India facing elderly population time bomb

India is facing an elderly population 'time bomb' according to a United Nations report which revealed its number of old people will triple by 2050.

By Dean Nelson, New Delhi

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The report, by the United Nations Population Fund, found the number of over-60s will increase from around 100 million today to more than 300 million by 2050 and warned the government to prepare for the additional strain this will put on families and health and welfare services. It also predicted the number of over-80s will increase sevenfold.

Officials said they were particularly concerned about the impact on elderly women, who will outnumber men, and be left more vulnerable in Indian society.

The findings, contained in its Report on the Status of Elderly in Select States of India, have come as a surprise to the government which has focused its policies on high economic growth to meet the employment and training needs of the country's rapidly growing youth population.

The government's reforms are aimed at increasing foreign investment and rapidly developing its transport, health and education provision, including new towns, to meet the requirements of what it regards as a young population explosion.

India's soaring population is expected to increase from 1.2 billion today to above 1.6 billion by 2050 – by when it is expected to have overtaken China's ageing population to become the world's largest nation.

But while the government has focused on how to harness its surging young population to drive development, the UN report has revealed how it also faces dramatically increased spending on health and welfare services to care for its elderly. According to the report two-thirds of India's 100 million people over 60 suffered a chronic ailment in 2011. That number is expected to increase to more than 200 million by 2050.

The report warned that India's current hospital and welfare services are insufficient for the strain they will face as the pace of population ageing increases.

"These findings underline that with a growing elderly population in the country there is a need to strengthen geriatric care services in the existing public health system so that the increasing care demands of the elderly can be met," the report warned. It also said the government must increase the availability and take-up of welfare benefits by the elderly poor.

The authors said they believed most looked to their children to support them within India's extended 'joint families' but this will put greater demands on families, particularly when few have pensions.
Satya Narayana, senior UN national programme officer for India, said he was particularly concerned that elderly women will suffer most.

"Women in Indian society are vulnerable throughout their lifetime and that increases into their old age," he said.

One of the authors, Professor K.S James, head of the Population Research Centre at Bangalore's Institute for Social and Economic Change, said India's elderly will have to work longer and retire later.

"Like any other country ageing is a challenge and a problem. We need to make people work-whatever the age. If they are working that solves half the problem. We have to improve their skill levels, education and health, that's the key," he said.


1. How much will the population of people over 60 years of age increase by 2050?

2. Instead of the elderly, what has the government been focusing on?

3. How many people over 60 have chronic illnesses?

4. Why does Satya Narayana believe Indian women will suffer more?

5. How does Professor K.S. James believe the problem can be solved?
Many Indians look back on the sterilisation drive that was undertaken during “the Emergency”, when Indira Gandhi suspended democracy in 1975-77, as one of the bleakest episodes in the history of their independent republic. Indira’s unelected son, Sanjay Gandhi, led a campaign that made sterilisation compulsory for fathers who already had two or more children. As states struggled to meet their quotas, reports of widespread and forced operations became commonplace.

Today sterilisation targets of that sort tend to be consigned to the past (with notable exceptions) and are recalled with a shudder. Yet efforts to keep a lid on India’s population, which is set to overtake China’s by 2030, are still carried out via more subtle policies. One curious example is the notion of India’s having a “two-child norm”, or “2CN”, which pops up in a range of welfare schemes. According to its principle, which started to appear in state laws in the early 1990s and has since gained traction, only Indians with small families should be eligible for certain handouts and political roles.

It can be one of the conditions that shape the many new “conditional cash-transfer schemes”, an increasingly popular form of welfare that pays poor Indians to change their behaviour. In some states, Janani Suraksha Yojana, a national scheme launched in 2005 that distributes a cash bonus to women who go to hospital to give birth, allows mothers to claim their 600-1,400 rupees ($11-25) handout for only their first two live births. Across the country another handout, 500 rupees for each safe home birth, is limited to two deliveries. Another national scheme, launched on a pilot basis last year, pays women to attend antenatal check-ups. But it covers only a mother’s first two children.

At the state level, matters become curiouser and curiouser. The cut-off appears in laws totally unconnected to family welfare. Some states, including large players such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, bar people with more than two children from running in village and district council elections. The rule does not, some Indians note with a raised eyebrow, apply to the higher-ranking state politicians who pass such laws. In Maharashtra, home to both India’s commercial capital Mumbai and swathes of sugarcane fields, a 2005 law gives farmers with more than two children lower irrigation subsidies.
The two-child norm thus seeks to reward, rather than force, family planning. It is a far cry from China’s one-child policy or India’s own past. Yet critics say the main outcome of its application is to exclude the poorest Indians—who tend to have more children—from all sorts of welfare schemes. Leena Uppal, of the National Coalition Against 2CN and Coercive Population Policies, adds that, in a country where many parents see having fewer children as having fewer chances to produce a son, discouraging larger families simply encourages female foeticide.

Bhim Raskar of the Resource and Support Centre for Development, an NGO that oversees various projects in Maharashtra’s villages, says those who wish to tame India’s population growth must address the problems that give rise to large families. Weak public services, especially health care, give parents reason to have several children, as an insurance policy against some of them dying. Poor women’s rights and education spur parents to procreate until they have at least one son. Mr Raskar shakes his head at the idea of imposing a two-child norm from above. “Laws should be the last weapon, but here it is being used as the first weapon. You need to try to understand [a situation], and then change will come.”


1. What was “the Emergency” in India?
2. What is 2CN?
3. What is Janani Suraksha Yojana?
4. What do critics of 2CN say will be the main outcome?
5. According to Bhim Raskar, what problems give rise to large families?
"...in order to accommodate the 300 million people that will join India's workforce between 2010 and 2040, India needs to create roughly 10 million jobs a year."

As China, Japan and many other nations face an aging demographic profile, the youth segment of India’s population is growing rapidly, and is projected to continue to do so for the next 30 years. Provided India can act quickly on health, education and employment, this demographic dividend has the potential to inject new dynamism into its flagging economy. Failure to do so, however, will result in demographic disaster.

Today, more than half of India’s population is under the age of 25, with 65 percent of the population under 35. By 2020, India’s average age will be just 29 years, in comparison with 37 in China and the United States, 45 in Western Europe and 48 in Japan. This demographic trend will confer a significant competitive advantage upon India. About a quarter of the global increase in the working age population (ages 15-64) between 2010 and 2040 is projected to occur in India, during which time this segment is set to rise by 5 percent to 69 percent of its total population. Roughly a million people are expected to enter the labor market every month, peaking at 653 million people in 2031. As a result the IMF projects that India’s demographic dividend has the potential to produce an additional 2 percent per capita GDP growth each year for the next twenty years.

However, India’s ability to reap the rewards of its huge demographic advantage is far from guaranteed. The failure of a number of Latin American countries with the same demographic profile as Southeast Asia to achieve similarly impressive economic outcomes is a cautionary tale for India. The key to transforming the demographic dividend into economic growth lies not just in having more people, but having greater numbers of better trained, healthier and more productive people. The relationship here is mutually reinforcing: India must harness the advantage of its youth to fulfill its economic potential, and in turn must generate growth in order to continue to support its growing population. As noted by India's former Minister of Human Resource Development, Kapil Sibal, “it will be a dividend if we empower our young. It will be a disaster if we fail to put in place a policy and framework where they can be empowered.”

At the most basic level, India must focus on improving the overall health and well-being of its children in order to make the most of their immense potential. The Asian Development Bank estimated that 32.7 percent of India's population lives below the poverty line of $1.25 a day (PPP), and India is home to one-third of the world's poor. At 44 deaths per 1,000 live births, India's mortality rate is high. The World Bank notes a direct link between undernourishment and impaired cognitive development, so should India fail to ensure the health and well-being of its children, its future productivity and development will be severely curtailed. With a Human Development Indicators ranking of 134 out of 187 countries, India has a long way to go, and must swiftly invest in developing the potential of its enormous human capital.
Perhaps the most crucial task India faces is equipping its burgeoning youth with education and skills training. According to India’s 2011 Census, India’s literacy rate sits around 74%, with significant variation according to state and gender. In this regard, India’s 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is a big step towards guaranteeing a basic education for every child. Since its launch in 2010 India has witnessed some positive results, with 94 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 enrolled in school, and steady improvements in terms of facilities such as toilets and drinking water.

India's demographic dividend is expected to level off around 2040, so in order to capitalize on its favorable demography India must act now. Should India fail to guarantee the well-being, development, opportunities and growth necessary to support its youth, it will be unable to convert its unique demographic dividend into sustainable economic and developmental outcomes. Instead it will be left to face the dire political, economic and social consequences of a marginalized and restless youth population, on a scale unprecedented in modern history.

http://thediplomat.com/2013/03/10/the-promise-and-peril-of-indias-youth-bulge/2/

1. How many jobs does India need to create yearly by 2040?
2. What is a positive outcome to India having a young population?
3. What are the keys to transforming the demographic dividend into economic growth?
4. What is the most crucial test India faces?
5. When is India’s demographic dividend expected to level off?
Indian MBA graduates have to settle for less

By Yogita Limaye BBC News, Bangalore

India has the largest youth population in the world, and at one time its graduates could expect to leave university and walk into top jobs. But after spending thousands of dollars on business courses, many are finding that tough economic times have taken their toll on their job prospects.

When Pavan Shanbhog joined a business management course in 2010 at a mid-ranked college near the southern Indian city of Bangalore, he expected that in two years’ time he would be working at a reputed firm, earning a high salary.

Pavan graduated from his course in March this year without a single job offer.

Hotly contested

His situation could have been very different if he had graduated from one of the country’s best business schools, such as the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

Students there are often recruited even before they finish their courses, with some getting multiple job offers.

This year, the average pay offered to students from India’s top ranked business school IIM Ahmedabad was $25,000.

This is considered a very high starting salary in the country, although it is no longer rising substantially year after year, as was the case during periods of higher economic growth.

I feel sorry for the money their parents have spent because they’re not getting anything in these lower rung institutions"

It is no wonder that there is intense competition to get into these institutes.

This month, more than 200,000 students will be taking the common admission test (CAT) to try to gain entry into one of India’s best business schools.

But only the top 2% stand a chance of making it. That is why students across India take extra classes to prepare for the test. MBA aspirant Nikhil Cherian has been attending lessons at the Triumphant Institute of Management Education (TIME) coaching centre in Bangalore.

"I think I'll make it to at least one of the top 20 schools, but if I don't I won't just go to any college," says Nikhil.

"I'll wait and take the exam again. The market is so low that if we don't get a degree from a reputed institute, there is no guarantee of a decent job."
Gulshan Chhabra, vice president at TIME, says: "With the investment on education being so high, people are definitely more selective now about which business school they want to get into."

Management education in India could cost anything between $15,000 and $28,000, and many students take loans to pay their fees.

A report from financial research agency CRISIL says increasing awareness among students about the quality of education may result in a number of business schools closing down over the next couple of years.

The corporate world has slowly begun to step in to changes things. Some companies have adopted colleges, training their faculty and sharing the latest industry knowledge with them.

But many say the biggest step needs to be taken by the government to allow the education system to function freely, so that India can reap the demographic dividend of its large youth population.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19897823

1. What is the average pay offered to IIM students?
2. How many student take the CAT each month?
3. What will Nikhil Cherian do if he doesn’t get into a top 20 school?
4. How much does management education cost?
5. What have some companies done to make changes?
Will the proposed law to provide cheap food to more than half of India's people eliminate hunger, the most shameful scourge of an aspiring superpower?

The jury is still out on how the $19bn (£12bn) scheme will work, as is the case with similar big-ticket welfare schemes launched by what many believe is an endemically weak and corrupt state.

But there is little doubt that India needs to fight malnutrition on a war footing, and the food security scheme may well be its last chance to redeem itself.

Many believe that it does not behove a country which never tires of gloating about its red hot economic growth to have millions of malnourished and starving people.

The facts on the ground are startling. India has the largest number of malnourished children in the world, a rate worse than the average in Africa.

Nearly half of India's children under three are malnourished. More than half of the tribes' children are underweight and stunted.

India fares worst in terms of low birth weight and underweight children, and under-five infant mortality compared to Brazil, Russia and all South Asian neighbours.

'Alarming situation'

India also has the highest number of Vitamin A deficient children in the world: nearly 6% of the children suffer from eye problems related to the deficiency. Of the 37m people in the world who are blind, about 15m are from India. More than 320,000 children suffer from avoidable blindness.

There are shocking disparities between states when it comes to hunger and malnutrition. All states have a "serious to extremely alarming situation of hunger", says the latest India Human Development report.

Among the most well-off states, Gujarat - the Economist magazine called it India's Guangdong - fares the worst in terms of overall hunger and malnutrition.

Other economically prosperous states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have serious hunger problems. "Economic prosperity alone cannot reduce hunger," says the report.

The results of the government's largest nutritional programme, the 36-year-old Integrated Child Development Scheme, have been mixed. It provides nutrition to children below the age of five years - children get snacks and hot cooked meals at lunch.
There is still no consensus as to whether the programme has worked. Coverage of pregnant and lactating mothers, for example, is still low.

There are two more programmes for feeding adolescent girls, but neither provides for universal distribution of supplementary nutrition for them.

Then there are India's notoriously fickle public distribution system shops aimed at providing food security to people. Over 500m people are supposed to benefit through a gigantic distribution network of half a million fair-price shops supplying cheap food grains.

Here too, the results are mixed and contested. In many states, it has failed to make cheap food grains available to the poor. Theft of supplies, fraudulent beneficiaries and hoarding by the shop-owners is not uncommon.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-16291300

1. How does India compare to Africa in terms of malnourished children?

2. How does India compare to Brazil, Russia, and other South Asian countries?

3. What is a major cause of blindness in India?

4. What is the Integrated Child Development Scheme?

5. How many people are supposed to benefit through the public distribution system?