, entrepreneurial, and resilient nature of its people and a society that's generous and supportive. Highlighting the demographic dividend, abundant natural resources, strategic strengths like comprehensive databases and telecommunication infrastructure, and a vast market, she conveyed a hopeful vision for the nation's progress. She underscored the urgency to institutionalise ethical conduct in the public sector, a profound respect for merit and integrity, and oversight of discretionary powers. Safeguards against conflicts of interest and fostering a culture of evidence-driven, transparent decision-making are vital.



In her presentation on *Pakistan's Population and Gender Dynamics*, **Ms Samia Liaquat Ali Khan** shed light on pressing issues related to gender disparities, population growth, and economic development in Pakistan. She discussed multifaceted challenges women face, particularly in health, education, political empowerment, and economic opportunities. Backed by alarming statistics, Ms Khan revealed that in 2020, Pakistan was ranked third among countries with high maternal and infant mortality rates. 40% of children under five suffer from malnutrition, with a staggering 12 million girls among the 20 million out-of-school children. Over 75% of 10-year-olds in schools grapple with

basic reading comprehension, and a concerning 21.8 million youth, aged 15-29, are neither engaged in education nor employment.



Ms Khan lamented that despite a significant proportion of women working in sectors like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, financial inclusion remains elusive for many. Shockingly, only 7% of women hold bank accounts, a mere 14% partake in business, and property ownership is critically low, with just 3.3% of women owning homes either individually or jointly. On the political front, she underscored the underrepresentation of women, pointing out the stark disparity in elected female representatives and an 8% lower female voter turnout compared to men. Charting a path forward, Ms Khan passionately advocated for an overhauled education system, wider societal acceptance of women as leaders, especially among adult males, and the imperative to reframe social and religious constructs with respect, tolerance, and empathy.



Delivering the Concluding Remarks and Vote of Thanks, **Air Marshal Farooq Habib (Retd)** reflected on Pakistan's longstanding challenges, noting that even in 2023, the core issues identified by the panellists persisted. Drawing attention to Francis Fukuyama's 'getting to Denmark' concept, he emphasised that for nations to reach the levels of development exemplified by countries like Denmark, they must wholeheartedly embrace principles like integrity, transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and meritocracy. The Air Marshal stressed that without adopting these foundational principles, no nation can truly progress. In conclusion, he urged the younger generations to actively challenge societal malpractices and champion change, envisioning a brighter future for Pakistan.

The seminar was attended by a diverse group of individuals, including academics, retired Armed Forces officers, policymakers, researchers, and media professionals; and concluded with an interactive Q&A session.

