



The trend of rural migration will continue due to poor public services offered to far-flung villages.

Roughly 7.5 million out of the 23 million rural population are living below the poverty line (less than \$2 per day), director general of the Rural and Urban Municipalities Organization's Office for Rural Studies Planning stated.

In an interview with ISNA, Ghazanfar Akbari cited World Bank statistics based on which 21 percent of Iranians live in poverty, of whom 11.8 percent are rural dwellers and the remaining 8.9 percent are residents of cities.

About income and expense disparities in urban and rural districts, the official

those living in rural districts in 1995.

The official regretted that 19.3 percent of villages were vacant in 1966; the figure reached 45.8 percent in 1996.

Akbari predicted that the trend of rural migration would continue due to poor public services offered to far-flung villages.

Only about 10 percent of rural houses are engineer-constructed and able to resist earthquakes, he pointed out.

Over 51 percent of villagers live in more-than-20-year-old buildings, the official unveiled, urging for measures to reinforce rural infrastructure.

7.5m Earn Less Than \$2 a Day

recalled that a city dweller earned four times more than a villager in 1976.

He stressed that the revenue gap between two groups has narrowed--with the urban dwellers earning twice as much--thanks to policies adopted by post-revolution governments.

According to Akbari, per capita share of a city inhabitant from subsidies was 2.7 higher than a villager's share in 1976.

He expanded that the city dwellers received 4.3 times more subsidies than

Akbari further noted that 9,957 villages had trembled by quakes over the past decade.

He believes that rural houses should be demolished and built anew to resist quakes. It is impossible to buttress the existing ones, the official stressed.

According to Akbari, even rural areas with less than 20 households have been connected to the grid.

The official highlighted that there is a long way ahead before high living standards can be obtained in villages.

Parking Attendant Scheme To Expand

The number of spaces under the parking attendant scheme along Tehran's streets will increase to 50,000 from the present 11,000 during the next Iranian year (starting March 21), ISNA reported.

Managing director of Tehran Municipality's Traffic and Transport Organization, Seyyed Jafar Hashemi Tashakkori, added that the number of public parking spaces is limited and therefore motorists should be made to leave those spots after a specified time.

In order for that to happen, parking attendants are assigned to different streets, selling vouchers to drivers who park their cars in the area.

"The scheme however should not slow down traffic," he opined.

"Most of the capacity of multi-story car parks is unfortunately vacant, despite the huge capital expended on their construction," he added.

Hashemi Tashakkori said the plan would continue in cooperation with the Traffic Police to ensure the parking spaces are distributed justly among drivers.

He added the attendants would also help establish order on streets, and prevent driving offenses such as double parking.

There are currently 11,000 parking spaces controlled by attendants in Tehran.

Drivers are not allowed to park their cars on certain streets for longer than two hours.

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Work-Related Accidents Rise

Job-related injuries escalated to 9,317 in the first half of the current year (to end March 20) compared to the same period of last year, indicating a 6.42 percent increase.

Director general of Social Security Organization of Iran for statistics and

socioeconomic calculations also said that the highest number of the incidents (28.27 percent) were leg and foot injuries, while the lowest figure pertained to brain injuries with 0.29 percent, Fars news agency reported.

Mohammad Qaragozlu

explained that 2,101 cases involved hands and 2,487 cases fingers, accounting for 49.2 percent of the incidents altogether.

Also male workers comprised 98.45 percent of the injured while women accounted for 1.55 percent. Over 75 percent of those

injured were married.

Stating that the highest number of injuries occurred in the 25-29 age group, he went on, "An investigation into the causes of workplace incidents indicates that close to 52 percent of total job-related injuries were resulted by carelessness and insufficient experience; 8.5 percent were due to lack of protective shields and 4.5 percent to malfunctioned devices.

Pointing out that over 91 percent of incidents occurred in the daytime and only 9 percent took place at night, he said work-related accidents have declined in the provinces of West Azarbaijan, Tehran, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, North, South and Razavi Khorasan, Khuzestan, Semnan, Gilan, Mazandaran and Hormuzgan during the first half of the current year over figures from last year. In contrast, 20 other provinces have witnessed a rise.

He said the decline did not necessarily signify an improvement in safety standards. "Rather, it must have been partially induced by closure of certain industrial units. More detailed studies into the causes are required."

As per the law, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is in charge of ensuring that safety standards are observed in workshops and factories.

A probe into the conditions of 9,317 injured workers revealed that over 91.33 percent of them fully recovered; 8.2 percent acquired minor and major disabilities; and about 0.5 percent lost their lives.

Tehran Drivers Get Big Minuses

Surveys indicate that each motorist in Tehran commits at least 100 driving offenses per day, IRNA quoted director general of Traffic Technical and Engineering Office of Police as saying.

Amir Aflatoun Nazmi

mentioned some of offenses as failing to drive between lanes, not keeping the authorized distance from other vehicles, not using mirrors and turn signal indicators, and applying sudden brakes.

"Safe driving patterns should be taught in driv-

ing books," he proposed. "Correct driving styles can as well help abate air pollution to a large extent."

Turning to government plans to phase out two million dilapidated cars and two million motorcycles by the end of the

Fourth Development Plan (2005-2010), the official expressed regret that so far the program had not been successful.

"We will not succeed to junk rundown cars unless we are equipped with high-tech cannibalization centers," he concluded.

Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.



A local man makes handicrafts in Sabzevar, Khorasan Razavi province

China Troubled by Ageing Population

China's rapidly growing elderly population could surge as high as 430 million by 2051, when almost one in three citizens would be 60 or over, Xinhua news agency said.

The ageing population, now growing by three million a year from the current 143 million, posed a grave challenge for the already strained state social welfare and pension systems, it said.

"China is facing surging demand from the elderly population in terms of social welfare and medical services," Li Bengong, an official with the China National Committee on Ageing,

was quoted as saying.

"Welfare services cannot match the rise in demand."

People retiring in China today do not enjoy the cradle-to-grave welfare provided to previous generations which has been replaced with a mixture of government and corporate pension plans experts say are riddled with problems.

Some 85 million elderly people in rural areas, or 65 percent of China's total ageing population, "do not benefit from the country's social welfare system, pensions and adequate medical care," Xinhua said.

China's social welfare expenditures hit 350.2

billion yuan (\$43.5 billion) in 2004, up 65.5 percent from 2000, it said.

Last March, Chinese media reported the pension system was facing a shortfall of more than \$300 billion.

Defaulting on pension payments and lack of medical coverage are two key flash points for unrest, sparking protests by retirees across the country.

Communist Party leaders are expected to move toward improving social services after years of focusing on speeding up economic growth in the 11th Five Year Plan, the new roadmap for the world's top five economy.

Firefighters on Call For Yearend Festival



Firefighters will have a 24-hour presence in the capital's major squares and crowded spots from March 11 to April 4 to act promptly in case of any incidents.

pickup trucks would be on alert in different parts of the capital.

Samiei gave assurances

that the firefighters would also have a continued presence in Tehran entrances and exits as

well as parks near the capital during Norouz holidays.

Iranians have for centuries celebrated the last Wednesday of the year. They gather to celebrate what is known in Persian culture as the feast of Wednesday. On this night, they jump over bonfires.

The traditional ceremonies mark the departure of winter and the approach of spring. Ancient Iranians believed that good spirits observe from heaven what is happening on the earth on that particular day.

In recent years, however, the celebrations have been marked by the unfettered use of unsafe and mainly homemade firecrackers and explosives, resulting in bitter incidents, largely involving youngsters.

Radiologists' Concerns Recounted

By Farzaneh Shokri

told Iran Daily that most physicians and technicians involved in the field are exposed to ionizing radiation which has dangerous side effects.

He termed as a 'disaster' the plummeting number of qualified radiology specialists--a bitter fact which has driven the Health Ministry to authorize non-physicians to establish x-ray and CT scan clinics.

"This is a threat to the field of specialty. It is a source of regret that none of the responsible state organizations bother themselves to follow up the issue," the expert criticized.

He is of the opinion

the annual inflation rate cited by the Central Bank of Iran, Sedaqat criticized.

Turning to medical radiology devices, the official said that the average lifespan of radiological equipment is about seven years.

"The devices must be upgraded after this period, otherwise their maintenance expenses would outweigh the replacement costs," the expert mentioned.

He urged the officials with the Health Ministry, High Insurance Council and Medical Registration Board to revise the fees assigned for clinical radiologists.

The official warned that unless prompt action is taken, the profession would teeter toward deterioration.