

ESAW/CRVS/93/11

**NATIONAL REGISTRATION SYSTEM
IN PAKISTAN**

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NOVEMBER, 1993

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NATIONAL REGISTRATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN
BY ASAD MAHMOOD ALVI, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Introduction:

1. The National Registration system commonly known as "Continuous Population Registers" was introduced in the country during 1973 when the Directorate general of Registration was established under National Registration Act to a) register every citizen of Pakistan whether residing within or outside the country, and b) issue national identity cards to all persons of age 18 and above. This Act was promulgated to fulfil the following aims and objects:-

- a) To provide statistical data,
- b) To facilitate identification during voting at elections and giving evidence in courts,
- c) To facilitate birth and death registration, and
- d) To facilitate apprehension of criminals and provide general security in the country.

2. Under Section 4(1) AND 4(2) OF THE NATIONAL REGISTRATION ACT-1973, it is envisaged to establish Population Registers for Pakistan by administrative units. These registers are built-up from a base consisting of the inhabitants of an area, augmented continuously by current information on the fact of birth, death, adoption, legitimation, marriage, divorce, change of occupation, change of name and change of residence. They are thus the result of record linkage in which notification of certain events, recorded originally in separate files are automatically and continuously entered into a central file on a current basis throughout the lifetime of an individual. To assist in locating the records of a particular person or household or family in a register, indexes are provided. The entire system of files and indexes maintained in the country is called "Population Register".

3. To keep the population registers alive and current, it is essential that additions due to births and immigration,

deletions due to deaths and emigration; and changes in personal characteristics like occupation, education, marital status and residence, etc. of the registered persons are incorporated regularly in them. The information contained in the registers, otherwise, becomes static and outdated within a few years after their establishment. As such, the population registers would not serve the purpose of presenting an up-to-date and current picture. It is obvious that a person can be entered in a population register either at birth on production of a birth certificate or on acquiring citizenship. The population registers, which, when established and used for identification of nationals of a country, would help to segregate the foreign nationals present in the country at a particular time. This control enables the Government to provide general security in the country which is plagued with the presence of aliens in the form of refugees and infiltrators at the time of wars and political upheavals.

Organizational Set-up:

4. Besides the Headquarters' Office at Islamabad, five Regional Registration Offices are in operation to supervise the working of 83 District and 147 Sub-Divisional Registration Offices established in the entire country. The staff strength comprises of 4616 officials/supervisory level.

Scope and Coverage:

5. The National Registration Act covers whole of Pakistan and is applicable to all citizens of Pakistan whether residing in or outside the country. For smooth functioning of the operation the country has been divided into 278 zones, each comprising of one or more administrative units depending on population. However, there are a few instances where administrative units having very large population, have been split up into two or more zones. Zones do have direct correspondence with administrative units at the District level.

Functions of the Directorate General of Registration:

6. The functions of the Directorate General of Registration, envisaged under the National Registration Act., 1973 are given below:-

- i) To register citizens of Pakistan as required under the National Registration Act for establishing authentic population registers.
- ii) To issue identity cards to persons of age 18 years and above as required under Section-5 of National Registration Act for the purpose indicated under Section-8 of the said Act.
- iii) To issue identity cards under Section-5 of the National Registration Act to persons attaining the age of 18 years after initial registration.
- iv) To issue duplicate or revised identity cards due to various genuine reasons.
- v) To register births and deaths in cooperation and collaboration with the provincial Government to keep the information about registered citizens current.
- vi) To check identity cards after initial coverage and update registration data periodically by incorporating changes in individual characteristics such as marital status, level of education, residence and by insertion of births and deletion of deaths as required under Section-6 of the National Registration Act.
- vii) Storage of information about every individual on the basis of registration forms and retrieval thereof.
- viii) Preparation of population registers by village in rural areas and by ward in urban areas.
- ix) Identification of persons who attain the age of 18 during a calendar year for reminding them to obtain

identity cards.

- x) Updating of individuals' information on the basis of changes communicated to District Registration offices including insertion/deletion of individuals due to births/deaths and migration.
- xi) Production of various statistical tables required from time to time.

7. The National Registration System of Pakistan heavily depends on the Civil Registration System whose foremost objective is to provide complete documentation on events of births, deaths, marriages and divorces, which taken together reflect changes in family composition. The registration of vital events determines the civil status of citizens and defines relationship among individuals organized within families and households and their relationship with the state. It, therefore, becomes imperative to examine the Civil Registration System of Pakistan.

Review of The Civil Registration System In Pakistan.

8. System At The Time of Independence: After creation of Pakistan the registration of births and deaths continued to be registered under various pre-1947 Acts and Rules till the promulgation of the Basic Democracies order 1959. Under the arrangement, in rural areas, the village chowkidar was responsible to keep two registers, one each for recording births and deaths. Particulars of every birth and death were got recorded in the relevant register by the chowkidar. The Headman of the village was also responsible to ensure that each birth/death, occurred in his area, has been entered in the respective registers. These registers were regularly taken by the Chowkidar to the Police Station on his usual weekly/fortnightly visits. The Head Clerk of Police Station registered these events for all the village under the jurisdiction of Police Station in separate registers. The copies of these entries called birth/death statement were

forwarded to the District Health Officer, through the Superintendent of police, for onward transmission to the Regional Health Directorate for coordination & compilation and further submission to the Ministry of Health for preparation of reports at nation level. In the urban areas, the head of household and Mid-Wife/Nurse/Doctor, present at the time of occurrence of birth/death, were responsible to report the event to the Municipal Committee for registration. The registration of births and deaths in the province of Sind was done by the Revenue Officials.

9. Registration of Births and Deaths Under the Basic Democracies order, 1959 & Municipal Ordinance, 1960: The legislation of registration of vital events was replaced by the Basic Democracies order, 1959 and Municipal Administration Ordinance, 1960, under which registration of vital events was made compulsory and uniform in both urban and rural areas. Under these orders the heads of the households were made responsible to get births & deaths registered with the Union Councils/Municipal Committees. The flow of information continued to be the same.

10. The Basic Democracies order, 1959 and the Municipal Administration Ordinance, 1960 were repealed in 1970 and new Local Government Acts were promulgated. Under these Acts, the registration of births and deaths in urban areas was to be carried out by the Municipal Corporations/Committees and in rural areas by the Halqa Councils. A halqa council comprised of few villages and its population varied from 15,000 to 20,000.

11. Registration of Marriages and Divorces: The Registration of Muslim Marriages is carried out under the Muslim Family Laws ordinance, 1961 by the Nikah Registrar appointed by the Local Councils both in urban and rural areas. In urban areas, the Registrar reports marriages to the office of the Municipal Corporation/Municipal Committee/Town Committee and in rural areas, to the Secretary, Union Council. Divorces are reported

to the Union Council's office in rural areas and Municipal Corporation/Municipal Committee/Town Committee in urban areas. The registration of Non-Muslim marriages is done under a set of different Acts and the Deputy Commissioner is the Registrar for his district under these Acts. However, no arrangements exist for compilation of statistics from these records.

12. Present System of Registration of Births and Deaths: The local Government Acts, 1970 were replaced during the year 1979 by Local Government Ordinances promulgated by the respective provincial Government. Under these ordinances the registration of births & deaths in the urban areas is compulsory whereas it is not so in case of the rural areas. However, the procedures prescribed under Basic Democracies order 1959 and Municipal Administration Ordinance 1960 are being followed for registration of births and deaths.

13. Status of The Existing Civil Registration System: The present system is deficient with regard to both scope and coverage and far from satisfactory. Some of the factors that inhibit efficiency of the system are as follows:-

- i) Under the constitution, the registration of vital events is a provincial subject and the provincial/local Government are not keen enough to implement the system, although the provisions of law are quite clear. The agencies responsible to execute the system have their own priorities and don't assign due importance to it. Lack of funds is the usual excuse offered by the Provincial/Local Governments.
- ii) The administrative structures developed for registration of vital events is defective. There is no proper control and supervision over the basic units like Union Council in case of rural areas and Municipal Corporations/Committees, Town Committees and Cantonments responsible for registration of births and deaths in urban areas. Though separate

staff is available with the urban basic units but no staff exclusively for registration of vital events has been provided to rural, basic units i.e. Union Councils.

- iii) There is no coordination between the Local Government Department (agency for vital events registration) and the Health Department (agency for compiling vital statistics).
- iv) The importance of registration of vital events is not realized because of the illiteracy of the people and indifferent attitude of registration officials. Therefore, the coverage of the events is poor.
- v) Vital events are not indexed at the time of their registration to facilitate their search at a later date.
- vi) The information regarding registration of births and deaths, whatever the collection is made, is not being forwarded to Health Department, for compilation of vital statistics regularly and in time. Consequently, the Director General of Health has not been able to provide vital statistics at the Federal level.

14. Registration of Vital Events Under The National Registration Act And Efforts Made By The Directorate General of Registration To Improve The System: The

National Registration Act 1973 was introduced to establish a National Registration system commonly known as "Continuous Population Register" to achieve the aims and objectives already mentioned earlier. Various clauses of the National Registration Act pertaining to registration of individuals, vital events and issuance of identity cards are reproduced below to indicate the responsibilities of the Directorate General of Registration:-

Section-4: Registration of Citizens.

1. Within such time as the Federal Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify in this behalf.
 - a. every citizen in or out of Pakistan who has attained the age of eighteen years shall get himself; and
 - b. a parent or guardian of every citizen who has not attained that age shall get such citizen; registered in accordance with the provisions of this Act.
2. An application for registration shall be made in such form and to such authority as may be prescribed.

Section-5: Identity cards.

1. The Director General shall cause to be issued to every citizen who has attained the age of eighteen years and get himself registered under Section 4, a card in the prescribed form, hereinafter referred to as the identity card.
2. Every person to whom an identity card is issued shall be responsible for its safe custody and for maintaining it in proper shape.

Section-7: Surrender of Identity Card.

1. In case of the death of any holder of an identity card, his identity card shall be surrendered or given up to the District Registrar by the Spouse, heir or next of kin as the case may be, of such holder within sixty days of such death.
2. The holder of an identity card who ceases to be a citizen shall surrender or give up his identity card to the District Registrar within sixty days of his ceasing to be a citizen.

It is obvious that no definite clause is included for reporting the birth of a child but under Section-4(1)(b) a

parent or guardian is required to register it, otherwise on attaining the age of 18 years, it will be difficult for such a child to obtain his identity card as prescribed under Section-5 of the Act. As regards deaths, the reporting of deaths of persons of age 18 years & above is made compulsory under Section-7(1). The identity card of the deceased is required to be surrendered by the spouse or his/her next of kin within sixty days of death but no definite provision exists in the Act for reporting deaths of persons below 18 years of age. To remove these lacunae and keeping in view the constitutional requirement of vital events registration, Section 4(3) has been added to obtain the information regarding newly born citizen and the death of a citizen who has not attained the age of 18 years from the authorities prescribed under the Constitution namely the Provincial Governments.

15. The Cabinet in its meeting held on 20th December, 1972 while approving the National Registration Scheme decided that the Provincial Governments should be asked to implement the provisions of law relating to the registration of births and deaths and observed as follows:-

"The existing system of registration of births and deaths is far from satisfactory. It was explained that while the law on the subject was quite clear, the Provincial Governments were not enforcing it vigorously".

Consequently, the Provincial Governments were requested to implement the provisions of law relating to the registration of births and deaths and to improve its coverage. To facilitate the Provincial/Local Governments in maintaining uniformity in registration forms, a standard form for recording births/deaths was designed by Directorate General of Registration and forwarded to them for adoption. The registration units, however, are not particular to fill in all the items such as Citizen Code Numbers of parents and the deceased persons that are important for Directorate General of

Registration. Also the working arrangements have been developed between the local bodies and the respective District Registration Offices in consultation with the respective Provincial Governments for the exchange of data on individual birth/death for the updation of population registers. The Provincial Governments issued necessary instructions to District Authorities but unfortunately the information is not being supplied to the District Registration Offices regularly by the respective Local Bodies.

16. Again on receipt of President's directive in this behalf in 1980 the Provincial Governments issued fresh instructions to Secretaries, Local Governments to enforce the provisions of law vigorously and supply a copy of their record to the respective District Registration Office. In order to establish a close liaison and effective cooperation between District Registration Offices and various Local Bodies, the Provincial and District Registration Committees were constituted at each Province and District to thrash out the problems connected with vital events registration and suggest ways and means to improve the present system. The Director General of Health was also requested to direct the Provincial Health Secretaries to provide the information on births/deaths occurring in the hospitals/dispensaries to District Registration Offices but with no success.

17. In spite of all these efforts and the recommendations at national and international forum, the registration of births and deaths is still deficient both with respect to their completeness and geographic coverage. The number of local bodies reporting births and deaths to the District Registration Offices is insignificant. The reported events have also shown a decline in the same fashion. The condition of registration of vital events is deteriorating which may nullify the efforts already put in by the Directorate General of Registration in connection with the establishment of the National Registration System in the country.

Volume of Work To Be Handled:

18. The current estimated population of Pakistan is about 122 million. All of them have to be brought to the population registers. Of the total population, 49.91% are persons of age 18 and above and eligible to possess identity cards. Besides them, the following annual transactions have to be dealt with:-

- i) Registration of about 5 million births @ 42 per 1,000.
- ii) Registration of 1.34 million deaths @ 11 per 1,000.
- iii) Recording of changes in particulars of about 16 million persons.
- iv) Issue of 1.8 million identity cards to persons who attain the age of 18.
- v) Issue of about one million duplicate/revised identity cards.

Operational Plans:

19. The national registration system is a continuous process as people are being born, dying and attaining the age of 18 years every day. It is an individualized data system in which continuous recording of changes in selected items of information (such as name, father/husband's name, date of birth, marital status, level of education, present & permanent addresses, religion, mark of identification, signatures and thumb impressions of persons of 18 & above) pertaining to each member of the population is carried out in such a way that it opens possibility of obtaining up-to-date information regarding population size and its characteristics at desired time intervals. Thus the National Registration System is based on an inventory of the citizens of an area being continuously updated by current information on births, deaths, migration, marriages, divorces etc. The system, therefore, hinges the following demographic equation:-

Current population=Population at+(Births-Deaths+Migration)
 at 'Y' point of 'X' point of taken place between 'x' &
 time time 'Y' points of time.

20. The operation of the scheme was, therefore, divided into three phases and each phase overlapping the other i.e. phase-II would be started before the completion of phase-I. This has been done to utilize the limited staff resources effectively by diverting some proportion of staff resources from one phase to another on reduction of work-load of previous phase. The operation of the scheme was thus phased out in the following manner:-

Phase-I: Registration of nearly 122 million nationals of Pakistan living in each registration zone and to issue identity cards to nearly 61 million persons of age 18 years and above.

Phase-II: Computerization of National Registration Scheme to store and retrieve the individual information of registered persons and to classify the individual information by various administrative units falling under each registration zone to establish Population Registers according to these units.

Phase-III: To update the individual information periodically contained in Population Registers of each administrative unit by inserting births and deleting deaths as well as by incorporating other changes in individuals' characteristics like marital status, level of education and change of residence etc.

The purpose of phase-I is to establish Population Registers by various administrative units within each district and

simultaneously issue identity cards to persons of age 18 years and above. These population registers will be created for each ward in urban areas and by Mauza/Deh/village in case of rural areas. The purpose of phase-II is to establish and maintain population registers in this manner by using the computer because the individual information of citizens living in each registration zone is so voluminous that it is very difficult to classify it manually into various primary administrative units. The objective of phase-III is to keep population registers so created, current and alive by inserting births and deleting deaths as well as by incorporating other changes in individuals' characteristics periodically after the initial coverage.

21. These periodically updated population registers when established will be utilized not only to issue identity cards to the Pakistani Nationals who will attain the age of 18 years in future but will also assist to check the presence of foreign nationals in the country posing threat to the security of the country as well as for apprehension of the criminals. Moreover such population Registers will also prevent Pakistani citizens from obtaining more than one identity cards/passports. Also necessary statistics regarding size of population and its distribution, by age & sex, population growth rate and number of eligible voters can be derived from these Population Registers whenever required.

Progress of work:

22. Of 122 million citizens, only about 89.16 million persons could be brought to the books. The main reason of this low coverage are (i)deficient system of recording births and (ii) low level of literacy.

23. About 1.8 million persons attain the age of 18 every year, so at no point of time it can be said that 100% eligible persons have obtained their national identity cards. However, in our case about 11% of the eligible persons have not yet obtained their national identity cards. About half of the

estimated country's current population, (61 million) are persons of age 18 and above who are required under the National Registration Act to obtain their National Identity Cards. However, as of Sept. 30, 1993, 54.8 million identity cards have been issued and about 6.2 million persons have not come forward to obtain their identity cards, although there have been persuasion from the Government, (i) four general elections have been held in the country during the last 8 years in which production of national identity cards was mandatory for getting ballot paper at the time of polling, and (ii) a person is punishable under the law for rigorous imprisonment of 3 months or a fine upto Rs.1000/- or both, if he/she does not obtain his/her identity card within 90 days of attaining the age of 18. However, this provision of law has never been invoked due to low literacy rate. The reasons for showing lack of interest can be attributed to:-

- a) Low level of literacy.
- b) Persons on attaining the age of 18 do not come forward to obtain their identity cards voluntarily and apply only when have compelling requirements to produce their national identity cards.
- c) Females living in rural areas do not apply for their national identity cards.
- d) Poor people in rural and far flung areas, who do not own any property and have no intention to come to urban areas for seeking employment, do not obtain their identity cards.

Problems Encountered:

24. Like any other voluminous application, the Directorate General of Registration, right from its inception, started facing the following problems:-

- i) Lack of interest shown by the citizens for getting:-
 - themselves registered and obtaining their national identity cards without any compelling

demand.

- their dependents registered.
 - events of births/deaths registered.
- ii) The registration of births/deaths, under the constitution, is the responsibility of the Local Governments. This system was, to a certain extent, on the ground before the country came into being in 1947. However, it started deteriorating with the passage of time because there have been structural changes purely on political grounds. The National Registration System heavily depends on the Local Governments for reporting of births and deaths.
- iii) The in-herited weakness of not preparing population registers (an inventory of citizens) of an area, before issuing of identity cards, started showing its effects such as:-
- a) Obtaining of more than one identity cards by bonafide Pakistani to cater for his/her nefarious designs.
 - b) Some of the non-nationals (about 4 million non-nationals such as Indians, Afghanis, Bangladeshis, Sri-Lankans, Burmese, etc. are believed to be present in the country) succeeded in obtaining national identity cards.
 - c) Forgery in genuinely issued national identity cards due to the simple structure of the card.
 - d) Counterfeiting of the card.
- iv) Handling of huge and voluminous record of citizens manually.

Measures Adopted:

25. The Directorate General of Registration has been alive to the problems/difficulties that are being faced in implementing the National Registration System. In view of its

volume, the Government decided to (i) establish computerized data base comprising all citizens and (ii) introduce automation right from the receipt of application form for registration of citizens, births, deaths, change in marital status etc. to the delivery of identity card to an applicant. Therefore, a Pilot Project "Automation of Registration Scheme" has been launched in the districts of Rawalpindi & Islamabad with a cost of Rs.64 million with a view:-

- i) To establish population registers by villages in rural areas and by wards in urban areas.
- ii) To register births and deaths by deploying DGR's own manpower because the Provincial Governments expressed their inability for spending additional funds for bringing refinement in the registration system.
- iii) Recording of migration.
- iv) Preventing a bonafide Pakistani from obtaining more than one identity cards.
- v) Making difficult for non-nationals in obtaining of national identity cards because after establishment of data base a person will be entered into the data base only at the time of birth to already registered person or on production of citizenship certificate.
- vi) Reducing the chances of forgery in the computerized identity cards to the minimum because photographs, thumb impressions and signatures are printed by the computer.
- vii) Making counterfeiting of the card difficult by introducing security features in the card.

26. With the consent of the Provincial Governments, the Directorate General of Registration has developed its own system for registering births/deaths at the Union Council level. Thus the population registers shall remain current and

alive to yield statistical reports for any administrative unit. Persons on attaining the age of 18 years are identified by the computer and requested to apply for their National Identity Cards.

27. Awareness among masses is being created through publicity to get births & deaths occurring in their households registered with concerned District Registration Offices.

28. In view of the measures adopted it is expected that the coverage of vital events will definitely improve in Rawalpindi and Islamabad Districts. On completion of the Pilot Project which is likely to be completed by December, 1994 the computerized system will be extended to the entire country in a phased programme of five years after evaluating the pilot project.
