**Tragic Murder Of Arshad Sharif**

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Irrespective of the fact whether some people liked or did not appreciate his pursuits as a journalist, particularly his irresistible propensity to hurl incessant flak at the establishment and the PDM leadership in the wake of the removal of Imran Khan from the Premiership as a result of a no-confident motion against him, the fact is that Arshad Sharif was a journalist of considerable standing in his own right. His dastardly murder is a great loss to the profession of journalism in Pakistan. It is the most tragic happening that has devastated his family, friends and his followers. But none is more hurt than his family, which will have to live without him for the whole of their lives. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to this family with the prayer that the Almighty may rest his soul in peace and grant him an exalted place in paradise.

It is indeed regrettable to note that before the findings of the investigations being held into the incident are made public, there is an incessant flow of speculative narratives attributing motives to the murder and naming the possible suspects. People are drawing their conclusions. Efforts are also being made to exploit the situation to their political advantage by the rival political parties. This is all very distressing and painful for the family and friends of Arshad Sharif. DG ISPR and DG ISI who made a rare appearance at a presser rightly said that people should stop speculative stories about the murder and wait until the facts are laid bare by the investigative efforts.

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My motivation to write on this episode stems from a story by Haider Mehdi in his Vlog of October 25 in which he made unsubstantiated claims about who could be the possible suspects. He rejected the notion that the murder of Arshad Sharif was a sequel to mistaken identity as contended by the Kenyan police. He claimed that the Kenyan police was the most corrupt entity and could

cannot say anything about what his conclusions are but do feel constrained to clarify some of the claims made in the vlog regarding property and business interests of the Sharif family in Kenya because I was serving as press counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Nairobi during the period Mehdi claims Sharifs bought properties and set up businesses in that country. The fact is that the Kenyan government had floated tenders for outsourcing management of sugar mills, which were running at losses. Hussain Nawaz also submitted a bid and was awarded the contract through open competition.

However, when Hussain Nawaz and his team arrived in Kenya to take over the management, the unions of the mills and local people resisted handing over the management of the mills to foreigners. Consequently, the Kenyan government was forced to cancel the contracts. That closed the issue. I remember that the Pakistani media also ran stories about that deal, which never materialized.

The Vlogger made yet another false claim that the Sharif family sent Hameed Asghar Kidwai as Ambassador to Kenya to protect their business interests there. That is the most preposterous suggestion as the Sharifs had no business interests in Kenya, as is evident from my above submissions.

I am a strong believer in freedom of expression, but also feel that there is no concept of unbridled freedom in this regard. Freedom of expression also makes it obligatory for media men and journalists to avoid speculative reports and false narratives. All the professional and ethical codes adopted by international media organizations stress the need for truthful reporting. I wish the vlogger should have investigated the issue properly in regard to the business interests of Sharifs in Kenya before disseminating false information to the audience. The question arises how could Arshad Sharif have ventured to do a documentary on the non-extent business interests of the Sharif family in Kenya?

Hameed Asghar Kidwai was, surely, a political appointee as per the practice by successive governments. However, it is wrong to contend that he was sent to Kenya to protect the business interests of the Sharif family, which never existed. The fact is that Hameed Kidwai proved to be a very successful ambassador. During his tenure, he organized two solo trade exhibitions of Pakistan in Kenya that fetched orders to the tune of millions of dollars for Pakistani products. He was instrumental in the conclusion of a big deal between the POF and the Kenyan defence ministry for the purchase of arms and ammunition. He also made relentless efforts for business deals between businessmen of Pakistan and Ethiopia. In recognition of his successful diplomatic assignment in Kenya, he was later made a roving ambassador for sub-Saharan Africa, a post that he held for quite a long time after the exit of Sharif from power.

I thought that as a writer, who knew the facts, it was my moral obligation to set the record straight so that the people could judge how vested interests were trying to pass on false information to the masses to mislead them and also tarnish the image of certain individuals, who have served Pakistan as successful diplomats.

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