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Pakistan: Demographic and Ethnic Threats to Political Stability (U)

Pakistan has experienced exceptional demographic, social, and political turbulence in the 35 years since it received independence. The secession of the eastern wing to form Bangladesh in 1971 resulted in the loss of more than half of its citizens, and for the second time in less than 25 years, Pakistan had to organize itself. Ethnic and linguistic differences have long divided the people of the region, periodically erupted into political violence, and made the building of a sense of national identity at times appear impossible. Major refugee migrations in 1947, 1971, and most recently since 1979 have had lasting social and political effects. The continuing labor migration to the Middle East, involving millions of workers since the mid-1970s, has already affected the economy and may accelerate social change in the future as increasing numbers of relatively prosperous workers return. (U)

Rapid Population Growth: The Bottom Line

We believe that continued rapid population growth will undermine government efforts to raise the standard of living and deliver basic services equitably to all citizens. Official figures show that basic government services do not reach even half of the population. We expect that, as the population continues to outstrip provision of services, increasing alienation from the central government by segments of society could be exploited by organized dissident groups and lead to greater social and political instability.

We expect the current annual 2.8-percent rate of population growth, a product of high fertility and low mortality, to drop only slightly through the rest of the century. Demographic evidence shows no major change in fertility since the early 1900s; women still have an average of seven children. We believe that the government's failure to design family planning programs acceptable to Pakistani couples virtually assures continuing high fertility. As a result, we project

Table 1
Total Urban and Selected
City Populations, 1982^a

Thousand persons
(except where noted)

Total urban areas	24,778
Urban population as percent of total	27.1
12 largest cities	
Karachi city	5,333
Lahore city	3,027
Faisalabad municipal and cantonment area	1,129
Rawalpindi/Islamabad	1,057
Rawalpindi	(832)
Islamabad	(225)
Hyderabad city	817
Multan city	757
Gujranwala municipal and cantonment area	642
Peshawar city	604
Sialkot city	309
Sarghoda city	308
Quetta city	306

^a Projected from 1981 census data.

This table is Unclassified.

an expansion of Pakistan's 92 million population by nearly 3 million persons yearly during the 1980s, reaching a total population of 115 million by 1990 and 152 million by 2000. (U)

The Urban Tinderbox

We expect the high level of rural to urban migration to continue undiminished through the 1980s, translating into an overall annual urban growth rate of about 4.5 percent and increasing the potential for urban violence as living conditions deteriorate and competition increases for jobs and urban services. We forecast

that today's urban population of 25 million will increase to 35 million by the end of the 1980s, and the portion of all Pakistanis living in the cities will increase from 27 percent to about 31 percent. A large share of this population will be poor, unskilled, and virtually illiterate migrants from the countryside.

Urban interest groups—labor unions, students, and professional, trade, and neighborhood associations—have long expressed dissatisfaction over low wages, lack of jobs, shortages of housing, inadequate water supplies, and congested transport systems. Urban dissent led to demonstrations and riots that brought down the governments of Ayub Khan in 1969 and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. The even greater concentrations of people suffering common problems and the inability of the government to do much about them during the 1980s could again foster political activism and possibly develop into a threat to the government.

Provincial Rivalries

Provincialism continues to be the hallmark of Pakistani politics. A common devotion to Islam, stressed by President Zia in his Islamization policies, has not overcome the problems of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural rivalries that divide the people of the four provinces. We expect these divisions to continue to frustrate central government aims to engender a sense of national purpose through the 1980s.

The minority Sindhis, Baluchis, and Pushtuns fear the more numerous Punjabis and resent their domination of the Army and central government. The Punjabis believe that their sacrifices at the time of partition from India give them authority to control the national government. Studies of the Punjabi power base by US scholars suggest that Punjabis believe that the other provincial peoples are "backward" and need strong control and direction in order to become "true" Pakistanis. The people of the other three provinces resent such implications, believe that their cultures are threatened, and distrust intrusion of the central

* None of the provinces are the exclusive home of the ethnic groups that gave them their name or form the majority, but all four project the unique characteristics of the dominant ethnic group.

Table 2
Estimated Population by Province, 1982^a

	Population (millions)	Percent
Pakistan	92	100
Punjab	52	57
Sind	21	23
North-West Frontier Province	14	15
Baluchistan	5	5

^a Projected from 1981 census data.

This table is Unclassified.

government into their affairs. Movements for separation or greater autonomy by all three provinces have plagued every central government since partition and, in our view, are an ever-present danger to the stability of the country.

The Afghan Refugees

We expect the Afghan refugees will present a problem of increasing complexity and a growing threat to internal stability throughout the 1980s. Most of the refugees are Pushtun tribesmen who are received as brothers by the Pakistani Pushtuns of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan, and as Muslim brothers in need by all Pakistanis. Nevertheless, in these two always volatile tribal areas, where nearly all refugees reside, government authorities claim that preservation of order is their greatest concern. Although only one significant disturbance involving locals and refugees has occurred, minor disagreements between refugees and the local population or between rival refugee groups could lead to a pattern of increasingly serious incidents.

Islamabad is concerned that unrest could be exploited by Soviet-sponsored agents.

We believe the sheer size of the refugee population will further strain internal stability. The US Census Bureau estimates that there are 2.5 million refugees as of mid-1982, based on the number of refugees

registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees between 1979 and the end of 1981, estimated arrivals of 25,000 during 1982, and estimated births and deaths occurring in the refugee population. The Census Bureau projects that the refugee population will reach 2.7 million by 1985 and 3.2 million by 1990, assuming that no additional refugees will arrive or be repatriated after 1982. The NWFP, including non-Pushtun areas, which currently shelters about 80 percent of the refugees, is fast approaching the saturation point in terms of suitable land available for settlement, according to Western and Pakistani observers. As a result, some camps may have to be opened in the Punjab, away from Pushtun ethnic areas. Although government officials say that such a move would be acceptable to Punjabis on the basis of Islamic ties, we believe that ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences between Pushtuns and Punjabis probably would lead to strained relations or even open violence.

Pakistani officials are necessarily caught up in the short-term problems of refugee management, but a few officials and other prominent Pakistanis speculate on the social and economic ramifications for both refugees and Pakistanis of an extended or permanent refugee stay. Some refugees will inevitably tire of the enforced idleness of camp life and seek a more active life on the outside. Some have already entered into transportation or commercial enterprises in the NWFP, as well as in the cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad; officials say that there are several thousand living in Sind Province. These relatively few Afghans, although apparently highly visible, have been absorbed into the economy. But the absorption of nearly 2 million poor, mostly uneducated, small farmers or nomads into the already overburdened economy would, in our opinion, present the government with a far more serious management challenge.

Labor Emigration

Temporary labor emigration to the Middle East has substantial short-term benefits for Pakistan, but in our opinion, it poses a threat to economic and social stability over the long run. The flow of remittances from the migrants, rising from \$330 million in 1976 to

over \$2 billion in 1981, according to official Pakistani data, has been a boon to Pakistan's economy and figures prominently in government decisions to maximize the worker exodus. The approximately 1.2 million workers overseas represent about 5 percent of the total labor force, relieving pressures on the domestic labor market which, according to official data, can employ efficiently only about one-half of all eligible male workers.

Despite this excess labor, domestic shortages that have developed in some labor categories have retarded Pakistan's economic development. According to data from labor recruitment agencies, skilled and experienced general laborers are more likely to emigrate than the unskilled. World Bank analysis shows that skilled domestic labor migrants have been replaced by less skilled or inexperienced workers, which has created a drop in domestic productivity. Vocational training so far has failed to fill the gap.

In our view, the Pakistani Government has undertaken insufficient long-term planning to meet the social and economic demands that will arise when the Middle East job boom ends. Labor Ministry officials, who believe that overseas demands for Pakistani labor will remain high at least through the 1980s, concentrate on enhancing and regulating the flow. A World Bank migration study, however, foresees a trend developing in favor of specialized and professional labor at the expense of the nonspecialists and unskilled as Middle East development projects move ahead. If so, the opportunities for emigration by non-specialized and unskilled laborers may decline before the end of the decade, which would hurt the economy by reducing worker remittances and throw the bulk of the Pakistani workers back on the ill-prepared domestic labor market.

³ Estimates by government recruitment agencies of the number of Pakistani workers legally in the Middle East range from 500,000 to over 1 million. We concur with the results of a survey by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, which puts the figure at 1.25 million. Guesses by various sources place total numbers, including illegal workers, at about twice this figure.

We expect that social problems will intensify as increasing numbers of migrants return home with money and new experiences. The money earned abroad can move the returned migrant into the middle class with enhanced community standing. We believe that this elevated status may make him less likely to submit to the autocratic demands of landlords, tribal leaders, political leaders, and employers. Pakistani social scientists have described instances where the political and social powers of traditional leaders have been successfully challenged by returned workers. They have also cited cases where the shift of family power from father to sons or to other family members during the absence of the father has created conflict within the nuclear and extended family. Such incidents are only beginning to be recognized and documented, but as the migration stretches out in time and more migrants return, pervasive social change, always unsettling in a traditional society, may occur. [REDACTED]

Outlook

We believe that many demographic and ethnic problems will continue to trouble Pakistani governments throughout the 1980s and, under a worst case scenario, could combine with other factors to topple the Zia regime or its successors:

- Inability of government services to keep up with rapid population growth might be manipulated by dissident forces. Overcrowded urban environments almost certainly will encourage antiregime activity.
- Heightened awareness among Pakistanis that the Afghan refugees may increasingly compete for limited jobs and services will threaten the uneasy surface calm that the government has so far been able to maintain.
- Continued concentration of political power among the majority Punjabis will reinforce ethnic tensions, permitting exploitation by antiregime agents.
- While we expect the overseas laborers to be a major force for economic growth, at least during most of the decade, the return of the "newly rich" migrants will tend to undermine social stability. [REDACTED]