

The Business

Chief Editor

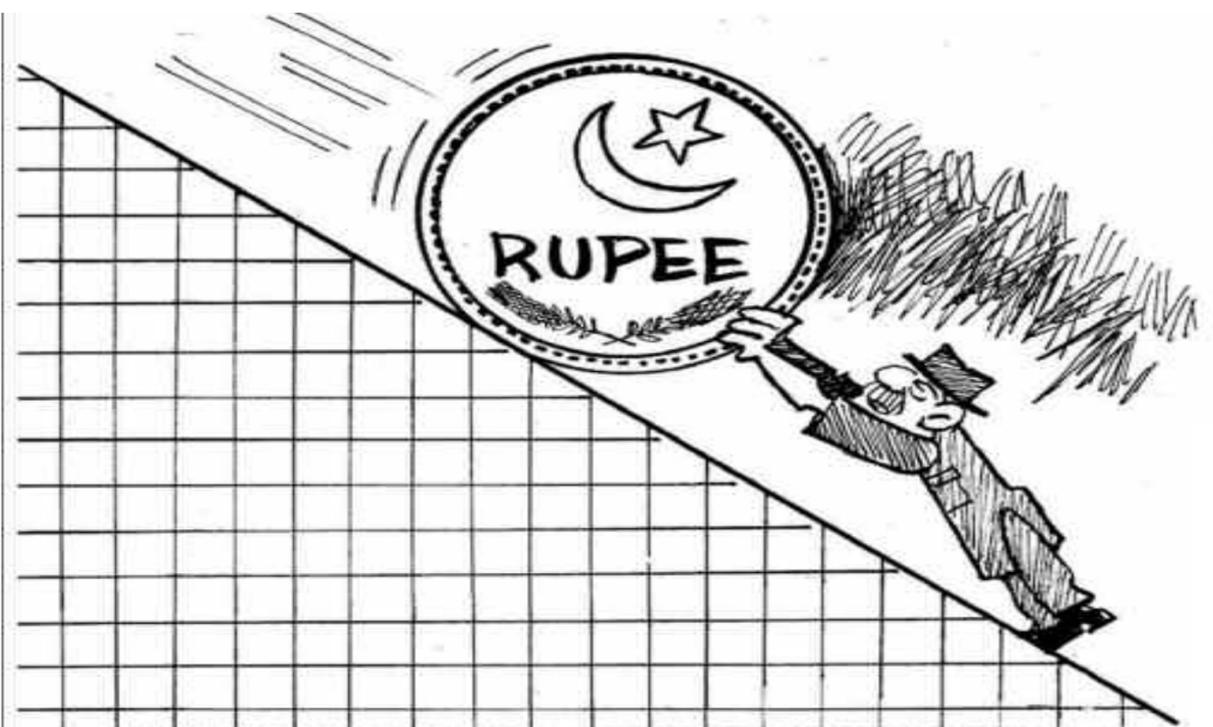
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Infant mortality rate

According to the Pakistan Demographic Survey 2020 (the latest survey) reported the other day, the average IMR — the number of deaths per 1000 live births of children under one year of age — stands at 56 as against 60 in 2018-19 and 62 in 2017-18. If that looks like some progress compare it with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 which seeks to ensure health and well-being for all, the rate should be no more than 12 per 1000 live births. Clearly, this country has a lot of catching up to do. One significant cause of such a high child mortality ratio is inequities between the rural and urban populations. The mortality rate during the survey period was 59 in rural areas and 50 in urban centres. The reasons for this disparity may be different, such as relative lack of education among rural mothers, poor sanitation, poverty, environmental conditions as well as developmental levels in different regions.

The biggest factor of inequity affecting infant health, however, is that whereas neonatal and postnatal care is accessible in cities, basic health facilities in rural areas are either missing or are not properly staffed and provided with sufficient medical supplies and necessary equipment.

A rather intriguing revelation of the survey is that the IMR rate in urban areas for males was 48 and 51 for females. What needs to be done to set things right is suggested by the National Health Vision Pakistan 2016-2025. Among other important recommendations, it calls for proper distribution of health services with an equity-based approach targeting rural areas, urban slums, and other disadvantaged sections of society. Also emphasised is the importance of initiatives aimed at provisions of obstetric and neonatal care at primary health level along the pattern of Integrated Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn & Child Health and Nutrition Programme, Punjab.

Other key findings of the demographic survey show the total fertility rate — average number of children that would be born to a woman during her fertility period was 3.7. The general fertility rate, the number of births in a year per 1000 women of childbearing age, was 124. And the crude birth and death rates — the number of births and deaths in a year per 1000 people — were 27 and 6.7, respectively. A particularly noteworthy finding was that the rate of natural increase, or natural population change calculated by dividing natural increase by 10, was 2. In simple words, the population growth rate is two percent! This amounts to zero growth rate, which is too good to be true.

On a catastrophic path

C J POLYCHRONIOU

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has seen the return of state-on-state warfare on European soil for the first time since the end of the Second World War. The Balkan wars of the 1990s, which stunned Europe and claimed over 200,000 lives, have been attributed, rightly or wrongly, to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the resurgence of old conflicts between ethnic groups.

The question why Putin decided to invade a neighboring country that did not directly provoke Russia will certainly be debated for years to come. Yet, there is little doubt that Nato's eastward expansion since the 1990s lies at the heart of Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. Security, rather than conquering foreign territory, is the primary aim behind Russian actions in Ukraine.

Be that as it may, this is an unjustified act of aggression. The Russian invaders have destroyed entire cities and have perpetrated atrocities that constitute serious war crimes, although it is most unlikely that Putin will be charged with war crimes since the International Criminal Court (ICC) does not conduct trials in absentia.

The war in Ukraine is also having ripple effects throughout the global system: food and fuel prices are soaring, leading to political destabilization in many countries around the world, European attitudes about defense spending have dramatically changed, war mongering in the US has once again reached an all-time, and even China is putting on display its global reach ambitions by delivering missiles to Serbia, a traditional Russian ally.

Last, but not least, the war in Ukraine is pushing climate action aside even though most countries are falling short on their climate goals.

For starters, the Biden administration has opted to resume oil and gas drilling in public lands despite campaign promises to end new oil and gas leasing. This is supposed to be a justified response to high gas prices caused partially from Russia's invasion in Ukraine. However, the fact of the matter is that Biden never meant to carry out his pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, the Biden administration approved more permits for oil and gas drilling in 2021 than Trump did in the first year of

his presidency, according to data analyzed by the Center for Biological Diversity. Biden also promised to restore US credibility on the climate-change front, yet the US Congress approved a mere fraction of the amount that Biden pledged to deliver this year in public finance to developing countries to support climate action.

Also, let's not forget that greenhouse gas emissions rebounded to their highest level in 2021 as economies started recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. And at the end of February, just days after Russia began its assault on Ukraine, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a new scientific report which stressed that many of the impacts of global warming are simply 'irreversible' and already beyond the ability of many people to cope.

Germany, which is Europe's largest economy, announced soon after the start of the Russian invasion that it would build two liquefied natural gas terminals as part of an effort to replace Russian gas with fossil fuels from elsewhere. This is an investment in fossil fuels, so it's hard to see how it can be reconciled with the country's aim to become carbon neutral by 2045.

Greece, a country facing severe climate change threats, is also boosting gas exploration efforts in order to reduce reliance on Russian energy. The move has already drawn heavy criticism from environmentalists. However, with the country sitting on possibly more than 600 billion cubic meters of natural gas, environmental concerns are surely going to take a back seat.

As further evidence of the short-term thinking that prevails in today's world, the war in Ukraine has renewed interest in nuclear energy despite the dangers associated with nuclear power plants. So what if nuclear power is also a far more expensive form of generation than solar or onshore wind, as UMass-Amherst economist Robert Pollin pointed out in a recent essay of his that appeared in Dollars & Sense.

In sum, the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises the question, again, why the world fails repeatedly to set its priorities in the right order. At a critical juncture in history, when cooperation and solidarity are most urgently needed in order to address the greatest threat confronting global civilization, namely

global warming, we see that short-termism is indeed a defining feature of contemporary capitalism, that the pursuit of state power and hegemonic ambitions remain unchangeable, that profiteering at public expense continues unabated, and that the primitive instinct for waging war is still at work in the 21st century.

Mind you, it isn't as if average citizens are unconcerned about the state of our world. Over 90 percent of European Union citizens regard climate change as a serious issue, while a staggering 94 percent of them say that protecting the environment is important to them. Across Europe, climate change was regarded the top-most perceived threat even at a time when majorities in other parts of the world saw the spread of infectious disease as posing the greatest threat to their countries.

True, the situation is quite different in the US. Only four in 10 US adults are highly worried about the climate crisis. And while Americans approve of action to combat global warming, only 31 percent are in favor of a complete shift away from fossil fuels, according to a Pew Research Center poll.

However, we must not forget that the US is an outlier nation when it comes to climate protection, among other things such as the quality of life and workers' rights. Based on the 2022 Climate Change Performance Index, the top four countries that lead the way in climate protection are Denmark, Sweden, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The United States comes 55th, with very low ratings for greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy.

Indeed, the US is dragging its feet on climate action as powerful vested interests have a disproportionate influence on policy making, the Green Party is irrelevant, and unions are extremely weak to the point of being inconsequential when it comes to forging national policies on sustainable development and workers' rights. Indeed, indicative of how weak organized labor is in the United States, the International Trade Union Confederation has ranked the US among the worse countries for working people.

The highly undemocratic nature of the US political system must figure prominently into any analysis as to why the richest country in the world is lagging on climate change or even why the Biden administration has betrayed its climate pledges.

Imran's perilous politics



SARIA BENAZIR JADOON

Fascism is a 'lie' told by 'bullies'. Ernest Hemingway could not have been more perspicuous. The entire politics of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf can be described in these two words. From one container to another with a brief transit in parliament, the scale and severity of its propaganda and persecution have only intensified.

After losing majority in the National Assembly and having been driven out of power through a constitutional exercise, the disgraced party has embarked on a desperate mission to discredit and defile the country's institutions and denigrate the democratic process. The resultant death of truth, and reduction of politics to a Manichean conflict has put Pakistan on a perilous path. A course-correction is in order and must come sooner than later. To do so, we must first call a spade a spade.

The ruckus in the Punjab Assembly was the latest exhibition of hooliganism that has come to typify political discourse inside and outside legislatures with the emergence of the PTI on the electoral landscape. Chaos is a ladder for fascists and Imran Khan knows how to climb it to power. For three and half years as prime minister, he drew on this spectacle to divert attention from his regime's negligence, repression and malfeasance and perpetuate his hold on power. The transformational change that he promised in 90 days did not even come about in 900 and the swamp he promised to drain got muddier with

the corruption of his cronies.

The 'star team' that it took him 22 years to gather converted every directorate into a circus. Economics got static at chick-onomics and accountability became a pseudonym for a political witch-hunt that was subservient to the emperor's dictates and stopped at his gate. The billions that were supposedly stashed abroad in the infamous Swiss banks never made it home but there were rumours of billions funneled out. Whatever existed as public health infrastructure was demolished. The leader could not be bought but everything else had a price tag including entire provincial governments and bureaucracies. This is beside the point that a commodity as necessary as bread became unaffordable for the vast majority of the poor and when they were crushed by hunger or accidents, the relevant ministers were awarded with a promotion.

Pakistan had the freest media in the world -- yet all dissenting voices were debarred. Rape was endemic -- but what could the PTI do? Men are not robots. The GDP plummeted so did standards of behaviour. Nobody knew the West better than Imran Khan and he was the leader of the Muslim Ummah; despite that, Islamabad faced international isolation without exception.

How does one justify this cleavage between rhetoric and reality? More importantly, how can one return to the electorate with such outstanding achievements? But what if there is no intention to return at all? Khan's performance could be dismissed as dismal, but it belies something far sinister: his formulaic contortion of every pillar of the state to construct the fortress of his power on top, his usurpation of democratic powers to establish a one-party dictatorship and dismantling of rule of law to dismantle the opposition to his rule -- wherever it originates from. The chicanery is astounding: disparage politics to seize political power, collude with institutions' functionaries to chip away at the integrity of the institutions and distort constitutional provisions to subvert the constitution itself. When plans turn into a fiasco, worry not. There is always a 'Khanspiracy' to fall back on.

Following his unceremonious exit from office after having broken records in misgovernment and despotism, the PTI chairman has sought refuge in patriotism and reinforced it with religion. The Goebbels-inspired agitprop depicts

Imran Khan as a victim of 'foreign-sponsored regime change' because he stood up for Islam and against the powers that be; it also enjoins the people to rise against the 'imported' government that has supplanted him. A reversion to reality from the world of alternative reality may be instructive; to begin with, a look into the composition of Khan's cabinet and the sources of his party's funds.

What is also baffling is: why would the enemies of Pakistan want to depose him when he has been the most potent weapon of the state's economic and diplomatic destruction? What honour did he restore to the nation by plunging Pakistan's passport to the fourth-worst in the world? An opposition leader's reference to a proverb is injurious to public pride but did it not hemorrhage when his government borrowed at a rate unprecedented in the country's history, spiraling external debt from 95 to 130 billion dollars in less than four years?

As usual, there is a pattern to this paradox: mislead the nation in the name of the nation, rally people around the flag and brandish a false narrative on national security to undermine the bastion of our national security. Finally, when facts blow up in your face, threaten to blow up the country.

The people of Pakistan must see through the PTI's smokescreen because the man who is presented as a messiah to them is in actuality a false messiah. The lies, hate and violence he is spewing in the name of revolution will devour their children. Khan's democratic rhetoric conceals his undemocratic intent and his anti-corruption campaign is just a shroud for his own corruption. More critically, his patriotism is a ruse to divide the public and conceal the devastation he has caused to Pakistan, his denunciation of critics, all and sundry as 'foreign-sponsored' a ploy to distract from the 'foreign funding' of his own party.

While it is incumbent on the new dispensation to muster all resources at its disposal to address the grievances of the people and steer the country towards stability and prosperity, it is equally obligatory for citizens to tackle the source of instability by doing their bit to rupture the PTI's echo chamber of fiction, factionalism and fanaticism. Holding out against tyranny is a civic responsibility and we cannot afford to exonerate ourselves of it.

The power of the youth

DR JAVAID LAGHARI

Pakistan has a population of 220 million people, which includes 48 million (22 percent) youth between the ages of 18 and 30.

In the 2018 elections, with 100 million registered voters, only half (50 million) exercised their right to vote. Therefore, the number of youth eligible to vote in the next election is roughly equal to the total number of votes cast in the 2018 election. Should the youth decide to exercise their right to vote in larger numbers, they can make a big difference to the outcome of the next election.

In the 2018 elections, the PTI secured 17 million votes, securing the highest number of votes (32 percent) followed by the PML-N at 13 million (24 percent), and the PPP at 7 million (13 percent). All the other parties were far behind. Even the MQM, which usually demonstrates its political muscles, secured only 750k votes (one percent) but managed to gain a proportionately higher number of seats (6) because its vote bank is concentrated in the two largest cities of Sindh.

With the current super-charged political imbroglio, the youth is now much more aware of the political situation. They are participating in jalsas in larger numbers than ever before, and they are more concerned about the future of Pakistan. In addition, the population is growing at a rate of two percent per annum, adding four million youth to the voting age every year. Therefore, just in the last four years, 16 million youth have been added to the voting pool. This is now an energized crowd exercising their right to speak up and participating in ever larger numbers in political rallies. There are no prizes to guess which party or leader the youth are tilted towards and will vote for.

In Pakistan, those who call the shots have not yet realized the power of the youth. These people belong to the Baby Boomers generation (those

born before 1965) while the world today is driven by Gen-Y (millennials) and Gen-Z, who were born in the age of IT. This generation is driving the world today, whether in politics, technology or entrepreneurship.

Many Western democratic countries are now led by young leaders who are millennials: Sebastian Kurz, the chancellor of Austria, is 35 years old; Sanna Marin, the PM of Finland, is 36; Jacinda Ardern, the PM of New Zealand since 2017, who won the hearts of the Muslim World, is only 41 years old. However, let this in no way be equated with the brand of young leaders in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, and other monarchies and dictatorships, who were born with a silver spoon in their mouth and have inherited their positions. They may not have real-life experience of facing or resolving challenges of a free society where people vote on issues, past performance, and credibility. Most young Western leaders have worked their way up and received votes based on their qualifications, credibility and performance. Likewise in the world of entrepreneurship and technology, Jeff Bezos started Amazon when he was only 30 years old and is considered the richest man on earth worth over \$200 billion. Elon Musk started Tesla when he was 33 years old and is worth over \$170 billion.

Beyond the world of entrepreneurship and technology, the disruptive power of social media is influencing how the youth makes decisions. Today it is the world of Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube Influencers that is driving the trend. Vloggers like PewDiePie with over 100 million subscribers on YouTube are influencing the way Gen-Y and Gen-Z think and act. Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson with over 250 million followers on Instagram (more than the combined votes secured by both Biden and Trump) could announce his candidacy for US president.