

## **SUMMARY of the article “Facing the abyss,” by Faisal Bari, published on November 24, 2023**

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The article confronts the critical challenges facing Pakistan, emphasizing the alarming statistics revealed by the 2023 census. With a population of 241.499 million and a growth rate of 2.55%, Pakistan adds approximately 6 million people annually, surpassing the entire populations of countries like Finland, Norway, and Denmark. The population growth, rebounding from a reported decline, contrasts sharply with successful efforts in neighboring countries. Disturbingly, 40% of Pakistani children suffer from malnutrition, and the nation has high rates of neonatal, infant, child, and maternal mortality. Pakistan remains one of two countries, along with Afghanistan, unable to eradicate polio. Education woes are evident with 23 million out-of-school children, making Pakistan the global leader in this regard. Quality education accessibility is skewed, particularly affecting girls, rural children, religious minorities, and those from impoverished families. The environmental crisis is equally dire, ranking Pakistan as the world’s third or fourth most polluted country, significantly impacting life expectancy. The article laments the lack of realization and action by the Pakistani polity regarding these crises, attributing them to decades of deliberate policies. A poignant quote by Jaun Eliya underscores the tragic self-destruction without remorse. Despite ongoing economic and political crises, the article calls for a deeper focus on long-term reforms in population management, health, education, and the environment, emphasizing the need for a collective realization of the severity of the situation.

### **Easy/Short SUMMARY:**

The article highlights Pakistan’s pressing challenges revealed by the 2023 census, including a rapidly growing population, health crises, and educational disparities. Despite alarming statistics, there is a lack of awareness and action by



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the authorities. The article emphasizes the urgent need for long-term reforms in population management, health, education, and the environment to address the nation's deep-seated issues.

## **SOLUTIONS of The Problem:**

### ***Population Management Reforms***

Implement comprehensive reforms in population management, addressing the root causes of the high growth rate through awareness campaigns, family planning initiatives, and targeted interventions.

### ***Education System Overhaul***

Undertake a holistic overhaul of the education system, focusing on universal enrollment, reducing dropout rates, and ensuring equitable access to quality education, especially for marginalized groups.

### ***Healthcare System Strengthening***

Invest in strengthening the healthcare system, addressing malnutrition, improving maternal and child health services, and controlling the spread of diseases, including polio, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and potential epidemics like AIDS.

### ***Environmental Policies and Enforcement***

Enforce stringent environmental policies to combat pollution, with a focus on reducing air and water pollution, promoting green initiatives, and improving public health outcomes.

### ***Political and Institutional Reforms***

Initiate deep-rooted political and institutional reforms to address governance issues, build trust among citizens, and pave the way for sustained economic and social development.

## **IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the article:**

- Pakistan's population is 241.499 million with a growth rate of 2.55%.
- The annual population growth adds around 6 million people.
- India's growth rate is 0.7%, China's is 0.1%, and Bangladesh's is 1.1%.
- 40% of Pakistani children suffer from malnutrition.
- Pakistan has high neonatal, infant, child, and maternal mortality rates.
- Pakistan, along with Afghanistan, has not eliminated polio.
- Pakistan has the world's largest number of out-of-school children (23 million).
- Pakistan ranks as the world's third or fourth most polluted country.
- Living in Pakistan, particularly in big cities, reduces life expectancy by four to five years.

## **MCQs from the Article:**

- 1. What is Pakistan's annual population growth rate according to the 2023 census?**
  - A. 0.1%
  - B. 1.1%
  - C. 2.55%**
  - D. 3.5%
  
- 2. Which country has the world's largest number of out-of-school children?**
  - A. India
  - B. Bangladesh
  - C. Pakistan**
  - D. Afghanistan
  
- 3. What is the current ranking of Pakistan in terms of global pollution?**
  - A. First
  - B. Second



**C. Third or fourth**  
D. Fifth

4. **Which country, besides Pakistan, has not been able to eliminate polio?**

- A. Bangladesh
- B. India
- C. Afghanistan**
- D. China

5. **What percentage of Pakistani children is reported to be malnourished?**

- A. 20%
- B. 40%**
- C. 60%
- D. 80%

## VOCABULARY:

1. **Abyss** (noun) (عمق عمیق): A deep or seemingly bottomless chasm.
2. **Fertility Rates** (noun) (معدل الخصوبة): The average number of children a woman is expected to have during her reproductive years.
3. **Comparator** (noun) (مقارن): Something that serves as a standard of comparison.
4. **Neonatal** (adjective) (وليد حديث الولادة): Relating to the first 28 days of a child's life.
5. **Malnourished** (adjective) (ضعيف التغذية): Suffering from malnutrition, lack of



proper nutrition.

6. **Polity** (noun) (پالیٹی): An organized society, such as a nation, state, or church.
7. **Environmental Pollution** (noun) (پیرائمنٹل پولیوشن): Contamination of air, water, or soil by substances that are harmful to living organisms.
8. **Woes** (noun) (ویس): Troubles or difficulties.
9. **Poignant** (adjective) (پوائنٹنٹ): Evoking a keen sense of sadness or regret.
10. **Holistic** (adjective) (ہولسٹک): Characterized by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.
11. **Equitable** (adjective) (ایکویٹبل): Fair and impartial.
12. **Stringent** (adjective) (سٹرینٹ): Strict, precise, and exacting.
13. **Deep-Rooted** (adjective) (ڈیپ-ریوٹڈ): Firmly established at a fundamental or basic level.
14. **Pave the Way** (phrase) (پاویں گلی): Prepare for or facilitate the beginning of something.
15. **Sustained** (adjective) (سسٹینڈ): Continuing for an extended period without interruption.
16. **Realize** (verb) (ریلایز): Become fully aware of something as a fact.



17. **Overhaul** (verb) (تفحص وتفحص وتفحص وتفحص وتفحص): Take apart (a piece of machinery or equipment) in order to examine it and repair

it if necessary.

1. **Enforcement** (noun) (تطبيق أو إجبار أو إلزام): The act of compelling observance of or compliance with a law, rule, or obligation.
2. **Governance** (noun) (تسيير أو إدارة): The action or manner of governing a state, organization, etc.
3. **Trust Deficit** (noun) (نقص في الثقة أو انعدام الثقة): Lack of trust or confidence.

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Facing the abyss

Faisal Bari

6-8 minutes

THE 2023 census puts our population at 241.499 million and our growth rate at 2.55 per cent. This means we are adding some 6m people to the population every year. For comparison, Finland, Norway and Denmark each have a population of less than the number of people we add to our population every year. The population growth rate had reportedly gone down to 1.9pc in the previous decade but has bounced back. This, when most comparator countries, especially those in South Asia and others around us, have been quite successful in bringing down their growth and fertility rates substantially. Our failure is all the more stark and remarkable when we look at the figures for India (0.7pc), China (0.1pc) and





Bangladesh (1.1pc).

Forty per cent of our children are malnourished. Our neonatal, infant, child and maternal mortality rates remain one of the world's highest. We are one of only two countries, the other being Afghanistan, that has not been able to eliminate polio. In this day and age, we still lose many children to diarrhoea. We are not even able to provide safe drinking water to all our people. Hepatitis and tuberculosis are uncontrolled and many health officials feel we are on the verge of an AIDS epidemic. One in four adults in Pakistan might be diabetic. Our health outcomes are a disaster, but more disastrous is the fact that we do not realise where we are, and irrespective of whether we realise it or not, we are not, as a polity, doing anything about it.

Twenty-three million, possibly more, of our five-to-16-year-olds are not in schools. We now have the world's largest number of out-of-school children. We have not reached universal enrolment even at the primary level and dropout rates are high during the years of schooling. Girls, children from rural areas, children from religions other than the dominant faith or minor castes, children from poorer families, all have a harder time accessing quality education in Pakistan. The millions in schools, barring a minority who are enrolled in high-fee private or public schools, are getting an education of inferior quality. Our educational outcomes are a disaster, but again, more disastrous is the fact that we do not realise where we are, and irrespective of whether we realise it or not, we are not, as a polity, doing anything about it.

Pakistan is the world's third or fourth most polluted country. Living in Pakistan, almost in any big city, means losing four to five years of life expectancy. Lahore tops the most-polluted city ranking the most often. But most of Punjab and many parts of Sindh have high environmental pollution levels too. This is also showing up in the increased incidence of disease.

The tragedy is that we do not even realise what we have done to ourselves.

All of this is not the result of neglect by one government or one party. It is the result of decades of deliberate policies which are an outcome of political economy settlements in Pakistan. Jaun Eliya captures this beautifully:

(I am very strange, indeed so strange that I have destroyed myself but have no

regrets.)

The state's role in population management, health, education, or environment are not considered important in Pakistan. The rich, elites, and politically and/or socially more connected groups have found ways of accessing these services through other means. For a majority, it is through the private sector. Access to safe drinking water, quality education and health services are available to those who can pay for it. We have private schools that charge up to Rs70,000 per child per month. Even mainstream high-fee schools would be around Rs30,000 per child per month. High-cost hospitals charge around Rs20,000 per room per night. If you number among those who can afford these costs, you might not be too pushed about the provision of quality health and education services for those who cannot afford them.

In other cases, significant groups of people have created their own separate and dedicated streams for the provision of these services. The army, navy and air force have their own school systems, universities and healthcare provision facilities. These are usually of decent quality and better than the services provided to the public at large through government schools, hospitals and/or public universities.

Right now, we are in the middle of economic and political crises as well. Some have called this moment a 'polycrisis'. It is true that we are facing many issues at the same time. The economy is doing poorly. Our political system is in a crisis as well. The crisis of governance is deep, institutional degradation is real, and trust deficit — between all — is also deep. But some crises are more long-term, deeper and more persistent. An economic turnaround could potentially happen in a number of years. But political economy issues need far deeper reforms and a longer period as well. Even if political economy reforms are in place and policies start addressing the dismal situation regarding the population, health, education and the environment, it will be a decade or more before we will start seeing any impact.

But as Jaun Eliya indicates, the tragedy is that we do not even realise what we have done to ourselves. We might have stabilisation with this or the next IMF deal, and elections might settle some things on the surface, but the deeper issues will remain. They need far greater political, economic, social and institutional reforms and there is not even any conversation regarding them. The state of the



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nation's educational, health, population and environmental services and outcomes tell us as much.

I do not know if people have seen the painting The Scream by Edward Munch. If you have not, you can search for it online. This is how we should be reflected in terms of where we are today. Will we realise what we have done to ourselves and try to change course?

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.

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