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THERE are some people who are born superheroes. Others have superhero-ship thrust upon them, once a particular robe and wig becomes theirs to wear. But there are yet others who are natural sidekicks; those whose lot it is to let the superheroes really shine, whilst they keep to the background and manage the admin. After all, someone has to keep the bat cave clean and ensure weapon refill orders aren’t behind schedule. Even the batmobile needs servicing.

Ijazul Ahsan was Robin to the Batman that was Saqib Nisar. He went around tut-tutting after tasting prison food with chief justice Nisar, and stood around when the latter told off private hospital owners and gave them advice on what to wear whilst on a snap check of their private property. He enthusiastically helped host the Saqib Nisar weekend conferences on population control. He was with the boss at the forefront of the dam-building effort.

Then came Gulzar Ahmed, and Ijaz sahib donned his boots and work hat, and promptly became a city engineer with the new hero in town. He helped the top judge point his magic wand left and right, felling thousands of structures in Karachi for being illegal. This was the kind of superhero work which protected the paper plans of cities at the expense of the people for whom the cities are planned. But that didn’t faze justice Ijaz.

Next came Umar Ata Bandial, and here the sidekick took on a role far more equal to the hero’s. It also helped that there was an Imran Khan-led political party that kept asking the Bandial court political questions disguised as requests for interpretive opinion. Turn by turn, Ijaz sahib helped rewrite the Constitution. When it came to implementing the opinion-based works of fiction, he again helped seat himself on the permanent three-member bench which decided the same situation in two different ways depending on who petitioned it: if Imran Khan was not obeyed by his party, it was a cancer affecting the body politic; if Chaudhry Shujaat Husain wasn’t obeyed, dictatorships within political parties became the cancer needing judicial surgery.

He was with the boss at the forefront.

Justice Ijaz also has several great achievements outside of the political arena. Such as when he prompted justice Gulzar to add the word ‘alleged’ in reference to Matiullah Jan’s abduction when Gulzar sahib was dictating an order. Or when he dismissed Absar Alam’s petition against his removal as Pemra chairman, because his lawyer was absent due to being unwell. Ijaz sahib decided this wasn’t good enough because there was no medical certificate filed by the lawyer. Who couldn’t file it because he was unwell.

His environment-related record was equal to his other feats. Justice Ijaz was part of the bench which suspended the Lahore High Court order declaring the Ravi Urban Development Authority project as land grabbed from the poor with disastrous environmental impact, and allowed for ‘development’ to continue. RUDA was a pet project for Imran Khan, who shot a video there promoting it.

Justice Ihsan talked the big talk when he had another shoulder to shoot over. He took whatever was the flavour of the moment and ran with it as long as there was someone running ahead of him.

He tried his best not to recuse himself from the bench that was hearing justice Isa’s petitioning the presidential reference against him when it was pointed out that he would directly benefit from justice Isa being removed through a longer term as chief justice of Pakistan. Justice Isa fought and fought until all of Ijaz sahib’s friends couldn’t remove him.

Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others, said Oscar Wilde. After Imran Khan was deposed, Ijaz sahib strived hard to account for his curious attractiveness. This journey was a tough one, and occurred after he realised that an ousted Imran Khan needed the constitutional protections he had helped erode.

The hardest part of proving it is actually curious attractiveness must have been when he joined four other judges in declaring the assumption of the Army Act jurisdiction over civilians as being illegal and the relevant sections of the law unconstitutional. Like several of his other pro-democracy decisions that came after Imran Khan needed them this past year, no one took it seriously. Not even his brother judges at the Supreme Court.

It is surprising that justice Ihsan decided to take off the gloves even before the bell was rung. Even before the fight was announced. I wonder who he was afraid of being put up against. Perhaps an earlier version of himself?

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