**The people`s man**

BY Z U B E I D A M U S T A F A 2020-11-06

HOW the Single National Curriculum is being formulated betrays a gross ignorance of the principles of public policymal(ing. As I wait for the final document I often think of my friend Javed Hasan Aly who passed away last month of Covid-19, leaving his family and his many friends bereft.

I can imagine him shaking his head sadly and declaring that policymakers inIslamabad were violating public interest blatantly.

Javed was in the government himself (1965-2005), engaged in policymaking. He rose to the influential post of secretary Establishment Division. But he could make no impact. Why? He was so unlike the crowd in Islamabad vying for the boss`s favour.

Whenever I teasingly referred to him as a bureaucrat, he would feign annoyance to remind me that he was a `civil servant`. `I have always striven to serve the people and that is why my priority has been to learn about the interests of the public` He insisted he was not a babu -a functionary of the administration who blindly carries out the orders of the sahibs. And that no one can deny. Compassionate to the core, Javed`s forte was his deep understanding of the problems of the common man who suffered at the hands of ill-planned government policies. That would explain why the policymaking process was so important for him.

In fact, that is how I first met him. He always prided himself on how he had produced the White Paper on Education (2007) through a consultative process that involved gathering opinion at the district, provincial and federal levels to produce a draft that was circulated among stakeholders in civil society to obtain their views. I had attended one of his meetings to which Dawn had been invited.

As a host he was welcoming and respectful but above all his willingness to listen to others impressed me. He was a `giving person` to quote his daughter Amena generous with support, knowledge, mentoring or finance.

This generosity and his unmatched humour made him good company.

But these very qualities along with his impeccable integrity made him the nemesis of the powers that be who are selfish and antipeople. He suffered on that count. Take his recommendations on language in the White Paper. He recognised the linguistic diversity in the country and therefore suggested that in the first three grades the mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction.

His argument was primarily based on the principles of equity and quality of education.

`The child`s learning faculties are blunted by a focus on learning a new language instead of concepts,` he wrote. To work out the modalities of implementing the policy in an eclectic environment he recommended the establishment of a National Language Commission.Had this been done, we would not have been struggling with the language dilemma today.

But the then education minister, a retired army general, asked Javed to change his position on the language issue to align it with the military rulers` view. Javed refused and resigned. Such is the stuff that great men are made of.

Paradoxically, this stance in favour of indigenous languages came from one who wrote perfect English and was an ace English debater in his college days in Lahore.

Again, he had the courage to take a stand on religious teaching in school. Sami Khan, an education consultant who worked with him, tells me, `He considered religious education to be the primary responsibility of the family with the state functioning as a facilitator of values, based on faith`. In the White Paper Javed wrote, `Pakistan has suffered from tensions (and even terrorism) triggered by societal polarisations based on sectarian differences and intolerance.

His main concern was always policymak-ing which he said was flawed in Pakistan because it lacked a sound national base and was demand-/supply-driven as perceived by the rulers and not needs-based and grounded in public interest as itshould be.

His consultative method envisaged a participatory process to bring stakeholders together. Thus for the education policy the consultation was massive with teachers, students and parents being involved. First came a diagnostic document identifying the flaws that called for correction. The recommendations that followed were not random but focused on the weaknesses identified.

Passionate about the importance of policymaking in the governance of a country, Javed concept ualise d and prepare d the legal framework of the National School of Public Policy in Lahore. All Grade-20 officers are required to attend the course here before promotion to Grade 21. Again, his refusal to compromise on principles when the presidency ordered a transfer that didn`t follow the rules cost him his position in the Establishment Division.

But his expertise was recognised abroad and Harvard and Brookings Institute invited him to give lectures on Pakistan`s education.

Alas, his work is gathering dust in government archives. Hopefully some day its value will be uncovered. RIP dear friend. m www.zubeidamustafa.com