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## Pakistan

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# Anti-malthusians are bouncing back

by Saqlain Imam

*The author, a well-known Pakistani intellectual and journalist, filed this report from Lahore on Sept. 1.*

Pakistan, until recently awash with population control propaganda which had been accepted by the urban middle class and intelligentsia as signs of liberalism, enlightenment, and the necessity of "sustainable economic growth," is undergoing a phase of convulsion where political-religious organizations have bounced back, ever since they have been refurbished with the anti-malthusian literature of the Schiller Institute and the investigative report, "Behind Cairo '94: The Demographic War against Islam" (*EIR*, Aug. 12, 1994) by Hassan Ahmad and Aminata Demba. The Schiller Institute advertisement in the July 29 *Washington Post*, "Stop the U.N.'s Killer Conference!" has restored the confidence of the anti-Malthus activists ever since it appeared in a writeup of a local business daily.

The Pakistani government, headed by Benazir Bhutto, in its bid to appease the western elite, has been religiously following the dicta of the population-control theories since its installation in November 1993. Most of the "secular" political parties have been talking about the population control phenomenon in the same diction and expressions in which the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United Nations have been discussing it in their literature. Until lately, anti-population control talk was anathema for the "educated" people from the ranks of urban societies. In spite of the general non-acceptance of this rhetoric among the common people, all major political leaders have been underscoring the need for population control for the nation's development.

All non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whether self- or foreign-funded, have been acting in unison for population control projects without examining their purpose and basis. Any talk against population control would be considered as anti-development or retrogressive. Pakistani political leaders, who now pathetically lack the quality of thinking independently, have been in a race to beat each other in following the lines of the trailblazers of "Project Democracy." Various advisers and policymakers of the government have fashioned their diction in consonance with the propaganda of the World Bank, IMF, or the U.N. regarding popu-

lation control and sustainable economic development. However, their only fear was that of public reaction. And that has now bounced back.

All religious organizations, including Jamaat-e-Islami, headed by Qazi Hussain Ahmad; Jamiat-e-Ulema Pakistan, headed by Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani; Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam, headed by Maulana Fazhur Rehman; Jamiat-e-Ulema Ahl-e-Hadith, headed by Qazi Abdul Qadir Khamosh; Tehrik-e-Jafaria, headed by Alliamma Sajid Ali Naqvi, and several other community leaders, including some Christians, have come forth to condemn the Cairo conference as an anathema for humanity, un-Islamic, a conspiracy against the Third and Muslim Worlds. Since the political changes in the last couple of years, the bashing of political-religious organizations has been on the rise. This had sapped their confidence. Moreover, they were also held responsible for the growing sectarianism in the society by the elite journalists and political analysts.

However, the introduction to the anti-Cairo conference literature published by the Schiller Institute and *EIR* has given a new lease on life to the clout of declining politico-religious organizations that are now giving a tough fight to the population control theories of the liberals. Although it has not been officially announced, [as of Sept. 1] it is probable that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will not go to Cairo, as the public backlash has sent a message of disapproval to the corridors of power. But the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, still insists that Pakistan should sign the draft agreement that is likely to be tabled at Cairo. If Benazir did not go, Shahnaz would represent her. Pakistan feels itself alienated due to allegations of supporting fundamentalism and terrorism; therefore, it should not miss any opportunity that can help restore its good image in the world community, believes a diplomat who supports Pakistan's effective participation in the Cairo conference.

Due to the refusal of Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and Bangladesh's Prime Minister Khalida Zia to attend the Cairo conference, Pakistan's commitment has slackened. The growing opposition to the Cairo conference in the country, at least, has ensured that even if Pakistan agrees to the "conditionalities" of the conference, no mechanism of preventing population growth will be acceptable by the people.

Now, it is not the mullah (cleric) who is on the defensive. It is the NGO activist or liberal who has to defend his point of view vis-à-vis population control and the Cairo conference. The pro-population control religious activists have also come under heavy attack in the country. A month ago it appeared that the Cairo conference would be a fanfare, but now it seems to be heading toward a fiasco. Last month, rallies were held for population control, but now rallies against the Cairo conference are being held. The tables have been turned! The public censure of the Cairo conference is also likely to influence the course of political events in Pakistan, where, until now, being "pro-West" was the *sine qua non* for power politics.