**Eat the rich**

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October 29, 2020

We recently learned that the Punjab Excise and Taxation Department had to upgrade their systems after a Lahore native was unable to get his car registered. The car in question was a Lamborghini Huracan Spyder. The sportscar has a base price of over $200,000, going up to almost $300,000 or between Rs32 million and Rs48 million. News reports suggest that the owner paid over Rs115 million for the car. We assume that includes taxes and shipping costs, otherwise, we would be unimpressed by the gentleman’s bargaining prowess. The registration for the car alone cost over Rs4.5 million. A system upgrade was required because, as things stood, the tax department couldn’t register a car worth more than Rs100 million.

Although estimates vary, the average income in Pakistan is likely somewhere between Rs220,000 and Rs300,000 per year. Assuming the higher number, the average Pakistani would take almost 400 years to earn 115 million rupees. Even if we were to assume a high monthly income of Rs500,000 per month, it would take 19 years to earn 115 million, and that assumption doesn’t even account for income tax. Meanwhile, economist Dr Hafiz Pasha estimated last year — before the impact of Covid-19 — that the poverty rate would hit 40% this year. We can safely assume that, after accounting for Covid-19 and low economic indicators for the year to date, the 40% estimate is now on the lower end. About the same share of the population is food insecure. Millions of young people are unemployed or underemployed. This single car is worth enough to set up a small school or medical facility, or a small business or community farm.

The rich are free to enjoy their wealth, but such concentrations of wealth represent the failures of both the state and society. French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau has apocryphally been quoted as saying, “When the people shall have no more to eat, they will eat the rich.” The ever-widening income inequality makes us wonder how far we are from the day those words come true.

*Published in The Express Tribune, October 30th, 2020.*

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