

Expected demographic developments will change world

By **Shahid Javed Burki**

Profound demographic changes are occurring in many parts of the world that would have a number of unexpected consequences. Demographers now predict that by the latter part of the 21st century, the global population will enter a period of sustained decline for the first time in history. According to one analysis, "The strain of longer lives and low fertility, leading to fewer workers and more retirees, threatened to upend societies and how they are organised — around the notion that a surplus of young people will drive economies and help pay for the old. It may also require a recapitalisation of family and nation. Imagine entire regions where everyone is 70 years or older. Imagine governments laying out huge bonuses for immigrants and mothers with lots of children. Imagine a gig economy filled with grandparents and Super Bowl adds promoting procreation."

The 20th century presented a very different challenge. The global population saw its greatest increase in known history, from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 8 billion in 2000 as life expectancies increased and infant mortality rates declined. In some countries — representing about a third of the population — those growth dynamics are still in play. By the end of the 21st century Nigeria could surpass China in terms of the size of its population. Even in countries long associated with rapid population growth, such as India and Mexico, birthrates are falling towards or are already below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.

The youth are needed to lend a push to the economy by innovating and taking more risks than older people. Immigration can and does help. For reasons of preserving cultural homogeneity, nations in Europe have been inclined to accommodate the growing age-gap. They have been reluctant to bring in young people by admitting immigrants from the nations where the population was young. Africa — parts of which Europe had colonised and basically plundered — was the most obvious source of immigration. However, Europe resisted this for a while until the time that the German government headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel admitted more than a million Syrians who were fleeing the civil war in their country. Their arrival has already significantly affected the German demographic situation, its economy, and politics. The trend is continuing. According to an international team of scientists that published its findings in the highly respected British journal, *The Lancet*, 183 countries and territories — out of 195 — will have fertility rates below the replacement level by 2100.

The Lancet demographic model shows an especially sharp decline for China with its population expected to fall from 1.41 billion in 2020 to about 730 million in 2100. In about four decades, China's population could decline by almost one-half its present size. If that does occur, the population pyramid would get inverted. Instead of a base of young workers supporting a narrower band of retirees, China would have as many 85-year-olds as 18-year-olds.

Some newly developed countries such as South Korea had tried a combination of incentives to persuade parents to have more children. The government spent more than \$180 billion over the past 15 years, encouraging women to have more children but achieved few positive results. The number of 18-year-olds has fallen from 900,000 to 500,000 in 2020 and the decline is continuing. The South Korean experience has been repeated in a number of European countries, in particular in Italy. In a speech in earlier in May at a conference of the developing demographic situation in Italy, Pope Francis said, "The demographic winter was still cold and dark."

International migration is one solution if the countries with rapidly declining populations are able to adjust to the challenges posed by a large number of foreigners moving in from different cultures and with different skin colours. This will happen with the movement of people from the countries that have surplus labour to those that have serious worker shortages. Pakistan belongs to the first category of nations; the Middle East, Europe, North America and China belong to the second. With the exception of China, Pakistanis have moved to countries where workers are needed. Oil exporting countries of the Middle East need workers of all kinds of skills: those that can provide physical labour to those who are highly skilled. Europe has rapidly aging populations. As revealed by the most recent population census conducted in 2020, the United States has also joined the countries with downward pointing demographic trends.

Large-scale immigration can have almost immediate positive consequences. The research done at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) often called the rich nations' club, has shown that the arrival of one million young refugees from the Middle East added 0.3% to the country's GDP growth; this will increase further to 0.5% a year addition in the next decade. However, those wedded to cultural purity are not prepared to pay what they see as the price of letting in more foreigners. Already a right-wing political party, the AfD, has become a major political force in Germany. Perhaps the most telling impact of immigration of people with different skin colours and often of different religious persuasion is on the political system in the US. Donald Trump's unexpected rise in the 2016 presidential contest was based on his antipathy towards non-white people and those who were the followers of Islam. One of his first act in office was to restrict the entry into the US of people from countries with Muslim majorities.

The last census in the US was conducted on April 1, 2020, when it found the country's population was 331.5 million, an increase of only 7.4% in the 10-year period between 2010

and 2020. This was the second slowest rate of increase since the government began taking a census in 1790. The slowest growth rate was in the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression. The slow down this time around is part of a longer-term trend, related to the aging of the country's White population, decreased fertility rates and slow-down in immigration. Going forward, older populations, especially those over the age of 65 will continue to see far higher rates of increase than young ones. The number of those over 65 has increased by 35%. Slowdown in immigration has also played a role. Since 2010, immigration has declined, mostly because of the hostility of the Trump administration to admitting newcomers, especially people of colour. A Pew Research Center analysis shows that over half of the population increase between 1965 and 2015 was due to immigration which added 72 million people. Fertility rate decline was also an important reason for the long-term trend. It was 1.73 well below the 2.1 considered to be the replacement rate. Over the nation's history growth ebbed and surged during wars, economic downturns and immigration waves. But the overall arc has been in the direction of slowdown. It can only be reversed by admitting foreigners into the country. There are many indications that the administration headed by Joe Biden recognises the importance of immigration to keep his country economically and socially vibrant.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 14th, 2021.

**For daily CSS/PMS updated
Materials keep visiting
www.csstimes.pk**

Debating the budget

By **Arifa Noor**

HAVING spent 19 years editing stories in this newspaper or that, I have to confess that the budget 'days' are my least favourite. Come to think of it, reading the paper, during this period, is a close second. Of course, this is mainly due to my illiteracy, or innumeracy, where numbers of any kind are concerned, a fatal flaw if there was one for a sub-editor to have.

Our written-for-experts-coverage doesn't help. The receivables, slippages, surcharges and SROs have been my Waterloo since the day I slipped into a chair in front of the Apple computer in the offices of The News, almost two decades ago.

But I have a feeling I wasn't the only one. Most ordinary readers, aside from the finance ministry bureaucrats, consultants and economics graduates, were just as confused — they just had the luxury to ignore these stories, unlike me.

Over the years, our papers have added a few graphics — just a few — to add a bit of pizzazz to our news pages, though the old-style stories are still there. Television has brought some change to this coverage with its focus on ordinary citizens and the budgeting woes of the ordinary housewife or the single earner with a large family but for the large part it continues to be a jumble of arabs and kharabs being spouted by anchors such as Shahzeb Khanzada (if I ever get reincarnated, I can only hope I return with his grey cells and comfort with numbers) and finance whiz politicians, with nary a pause. But on a more serious note, there has been considerable change too in the recent past. In some ways, the debate on our economy has become more meaningful as we discuss the budget. Indeed, Pakistan is no stranger to IMF programmes and boom-and-bust cycles but rarely before did we discuss this in such great detail and dissected it in such depth.

Consider the 2008 election: in the time leading up to this key election, the then government, helmed by Shaukat Aziz, had artificially propped up the dollar, frozen utility prices and focused on growth through borrowing. Despite Pakistan's relatively warm relations with the US, the incoming PPP-led government had to put in place an adjustment programme similar to the one implemented by the PTI, which too led to high inflation and considerable pain for the people, but somehow the discussion then rarely focused on our toxic policies, and few asked why we begin negotiating with the IMF with nearly each election cycle.

The blame was simply put on the bad, bad, non-democratic government run by a dictator and the rest went to the PPP, whose governance skills, as perceived, are second only to the PTI's. Indeed, for many, the inflation back then was mostly seen as a failure of the PPP.

The PML-N came to power and also went to the IMF, quietly and without much fuss. Perhaps, the only issue seriously highlighted in public debate during these five years was the NFC award passed in 2010 that increased transfers to the provinces, and how debt and borrowing was becoming a serious challenge. This was because of the PML-N which raised this issue, highlighting the need to address it in the long run.

By the time, the PTI took over, politics had become extremely polarised. This coupled with its confusion over going to the IMF led to a heated political debate and perhaps for the first time, there was a wider questioning (and understanding?) of our unsustainable growth and constant dependence on the IMF.

Thanks to prime-time news shows where equally vocal government and opposition figures were compelled to blame each other for the economic mess, a range of technical issues turned into drawing room discussions — the exchange rate, government spending, current account deficit. Indeed, the major contradictions in our state policies (pursued by government after government) became a topic for widespread discussion. For once, even our long-held policy of asking 'friends' to deposit foreign exchange in our bank became headline news, something which earlier was rarely noticed.

The PTI was forced to acknowledge that it was easier to talk about reform than to implement it and how it dumped its earlier 'idealism' to bow at the IFI altar. On the other hand, the PMLN also — quietly — distanced itself from its policy on keeping the dollar stable. Parties, too, have grown, it seems, and are being compelled to think about their problematic economic policies.

Hence, on Friday, when the budget was presented, relatively new questions were being asked — about sustainability, about how we would pay for this 'growth' and how this was different from what the previous government had done. Questions were asked about exports and why the government had projected higher numbers but was falling short, all reflecting the larger awareness about our need to grow exports.

Perhaps, it wasn't just the polarisation or the channels which led to this awareness but also the dire straits we were in and the reluctance of the IMF to write us a cheque without expecting much in return (now that our relations with the US are not as warm as they were in the first decade after 9/11). Perhaps, it was a combination of all. But despite its shortcomings, the debate on the economy and the budget has moved far beyond simply discussing income tax slabs, pensions, subsidies and the inevitable side story on the allocations for the Prime Minister and President House.

But there is more to this growing debate for the polarisation was also there when Musharraf was ruling. It is about three elections, three changes of governments and space for the supporters and critics of all colours to ask questions of the political parties, who are here to stay. If the 2002 government made wrong policies which created problems in the long run, it is no longer around to be questioned, and no one is being forced to confront its mistakes. But the PML-N is, perhaps the PTI will be also (if it makes it to the

opposition benches as a unified force). Do we need further proof that democracy and elections, however flawed, can and do make a difference?

The writer is a journalist.

Published in Dawn, June 15th, 2021

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BUREAUCRACY

New Session for CSS and PMS has been started

SUBJECTS OFFERED ARE:

• All Compulsory	• Political Science
• International Relations	• Gender Studies
• Criminology	• US History
• Indo Pak History	• Psychology
• Sociology	• Punjabi
• Business Administration	• Journalism
Fee Per Month : 6000Rs. (for all subjects)	Duration: 4 months

3 Days free Demo classes

For Registration: Contact 03314599096

IMF programme implementation

By Dr Sajjad Akhtar

With the likely passage of the budget for FY22, the Pakistan economy not only enters the second innings of the PTI government but also the second innings of the IMF programme. Both the signatories to the deal, the IMF and the government, are/or will be helpless in implementing the programme in letter and spirit for the following reasons: a) The timeframe is too short, b) Covid-19 continues to dent its speed of implementation, c) PTI has prematurely entered into election mode, d) The PTI government continues to play T-20 economy match on the front foot, while embroiled in playing a political innings on the back foot, e) the dynamics and outcome (implicit or explicit) of likely negotiations between the IMF and the government in the pre- and post-budget environment. Let me elaborate on each of the above briefly.

a) Historically, experience shows that it is very difficult for Pakistan to implement any deep-rooted structural conditions in 36 months leave alone 18 months or till December'22 it has for the current programme. Yes quantitative targets, like circular debt, debt to GDP ratio, fiscal and current account deficit, will show marginal improvements not because of structural reforms per se but partly due to financial/fiscal engineering and partly due to automatic GDP growth. If the Debt Limitation Act passed in 2005 by the legislature turned out not to be worth the paper on which it was printed the very next year, how can you expect the SBP autonomy bill to be enforced in full as an ordinance or part of the finance bill, when the government is in the election mode? In addition to tariff adjustments, the energy sector requires multifaceted structural reforms linked to administration, cross-cutting subsidies, IPPs contracts, technology up-gradation of distribution system and provincial consensus. It is a tall order for 18 months when Senators, MNAs and MPAs and private lobbies are demanding their pound of flesh for support in the next election and even the political ownership for these adjustments is non-existent.

b) Covid-19 continues to throw a wrench in the smooth sailing of the economy. With the 3rd wave almost as bad as the 1st wave, the possibilities of new mini waves cannot be totally ruled out, with upcoming Eid-ul-Azha, Muharram and political rallies. Hopefully, the future waves will be less severe and short due to positive marginal effect of on-going vaccination drive. There are more minuses attached to Covid-19 but some pluses are in terms of more sympathetic views of multilateral donors including IMF, more grants/soft-term loans, less foreign exchange expenditure on travel (also by khepees) and more 'helicopter money' in the form of sectoral tax exemptions, subsidies, packages and planned second-round Ehsaas cash support.

c) In view of the declining popularity of PTI as evident from poor performance in the bye-elections, it has pre-maturely entered the election cycle in a desperate survival mode, earlier than by the governments in previous elections cycles. It has also taken a bigger risk than previous governments as this cycle overlaps with the Part II of the IMF programme. Its' desperation to win the next elections even by a wider margin can be witnessed from unceremonious exit of Dr Hafeez Shaikh, whose presence was proving a political liability and undertaking another round of revolving chairs in the cabinet. How to balance the two goals in terms of desire to win a landslide and meeting quantitative (forget the structural part) IMF targets will remain a challenge for the PTI.

d) Entry of new consumption driven growth-oriented populist finance minister, sitting smugly over more than expected foreign reserves (debt-driven and partly thanks to the negotiating skills of ex-finance minister with multilaterals), rising exports and now unexpectedly higher GDP growth. The government is no mood to withdraw any of the freebies it bestowed in the name of Covid-19 and maybe add few more in the upcoming budget. The new growth figures, even abstracting from manna from heaven agriculture growth and its authenticity, have strengthened government's belief that growth (irrespective of its quality and composition) will only take place with a plethora of incentives, exemptions and handouts ranging from individuals to sectors. The government is also hoping to finance the two-year-long election mode, with automatic increase in revenues from higher imports and GDP. How the tax base with POS technology can be expanded to the unorganized retail level when government is benefiting from consumption-led boom (growth in credit card borrowing, automobiles, cement, mobile telephones and wealth creation strategy) in election mode is beyond comprehension? Interestingly, the growth drivers are very similar to the ones cited by the previous governments to advertise their performance. Moreover, to speculate that the growth in exports is sustainable even close to double digits, one needs to empirically demonstrate that the last 12 months' export growth was through 'trade creation' rather than 'trade diversion'. If the latter is the case, the euphoria over the growth in exports will be short-lived once the pandemic disappears unless it is standing on competitive costs structure (hopefully not hostage to depreciated currency) and productivity gains.

e) Whether the IMF will renegotiate the programme implicitly or explicitly and/or partially or go for its suspension after studying the budget and its public response, depends on a chessboard of moves and possibilities. The recent performance of the economy is one trump card that the government has going into negotiations with the IMF. It will continue to play on the front foot as it is asking for waivers in tariff adjustment and fiscal reforms even before the programme has restarted. In other words it is reluctant to adhere to the signed agreement. Luckily, compliance of the IMF's a priori conditions by the GoP justified its last tranche. As waivers are linked to geopolitics of the USA, Pakistan by requesting for waivers in the upcoming pre-budget discussion meetings, it foresees the reluctance of

the IMF to grant such waivers at each future tranche meeting, given the tough optics it is adopting regarding the use of air base. However, India with an implicit nod from the US (if it is desperate or Pakistan's economy shows sign of weakness) may spearhead a wave of border and internal insecurity for twisting Pakistan's arm after the September'21 withdrawal. From an economic perspective, the IMF has been driven to play on the back foot for the time being and would have to wait patiently until the reserves start declining and consumption-oriented growth party is over.

Published in Business Recorder, 2021

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BUREAUCRACY

New Session for CSS and PMS has been started

SUBJECTS OFFERED ARE:

• All Compulsory	• Political Science
• International Relations	• Gender Studies
• Criminology	• US History
• Indo Pak History	• Psychology
• Sociology	• Punjabi
• Business Administration	• Journalism
Fee Per Month : 6000Rs. (for all subjects)	Duration: 4 months

3 Days free Demo classes

For Registration: Contact 03314599096

The 1991 accord and water management

By **Mehreen Naushad**

May 2021 brings about a fresh set of national security threats for Pakistan. It is at risk of acute water scarcity. The water predicament in Pakistan is aggravated by two primary reasons — climate change and water governance. The recent scare of water scarcity due to slow glacial runoff, and conflict between the provinces over the distribution of the Indus River water is a perfect example of the same. This article explores the challenges to water in Pakistan, in particular the management of water, and legally analyses the Pakistan Water Apportionment Accord 1991.

Of all the provinces, Sindh claims to be at a higher risk of the water crisis. On May 6, 2021, the Sindh Assembly asserted that the province is not receiving its due share of water as per the 1991 accord, and accused Punjab of diverting Sindh's water share to water its own fields. On May 16, 2021, the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) while increasing the water quota for Sindh rejected Sindh's allegation of diverting its share of the water to Punjab. IRSA claimed that the supply of water within a province is the internal affair of that particular province, and as such should not be attributed to the federal government.

Water, in Pakistan, is constitutionally the subject matter of the provinces. Inter-provincial disputes over the distribution of water poses a great challenge for water management. The Pakistan Water Apportionment Accord 1991, although made great strides in resolving the issues of apportionment of water between the provinces, it failed to address the real issue of sharing water shortages caused conflicts between the upper and lower riparian. These conflicts are further exacerbated due to water scarcity caused by climate change, wastage of water due to outdated and poorly maintained water infrastructure for irrigation purposes, and availability of poor-quality water for public consumption, and lack of effective water management and governance.

Previously, water was allocated between the provinces on an ad hoc basis. The Pakistan Water Apportionment Accord 1991 apportioned specific shares of total allocable water to all of the provinces. Since the accord does not define the manner for calculating how much water will be allocated to the provinces, IRSA was established to regulate the implementation of the accord, and to develop operating rules for water allocation. Accordingly, IRSA has established a three-tier process for forecasting the volume of water that will be available to the provinces for the next crop season. Accordingly, the Operating Rules as developed by IRSA identify two thresholds, i.e., the average use of water from 1997-1982 proportions, and the baseline volume of water for allocation of water.

However, these rules are complex and lack clarity. Consequently, the interpretation of the accord is a major source of conflict between the provinces.

The two major water conflicts that exist within Pakistan over the division of water and sharing of water shortages are between Punjab and Sindh, and between Sindh and Balochistan. Sindh as a lower riparian is in discord with Punjab, and Balochistan as a lower riparian of Sindh clashes with it over availability of water. It is evident that despite the country's overall water situation, the upper riparian is at an advantage to take larger share of water in time of shortage and does not acknowledge the rights of the lower riparian in sharing water shortage equitably.

According to Punjab, at the time of the signing of the accord, Pakistan's installed reservoir capacity has decreased since 1991 due to sedimentary buildup. It further argues that the apportioned baseline volume is dependent upon the construction of reservoirs, and as such in case of inflow below the baseline volume should be apportioned in accordance to the proportions of the 1977-1982 period. Whereas, Sindh takes a differing view to that of Punjab's. It claims that the apportionment of water is unequivocal i.e. it is not contingent upon the construction of further reservoirs. Sindh holds that in case the inflow volume falls below the baseline volume, the shortage is to be adjusted 'pro-rata' amongst the provinces, the accord does not introduce different apportionment for shortages.

Furthermore, the Council of Common Interest (CCI) under the Constitution of Pakistan was designated to hear any complaints about water interference. The CCI and the 1991 accord were meant to create a foundation for collective inter-provincial action on water. However, due to various factors including the wide gap between Punjab and the other provinces, the same was not successful.

Accordingly, there is a strong need for collective inter-provincial action to prevent water scarcity. It is imperative that Pakistan ensures equitable distribution of water among the provinces, including Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. This requires an integrated approach beyond the mere construction of more dams such as fully implementing the 1991 accord, reconstituting the CCI or establishing an oversight committee with the authority to settle water disputes, greater allocation of resources for improved water infrastructure and capacity building of water management institutions such as IRSA.

Furthermore, the Operating Rules formulated by IRSA lack clarity and seem to be inconsistent with the 1991 accord. The 1991 accord is inflexible in the sense that it uses the average flow of water during the 1977-1982 period to set the water allocation formula. Furthermore, it also fails to specify the rules for control structures. Hence, it would be useful to improve the operating rules within the framework of the accord.

Inter-provincial disputes on water can be resolved by amending the 1991 accord to ensure that the provinces receive their share of water entitlement, maintain transparency and prevent wastage of water. Furthermore, it is important to that a meticulously calibrated

system is put in place for measuring water inflows, storage and outflow. In addition to this, the measurement system must be audited by an impartial and independent party, and all reports should be made transparent for the public and relevant stakeholders to scrutinise. With respect to dams, the government should explore alternative options to the construction of dams on the Indus River such as water storages both on the Indus basin and outside the Indus basin. In case of constructing a dam on the Indus River, it is pertinent that the government seeks consensus from all relevant stakeholders through policy dialogue.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 15h, 2021.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BUREAUCRACY

New Session for CSS and PMS has been started

SUBJECTS OFFERED ARE:

• All Compulsory	• Political Science
• International Relations	• Gender Studies
• Criminology	• US History
• Indo Pak History	• Psychology
• Sociology	• Punjabi
• Business Administration	• Journalism
Fee Per Month : 6000Rs. (for all subjects)	Duration: 4 months

3 Days free Demo classes

For Registration: Contact 03314599096

The two sides of America's story

By **Dr James J. Zogby**

Speaking at the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa race massacre in which White mobs ravaged a prosperous Black neighbourhood killing as many as 300 Black Americans, President Joseph Biden observed, "We can't just choose to learn what we want to know and not what we should know. We should know the good, the bad, the everything."

The president was addressing the effort by some Republicans who are passing laws designed to eliminate lessons about the role racism has played in shaping our history and our institutions. They want students to learn only a mythic and rosy portrait of American history. This picture simply doesn't match reality. It also doesn't allow us to learn lessons from our legacy of racism.

The point Mr Biden was making is important and can be applied to another area of our history—the way we have dealt with immigration and immigrants.

June is Immigrant Heritage Month, a time to reflect on the American story. It is a complicated one that deserves to be understood with "the good, the bad, the everything," because it is full of contradictions that must be acknowledged and lessons that are still begging to be learned.

On the one hand there is the Statue of Liberty with her beckoning words:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

Millions of individuals from every corner of the globe have responded to this invitation, coming to this country seeking refuge and opportunity. And for many communities, despite facing initial hardships, their American story has been a remarkable one of acceptance and transformation that deserves to be recognized. As Jesse Jackson is fond of saying, America is a patchwork quilt of many hues.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the dark side to our story. The very idea of America was conceived with two original sins: genocide and slavery. From the time the first immigrant/settlers arrived on our shores until the early part of the last century, we engaged in the theft of land from and the brutal extermination of indigenous peoples. And, for centuries, the largest portion of America's wealth was derived from the fruits of slave labour. The continuing legacy of racism has led to further tragic distortions in our economy. Unlike Europe, where new immigrants form the underclass, in America immigrants come to a country with a pre-existing underclass giving them an advantage in economic and social mobility.

But forms of racism and discrimination have also exacted a toll on each new wave of immigrants. In every age, we witnessed oftentimes violent movements of bigots who sought to define America as theirs alone. And so, in turn, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Eastern European, Chinese, Japanese, and others have experienced discrimination, racial stereotyping, and exclusion.

It is important to acknowledge this so that we understand that the contemporary experience of Latino, Asian, African, and Arab immigrants have predicates in our history. At an Immigration Month celebration in Congress a decade ago, the members of Congress who spoke before me proudly noted that we are a nation of immigrants and appropriately decried bigotry against and efforts to exclude some groups of new immigrants. Each, in turn, denounced these behaviours as "not our values" and "not in keeping with our history as a welcoming nation."

When it was my turn to speak, I took issue with some of these comments. Yes, I noted, we are a nation of immigrants. And yes, generations have been inspired by the welcoming poem inscribed on the Lady in the Harbour. But, I reminded them, we are also the nation that, in addition to our deplorable treatment of Blacks and Native Americans, also witnessed "Irish need not apply"; passed the "Asian Exclusion Act"; stole the properties of and interned Japanese Americans; lynched Italian Americans; and persecuted Jews as socialists and subversives. This too is our history, and we must own it.

Both sides of our story, the good and the bad, are true and both must be recognised. If we fail to acknowledge the dark side and the lessons we must learn from it, then we are vulnerable to repeating its sins again.

The writer is the President of Arab American Institute.

**For daily CSS/PMS updated
Materials keep visiting
www.csstimes.pk**

Biden's charm offensive to placate Israel

By **Azhar Azam**

A deep military and economic gap between Israel and Palestine — where former controls the best-equipped army with several hundred nuclear bombs and 14 times more per capita GDP — gives Israel a sweeping authority to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from its southern areas and mow them down in the world's largest "open-air prison".

While the US fidelity to pro-Israel policy reflects "truth-bending grip of authoritarianism" on both countries — the UK's interference to obstruct ICC's investigation into Israel's war crimes in Palestine can be linked with an entrenched Israeli influence in British politics.

In Ontario, the law conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Across Canada, Muslims and other supporters of Palestine are systematically targeted, scholars are denied jobs for speaking on the Palestinian plight and journalists are chastised over questioning lack of Palestinian voices in the media as white nationalism and white supremacism plagues the country.

All three countries champion human rights of ethnic and religious minorities globally. At home, they resist condemning even the clearest Israeli violation of international law and human rights, and punish protesters for protesting against injustice to Palestinians.

On Israel, US President Joe Biden extended "unwavering support" to Israeli policies of apartheid and persecution, which disproportionately killed 256 Palestinians including 66 children in comparison to 13 killings in Israel including two children.

Biden insisted a two-state solution is "the only answer" to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Yet his contrasting statements, defending Israel's legitimate right to defend itself while calling for de-escalation, refute his commitment for peace. The mixed stance obscures his pledge to centre his foreign policy on human rights, and demonstrates he's following his predecessor's pro-Israel policy.

After the Democrat sought implementation of a "significant de-escalation on the path to a ceasefire" — Israeli PM Netanyahu, rebuffed the most assertive US tone saying he's "determined to continue this operation until its goal is achieved".

It wasn't the first time Biden was insulted by Israel. In 2010, as US vice president, during his trip to Israel, Israeli authorities pronounced an "incredibly frustrating" move of ratifying a large expanse of settlement in East Jerusalem, Ramat Shlomo.

On paper, Biden is vocal on human rights practices. But practically, his adviser's cautious inquiry from Israel to justify leveling the Al Jalaa tower and refusal to comment on the horrific incident reveals a bigoted administration's approach to the issue.

Israel bombed a high-rise building in Gaza housing offices of AP, Al Jazeera and other media outlets, contending Hamas militants were hiding their military assets there. With no proof, Israeli attacks pose serious threats to international peace since it can stoke other countries to launch offensives on civilians and public structures.

Caught in the middle of his advocacy for human rights and US interests with its closest strategic partner, Biden is criticised for sustaining Trump's policies and walking back on his promises from US relations with Gulf nations and refugees. In Congress, the US funding to Israel has sparked debate to ensure US security assistance is not used for Israel's maltreatment of Palestinian children, forced displacement and illegal annexation. Under Obama, Washington in 2016 announced a military aid of \$38 billion for Israel between 2018-28. Even Covid-19 couldn't chop off the priority and Israel, despite concerns over its abysmal record on human rights, received security assistance of \$3.8 billion from Trump in 2020.

The international community and left-wingers in the Democratic Party sought Biden to speak on behalf of Palestinians. He rather chose to compromise his credibility with complicit silence and then a guarded response on Palestinian dehumanisation while sharply condemning rocket attacks on Israel.

No matter how quickly Israel loses a perception battle; US policy on Israel isn't changing. Through recurrently blocking motions against Israeli aggression at the UNSC, throwing weight behind Israel in the recent attacks, Biden has launched a charm offensive to placate Israel. Yet his bizarre strategy has exposed his global human rights campaign.

Published in The Express Tribune, June 14th, 2021.

**For daily CSS/PMS updated
Materials keep visiting
www.csstimes.pk**