

Iran lawmakers approve birth-control surgeries ban (Update)

June 24 2014, by Nasser Karimi

Iranian lawmakers approved a bill Tuesday criminalizing birth-control surgeries amid a drop in the country's population, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

The agency said 106 lawmakers out of 207 voted for the bill, which would imprison those convicted of performing vasectomies and tubal ligations for two to five years. Opponent of the bill warn that it could lead to Iranians seeking underground medical care that could be dangerous.

The bill requires more debate on its details and ratification by a constitutional watchdog before becoming law.

Last year, some 100,000 people underwent birth-control surgery in Iran.

Having successfully curbed birth rates for two decades, Iran now is promoting a baby boom to help make up for its graying population. Last year, parliament approved a bill that allows the government to increase maternity leaves.

Iran's birthrate reached a peak of 3.6 children per couple after its 1979 Islamic Revolution, among the world's highest at the time. By 1990, experts estimated Iran could be home to 140 million people if the rate was left unchecked. To combat the rise, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei endorsed birth control, while then-President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani made controlling the birth rate a part of his

development plans.

Mass-produced condoms reached Iranians, as a month's supply of birth control cost the equivalent of 10 cents in 1992. The birth rate dropped precipitously, now reportedly standing at 1.8 children per couple with a population of some 77 million people. Experts now say that drive might have been too successful, estimating that Iran's population growth could reach zero in the next 20 years if the trend is not reversed.

Officials now say Iran should have a population of 150 million people or more. However, experts say it is difficult to encourage Iranians to have more children in its mismanaged economy, staggered by Western sanctions, 36 percent inflation and high unemployment.

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Citation: Iran lawmakers approve birth-control surgeries ban (Update) (2014, June 24) retrieved 9 May 2024 from

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