**We, the hypocrites**

BY FAIZAAN QAY Y UM | 8/4/2019

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| `ARE master plans just meant for the poor?` asked the Islamabad High Court.  The short answer? Yes. After all, who exactly is looking after the interests of the poor? In some ways, all political parties claim they are. But how well do they perform on their own claims and promises? Notwithstanding some things shelters for the homeless, expanded health insurance for the poorest the current regime is already beholden to vested interests. Billionaire Azam Swati and khokha owner Muhammad Arshad cannot and will not be held to the same standards. NAB`s pursuit of Aleem Khan is something the regime is only `tolerating`, but handcuffing writers like Irfan Siddiqui is fair game. Big-ticket investors, even with shady backgrounds, receive direct attention, while khokhas are demolished.  This hypocrisy extends to political expression. We remember the PTI containers, but we can also see how they like to deal with their opposition. Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced that the opposition will unite in prison, but Shah Mehmood Qureshi also demanded the immediate release of PTI MNA Alamgir Khan. And of course, their moment ary human rights champion in Sindh.  How much must happen before one`s conscience calls out one`s own hypocrisy? The PPP have fared no better. Asif Ali Zardari correctly takes pride in the 18th Amendment, but forgot to pass the memo on actual devolution to his minions in Sindh.  Lool( at the mess of urban governance in Karachi; KDA, KMC, SBCA do we even know who actually wields executive power? A truly democratic ideology would compel the transfer of all local powers to elected representatives to work with full autonomy. But who are we kidding about such an ideology? It was in this context that MNA Alamgir was arrested. `Don`t we have the right to protect our offices and houses?` asked Senator Saeed Ghani in the Sindh government`s defence. No, a public office is and remains a public office. It should be a source of shame if it needs protection from the very public it serves. From once promising to represent the poor, the PPP is now firmly a party of waderas and the elite, who see public ofHce as personal property and have no qualms in forming expedient electoral alliances with sectarian militants.  As a smaller party that has seen both good and bad times with the establishment, perhaps one would expect better of the MQM. We can make a valid case of excessive provincial and federal interference in local affairs and overlook their performance in Karachi. Mayor Wasim Akhtar also announced his opposition to the antiencroachment drive when people`s houses were next in line for demolition.What did it take for such opposition to materialise? The mayor stood strongly in support of demolitions in Empress Market, shamelessly standing outside the empty building, showing several children around him how `clean`it had become. Who cares that hundreds of businesses were brutally shut down, and thousands of people were left without food on the table? His conscience only awoke when significant public outcry developed and, perhaps, when some of his own voters were being impacted. From a party of the middle class, the MQM has degenerated into a party of middle-class hypocrisies even without any mention of allegations of extortion, terrorism and armed violence.  None of this exonerates our former rulers, the PML-N, from responsibility. The Sharifs can validly claim credit for introducing motorways and BRTs to Pakistan. But these cannot gloss over the kind of attitude on display in the 2012 assault case at a Lahore bakery, nor can they bring justice to those killed in Model Town or justify Gullu Butt`s actions on that fateful day. The Memogate scandalwasn`t an exercise in democratic attitudes, nor was their own use of containers to stop PTI protests.  What of cities and their poor residents under PML-N rule? Islamabad`s mayor strongly opposed khokha owners incourt, demonstrating how class and politics are cold and heartless. Cities like Lahore have been left defaced with concrete, facilitating car-owning elite while poor commuters bear the brunt of increasing emissions and environmental degradation.  Who is really looking after the poor? It is nobody but the poor themselves, who of fend us through their khokhas and jhuggis. All main political players are focused on their politics of hypocrisy, while religious parties are busy sheltering militants or throwing around fatwas of takfir on every politician they dislike. The deep state has kept up with these experiments at the peril of our lives. In the meantime, the state is using every power at its disposal to further dispossess the already downtrodden.  The poor an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis have no real allies. Maybe one day things will be different. Until then, the more things change, the more they stay the same.  The writer is a PhD student in urban/regional planning at the University of Illinois.  faizaanq@gmail.com Twitter: @faizaang |  |