**The meter starts now**

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PTI MPA Dr Imran Ali Shah probably doesn’t regret repeatedly slapping an old man on the road. But he is probably kicking himself for not realising that the event was being taped – or, perhaps, he knew it was being taped and didn’t care. Why should he? Road rage battles are common enough on Pakistani streets, and usually no one bats an eyelash.

All eyes were and are on Imran Khan as the media waits for the verdict by PTI Sindh’s disciplinary committee. Will MPA Shah be handed a long suspension, be forced to resign from his MPA position, or be subjected to a similar beating by the victim? These are all suggestions given by the practical and the irate on broadcast and social media.

Delaying tactics is the easiest way to make people forget such incidents. But what Khan doesn’t realise is that nothing his elected party does will be easily forgotten. Unless things go smoothly for Khan, he will be swimming in dangerously self-righteous waters for the next five years.

One Pakistan – rule of law for the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak. This is Khan’s utopian vision, which he has promised to the people of this country. For Khan, this is not utopia; it is a Pakistani’s basic right to life and liberty, and he will deliver it. For Khan’s followers, justice will be wielded by Khan because – for them – he is the law.

How dangerous is this mindset? Our slapped victim says that he doesn’t believe that he will get justice so he would rather not file an FIR – inherently suspending rule of law. It is not Khan’s duty or the PTI Sindh disciplinary committee’s to decide what should happen to Shah. This is the job of the police: determining what happened and providing a court of law with evidence after which a verdict is given. The PTI Sindh committee’s decision should have come into play after said verdict. But in the Khan-follower playbook, justice will only be given by Khan – since every other institution is corrupt, inept and sterile.

Whose fault is this mindset? Khan’s of course. Basing his entire campaign on providing speedy justice, becoming the champion of the highly controversial Panama case and promising that accountability will begin with him, his ministers and his party, he has put himself on a pedestal that he is unable to balance. Imran Ali Shah is one case but Khan shouldn’t forget that this first incident took place when he wasn’t even prime minister yet. Moreover, if the past is anything to go by, what will Khan do if and when he has to fry the big fish?

About three months ago, Naeemul Haq slapped Daniyal Aziz across the face on television. The PML-N representative didn’t react with physical violence. The media was in an uproar and Khan did nothing; in reality, no one really expected Khan to react. In 2011, Naeemul Haq famously hurled a glass at a PPP counterpart on live television. He has in public said that after he threw the glass, Khan applauded him.

During Election 2018 campaigning, Pervez Khattak used incredibly vile and misogynistic language against the PPP. He was issued a notice by the Election Commission and gave an unconditional apology for his actions. But before that, all eyes were on Khan, pressurising him to chastise his former chief minister. Khan remained silent.

The PTI chief – and now the PM-elect – has to realise that silence will not be golden when the pressure is on. He can sideline people (like he apparently has with Aleem Khan, reportedly telling Aleem that his public closeness with the PTI chief is creating problems and that, until Aleem is free from his NAB case, he should lay low). Making sure Aleem isn’t seen around him is one thing, but Khan cannot remain silent on major developing incidents, which are bound to occur in his tenure. Prime Minister Khan will be held to an absolutely unreal level of expectation of moral and swift justice.

And this pressure will come not just from the known faces on broadcast media but also from the unknown faces of social media. After Maryam Nawaz took over creating and harnessing the PML-N’s social media presence, the PML-N social media team learnt how to make its presence felt online, in direct and indirect ways – and they will make sure that Khan feels the pressure and the burn whenever a controversial incident takes place.

If one has to summarise the kind of pressure Khan will face, the most telling social media activity that popped up when the PTI won was a website based on the accountability of the first 100 days of PM Imran Khan. Known as the Khan Meter, it is run by someone who sees it as a “minor contribution to a better democracy.” The website lists all the promises made, in different departments of government, by the PTI’s chairman. It has bars, which will reflect if promises have been kept, broken or are in progress. It’s simply done, but if it is actively followed up, will be highly effective to maintain pressure on the PTI.

There can be no slapping, beating, cussing and controversy in Naya Pakistan. Khan has to make sure that all his parliamentarians – national and provincial – adhere to a strict code of humble conduct. All promises have to be kept, the country has to be magically made debt-free, load-shedding has to become a faint memory, and rule of law has to be exceptionally fair. If Khan doesn’t deliver, he is going to face the ire of a betrayed country, which wants the Naya Pakistan it has been promised.

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