**Two different worlds**

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As sections of the ruling classes continue to settle their political scores, the people witness no respite from the myriad of problems they have been facing for decades now.

The poor are suffering; parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are witnessing a monstrous rise in extremism and terrorism once again; the people of Gwadar have taken to the streets to remind the rulers of their broken promises; and healthcare workers and residents of informal settlements in Karachi are furious over the apathy of the ruling elite.

The brutal tactics that the Sindh government employed to get Karachi’s Mujahid Colony vacated have shocked PPP supporters as well, who proudly describe the political party as a messiah for the poor. Unfortunately, the PPP is bent on depriving people of their homes by selectively implementing the verdict of the Supreme Court.

Karachi is home to hundreds of illegal apartments and housing colonies in posh areas, but no action has ever been taken to demolish these settlements. The city’s premium hotels have encroached upon large areas of government land in the name of security, but authorities have failed to take notice of such land grabbing, which is normally carried out by the influential and the rich who seem to be the real masters of this country.

The apex court has also passed a number of verdicts against the powerful elements of our society, but the ruling class never implemented them.

For instance, the court issued clear orders regarding commercial activities on state-owned land in January 2019 and November 2021 asking the government to demolish all illegal constructions in these areas. Has the Sindh government or the relevant government institution implemented the court orders? Does this mean that the court orders are only applicable when they are directed towards the poor?

Unfortunately, no political party has come forward to raise its voice for the voiceless. Shelter is a basic human right, and it is the state’s responsibility to ensure that people have access to this right. In Pakistan, the state has utterly failed to come up with schemes that could provide decent housing to the marginalized sections of society. On the contrary it has allowed real-estate tycoons and the builder mafia to buy large swathes of land at less prices. A short while ago, an elite housing society was given more than 16,000 acres of land at a throwaway price.

Many government entities have been privatized so that their land could be occupied by developers who put profit before everything else. Those that have been bestowed farmhouses across the country, one wonders if any government body has visited these spaces and seen for themselves if the land is being used to promote agriculture in the country.

It is surprising that for the oligarchs, the government is ready to offer large chunks of land at an extremely discounted rate. But when it comes to providing decent housing to the poor, the state faces the unavailability of vacant land. The courts had earlier set a precedent where it asked Imran Khan to get parts of his Bani Gala residence regularized – which Khan’s critics believe was illegal. But no such ‘generosity’, according to rights activists, was shown to the poor who desperately needed shelter.

Elite apartments in the heart of the federal capital that have violated several housing regulations have also been largely ignored. But no such leniency has been accorded to the residents of slums in Islamabad, who were forcefully evicted from private and government land. PTI Senator Azam Swati openly admitted that he encroached upon a few acres of government land, but no action was taken against him while his party was in power.

While all political parties have been issuing statements over the appointment of the COAS, they have shied away from speaking on the problems of the people. For instance, how many of these parties have spoken against the forced eviction of the residents of Mujahid Colony? How many of them have shown solidarity with the protesting healthcare workers in Karachi? How many of them have sided with the medical staff in Punjab, Balochistan and other parts of the country? Can anybody recall the response of political parties regarding the farmer march towards Islamabad?

Can any politician let people know what support s/he extended towards the federal secretariat employees who protested in Islamabad for their rights? Were lady health workers and other members of the medical community who have been fighting for the regularization of their jobs given any support by political parties?

It seems that the rights of the people do not matter much to our ruling elite. At the moment, Imran Khan wants to bring life in Islamabad to a halt. His aim is to get back in power, not to lift more than 60 million people out of poverty. It is not aimed at making efforts to ensure the availability of pure drinking water to 80 per cent of the population. The protest is not for putting back in school the more than 25 million children that are out of school. It is unlikely to extend any help to more than 33 million flood-affected people; nor will it give assurances to more than 67 per cent people of this country who do not have access to decent housing.

This march is more about calling for an intervention by powerful quarters in politics, amidst tall claims of upholding the principles of Western democracy and the British parliamentary form of government.

And it is not only Imran Khan whose indifference to the plight of the people is quite visible; other members of the ruling elite are also equally nonchalant. Bilawal Bhutto, who has visited a number of countries since becoming foreign minister, does not seem to have enough time to help the grief-stricken people of Sindh whose lives have been shattered by the catastrophic floods.

Shehbaz Sharif and his brigade of federal ministers and special assistants have been touring the world, squandering taxpayers’ money at a time when the country is on the verge of default. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and members of his family are on a tour to Europe at a time when several Pakistanis are facing hunger and starvation.

It seems that the world of the ruling elite is entirely different from the one inhabited by ordinary citizens of Pakistan. While the members of the ruling elite are planning foreign trips, political agitation for their petty interests and squandering tax money on the security of VIPs, the people are barely making both ends meet. No political party seems concerned about the plight of ordinary Pakistanis.

Inflation in the country is skyrocketing; poverty is witnessing a phenomenal surge and crimes are affecting the lives of people. Far away from the slums of the poor, the colonies of low-income people and the homes of the marginalized lie the palatial palaces known as Jati Umra, Bani Gala and Bilawal House. The two worlds are diametrically opposite to one another – one being immune to all the hardships of life while the other one remains trapped in the abyss of miseries.

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