**Mr PM, I disagree**

Mir Adnan Aziz

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Mr Prime Minister, a student delegation from Harvard University sat down with you on August 26. We were graced with the prime ministerial part of what was otherwise termed an interactive session. The thrust of your speech was “social order can never be compromised for rule of law”.

Groundbreaking as this sounds, established global realities prove otherwise. The unanimous view holds that it is rule of law which, by ridding society of arbitrariness and chaos, begets social order.

Your views sounded from someone in for the long haul, rather than an interim period which mandated free and fair elections as the prime job. Dwelling on the perils of democracy, you cited its autocratic fallout in India. The implied notion was further cemented when you likened Pakistan’s security concerns to that of Israel theorizing that “in Pakistan’s context, there are times where normal laws get suspended or are not the solution to the challenges. The priority is that you first secure life, social and political order and then go for issues of civil liberties and democratic principles.”

The reality is that securing life and social order has never even figured in the self-centred priorities of our power-elite. You also claimed that the “dust was settling down” and “the common man was becoming the nucleus in which their rights were ensured”. The fury of the people, some ending their anguished lives, is testament to a ruptured nucleus.

Lamenting the backlash about your “what if they [Pakistanis] go [abroad]” remark regarding our alarming brain drain, you lauded it as a source of remittances. Mr Prime Minister, forsaking our human and social capital for the dollars of those who have lost hope in Pakistan is bizarre. This apathetic ‘fend for yourself’ mindset had 0.8 million disillusioned people leaving Pakistan in 2022 alone.

Nothing was reported about a student asking you as to why your stated imperative of securing life and social order has been systematically wrested away from the people of Pakistan. Your eloquent words totally belied the Jaranwala atrocities under your direct watch; the latest in an endless spate of violence against our very own. On August 16, unchallenged rampaging mobs desecrated and ransacked at least 24 churches while torching and looting around 91 houses. Mr Prime Minister, the heinous face of the absence of rule of law was equally, if not more, reprehensible than the violence of the marauding mobs.

The Punjab government, which now conveniently blames the omnipresent foreign hand, remained a mere bystander. Now, 10 JITs have been formed to investigate atrocities, otherwise documented on camera and seen by millions.

The sanctity of your personal assurance of justice to the affected in Jaranwala is evident from Punjab police officials reportedly pressurizing them for a compromise. The Lahore High Court has been moved against this travesty. Still receiving threats from extremists, the beleaguered community has shown their no-confidence in the JITs. The LHC has also been requested to form a judicial committee to investigate the incident.

Even if a student had asked you about the stark absence of both rule of law and social order in Jaranwala or Hazarganji in your native Balochistan or anywhere else in the length and breadth of Pakistan you might have, your long haul vision notwithstanding, conveniently cited the infancy of your tenure in office.

“The buck stops here”, read a plaque on president Truman’s table. Mr Prime Minister, how dare it even venture anywhere near the impregnable citadels of power in Pakistan.

It is often said that persecution of Christians or people from other sects or beliefs is a one-off thing; nothing could be further from the truth. Mr Prime Minister, the ugly fact is that this mindset has been nurtured, patronized and protected whereas atrocious acts of victimization have seen acquiescence and appeasement. This policy has stoked the infectious malady of bigotry in Pakistan.

The state’s abominable behaviour can be gauged from a few of the many documented facts over the years. Government corporations and hospitals have been inviting applications for the posts of sanitary workers from “Christian, Hindus and lower castes only”. Some even have a precondition demanding an oath that those selected will work as sanitary workers only. This reprehensible mindset and our crusading mentality against people of other beliefs presents a dismal picture of state failure. That we do it in the name of Islam is a sacrilege, an epitome of shame and criminal hypocrisy.

Over time, the authority of both our power-elite and religious leaders has eroded away. This is because they have increasingly abdicated their role as the enforcers of rule of law and a social order as laid down by Islam. Each has played its dubious role to create an implosive climate of extreme permissiveness and persecution. This has logically resulted in what Ralph Emerson described as “mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast.”

A recent video allegedly showed a group of ‘katcha’ dacoits proclaiming their allegiance to the ‘pirs’ of Ranipur. Threatening the police of dire consequences, the dacoits warned that they would protect their ‘pirs’ who allegedly molested, severely tortured and murdered a 10-year-old minor girl working for them.

This epitomizes Pakistan, the zealotry that is preached and the followers it garners. Reprehensible acts are carried out with impunity and sometimes, as perceived, by the sanction of the state itself. This has been made the reality of Pakistan. Mr Prime Minister, it is in no way a place where the dust has settled on the social, political or economic front and certainly not where people are the nucleus as you regally conveyed to what must have been a befuddled Harvard audience.

The writer is a freelance contributor. He can be reached at: miradnanaziz@gmail.com