

Democracy

The death of a civil servant

I GOT NEWS OF EJAZ NAIK'S PASSING AWAY in London. It brought a flood of memories.

I had had my first glimpse of him a long time ago, also in London — at the High Commission where he was a minister. He looked aloof, elegant and inaccessible — the kind of person who would have nothing to do with mortals like me.

How wrong I was — as were so many people — I only realised in 1970 when I first came in close contact with him. He had been designated the NWFP chief secretary. I was then serving as secretary to government of West Pakistan in Services Department. Ejaz Naik chose me as one of the officers he wanted to join the newly formed provincial government. When he was unable to accommodate me as a secretary in the provincial set up, he insisted on my joining it as the Peshawar deputy commissioner. At the first available opportunity, he installed me as a provincial secretary. I was touched by his consideration but still had no idea what a compassionate and humane person he was till I faced one of the biggest crises of my service career.

These were crisis days in East Pakistan. The martial law government now planned to re-post to the eastern wing all officers of West Pakistan origin who had served in East Pakistan. What martial law had been unable to accomplish with the civil servants of the Bengal cadre the government now hoped to achieve with a change in civil bureaucracy. But the situation seemed beyond redemption. I wondered how I would face the people and my Bengali colleagues of whom I had fond memories. The love and affection I received wherever I served — be it Bakarganj, Kushtia, Brahmanbaria, Mymensingh or Dhaka — had left an indelible mark on my heart. How could I go back to those very people as an instrument of suppression and tyranny? I discussed my dilemma with Musarrat, my wife, and she wholeheartedly supported my resolve not to go to East Pakistan under the prevailing situation. The only

option left to me was to submit my resignation before my posting orders were issued. I went to the chief secretary and submitted my written resignation. Ejaz Naik looked at me with pleading eyes not to do so. I explained to him that I could not become part of an immoral administration and if I did not resign now, I would be forced to go. The resignation would not be entertained after transfer orders were issued. Ejaz Naik reluctantly took my resignation promising that if my transfer was ordered, he would notify the federal government that I had resigned before the orders were issued. On the quiet, he kept my resignation in his briefcase and persuaded the governor, General Azhar to convince General Pirzada not to send me to East Pakistan. My transfer orders never came. What happened to my unfortunate colleagues who went to East Pakistan is history.

As director of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD), I found Ejaz Naik the most supportive chairman of its bard of governors. He took time off even on weekends to visit Academy's action research project at Daudzai. He was always touched by the plight of the poor and gave unreserved support to programmes for poverty reduction. When the Netherlands ambassador offered a \$1 million assistance after a visit to Aga Khan Rural Support Programme's Baltistan project, it was Ejaz Naik as Economic Affairs Division secretary general, who opened the bilateral window for NGO support, despite strong opposition from ministry officials. He visited Northern Areas frequently and when I took him to remote villages, he expressed deep anguish at the caveman-like existence of the people in the area. He supported the AKRSP in every possible way and after retirement became an honorary director of the AKRSP Board.

When National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) was launched through efforts of Naseem as secretary to Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ejaz Naik refused to serve as a direc-

OBITUARY

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tor. He was too sceptical about NRSP being allowed by the government to operate like the AKRSP. It was only five years later that he acceded to my request to join the NRSP Board of Directors. He remained on the Board till his sad demise. In a light mood sometimes he would say after a visit to Daudzai that if he had his way he would abolish the planning department and allocate all development funds for poverty reduction programmes.

Ejaz Naik was the NWFP chief secretary during Maulana Mufti Mahmood's term as chief minister. It is hard to imagine two more different people but they struck a most amiable understanding. Mufti Sahib

respected his integrity, honesty and transparency and he had a great regard for Mufti Sahib's principles. He used to gleefully narrate how when prohibition was being introduced in the NWFP, he suggested making exceptions on medical grounds, arguing that otherwise some people would die. Mufti Sahib, according to Ejaz Naik, retorted that it was best perhaps that such people should die.

Earlier, in 1971, during a visit to Kabul, my host in Afghanistan Karam Elahi of the Foreign Service showed me an article by Subramanyam. The author had made out a case of an opportunity of a lifetime for government of India to dismember Pakistan. On my return to Peshawar, I gave the article to Ejaz Naik. He stunned me after reading it with his comment that this may be the only way for Pakistan to become a democracy. How prophetic his words proved. As Akhter Hameed Khan used to say, a democracy has to be run by democratic people.

After my debacle at Daudzai in the wake of Ejaz Naik's transfer and Hayat Sherpao's assassination, I found myself rudderless. I was an OSD for a while and then did some odd jobs. Finally I took six months ex-Pakistan leave. On my return, I found Ejaz Naik serving as Cabinet and Establishment Secretary. He asked me to join him as his joint secretary to the Cabinet. On the first day, he called me to his office and pointed an almirah full of files. It was marked 'NGO'. I was to learn later on that the initials stood for 'Not to Go Out'. He asked me to take all those files away saying he didn't know why his predecessor had kept them in his personal custody. In the pile I found a file on myself alleging subversive activities at Daudzai. Only then did I comprehend why I was made an OSD and an FIA enquiry conducted into my tenure as PARD director.

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even Gulam Ishaq Khan turned round to me as if I drafted the minutes.

General Zia ul Haq had no idea that the frail-looking person had a steel resolve. When Ejaz Naik opposed in the Cabinet meeting large-scale induction of serving and retired army personnel in civilian services, I knew the president was not amused. Soon after I went abroad on a seminar. On my return I found Ejaz Naik sitting in the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) reading the *Economist*. He was most contented and uncomplaining, had no malice towards anyone and seemed as satisfied as SAFRON secretary as he had been as Cabinet secretary.

Ejaz Naik never hesitated in rectifying a wrong. When Tariq Siddiqi declined, on principle, to appeal against his dismissal, despite new government's offer to consider it, he initiated the case for reinstatement *suo motu*.

I found Ejaz Naik very kind, compassionate and indulgent. Once when my friend Tariq Aziz, then an Income Tax commissioner, asked me to intercede on his behalf with Ejaz Naik saying he would not listen to anyone else. Tariq needed an exemption to enable him to take a course at Harvard. When I requested Ejaz Naik he sent for the file and approved it. However, on many occasions when I barged in, he would simply show me the door. Later, he would explain: "I have a one-track mind. Don't ever disturb me when I am working." I heard about an incident when an officer having failed to get an appointment, one day barged into his office and sat down in front of him. Ejaz Naik simply got up and without saying a word left the office.

Ejaz Naik belonged to a generation of civil servants who were truly impartial, dedicated to the work assigned to them, had unquestionable integrity and would never succumb to pressures or compromise their principles.

The writer is a career civil servant