**New Haven for Money Launderers**

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The dramatic acquittal of Altaf Hussain on two counts of “encouraging terrorism” by British court is a brazen act of supporting self-exiled/ blacklisted Pakistani politician. The events of last 3 days have uncovered the dichotomy of the oldest democracy in which the jury has overlooked hardcore evidences against Altaf Hussain, wherein he in 2016 incited general public and MQM supporters in Karachi to storm the Law Enforcement Agencies Headquarters and media houses thus encouraging terrorism. In addition to MQM leader numerous other politicians of Pakistan have found a safe shelter in UK where they have stashed away huge sums of black money and have built empires of real estate in the most expensive neighborhoods. Turning a blind eye towards these criminals casts a shadow on the sincerity of British authorities for being the most civilized and just society.

The outcome of cases against MQM leader clearly reflect on the dual standards of British government in which legitimate freedom struggle of Kashmiris is labelled as terrorism while confirmed perpetrators like Altaf Hussain are granted acquittal citing lack of evidence despite being an open and shut case for a committal. The case has been dealt with complete oblivion to the domestic circumstances of Pakistan which has always been a close ally of West particularly UK.

The UK authorities should have related the proceedings to similar incident on their homeland; if a British citizen would have “incited people of Britain for violence” what would have been the verdict. While British justice system has given undue relief to MQM leader, killers of Mr Imran Farooq who was murdered in North London still loom large since 2010.

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Contrary to being proponent of global human rights, Britain views events in South Asian Region through a different lens as situation in Indian occupied Kashmir and Afghanistan is dealt with different yardstick. It is time for UK to redefine terrorism since Muslim world suffers from discriminatory handling of issues in their regions by the British government. Case in point is Pakistan, wherein Pakistan’s wanted politicians are hiding in self-exile in UK and freely living in the properties built through money laundering and black money. Those who have squandered billions and were involved in anti-state activities are given refuge and relief in Britain which is against universal norms of diplomacy and International Law. Despite repeated request by Pakistani government to bring back the absconders and face a fair trial in court of justice, on the contrary British authorities have facilitated refuge of wanted criminals behind British Law.

Criminal involvement of Altaf Hussain is a well-known fact, proved through solid evidences against him yet his acquittal puts a question mark on the neutrality and motives of British authorities. Keeping vested interests of individual’s supreme than those of friendly nations can be detrimental to inter-state relations particularly between Pakistan and UK as those have been strong and time tested since decades. British authorities must review their policy towards political absconders wanted by their countries for court trials and especially address the legitimate demand of Pakistan for extradition of self-exiled politicians. British government needs to heed these calls and clear the air on the issue so that growing speculations are checked timely. It is time now that UK government walks the talk and disposes off such criminal cases on merit.

*The writer is a freelance columnist.*