**We, the 1.21pc**

BY Z U B E I D A M U S T A FA | 1/31/2020

|  |
| --- |
| I BELONG to Pakistan`s 75-plus age group. According to the 2017 census, my contemporaries, who were born in 1944 or earlier, constitute only 1.21pc of the total population of this country. Not a very big number less than 2.5 million. But we seem to have become a burden for the government that had promised us a `new` Pakistan when it assumed office. Did it mean a `young` Pakistan? Take my case as an example (mind you I am not alone). I have been a working woman nearly all my adult life. True, the pace of my work has slowed down with age.  I am low-visioned too. Nevertheless I continue to contribute to society as best as I can mainly by doing voluntary work in a school for underprivileged children.  I have been fortunate to have received good education which was available in abundance when I was of schoolgoing age.  I also do a lot of campaigning and advocacy for our children`s right to good education in their mother tongue. My former employers provided me a pension that takes care of my basic needs comfortably in my twilight years.  Additionally, the government was giving me a pension under the Employees` Old Age Benefits Institution pension scheme that Z.A. Bhutto set up in 1976 ostensibly to provide social security to the workers whose employers subscribed to it. Mine did. That means the EOBI pension is my entitlement. It helps me indulge in little luxuries like buying books to reward children on my book lovers` list whom I mentor.  Although I receive a royal sum of Rs6,500 a month it goes a long way. It allows me to take the student who comes to me to learn English to a modest coffee bar for snacks and she enjoys it. We sit and chat like two teenagers though more than six decades lie between us.  Since November this fun has stopped.  Why? No pension has been sent into my Alf alah pension account by the EOBI. They never warned me although they have my cell number. When I wrote to the chairman asking him as politely as I could under the circumstances why my pension had been stopped I received no reply. My passbook says it `is valid till this pensioner is alive`.  On the EOBI website the chairman describes himself as an `honest civil servant who inherits a vast experience of management and administration`. In spite of this claim he has failed to even acknowledge my letter.  Further inquiries done unofficially produced all kinds of results. One senior officer told me that they were checking on all pensioners in the 1.21pc group to ensure they were alive. Another said it was a computer glitch caused by a novice deleting some names accidentally. One senior officer was helpful and asked me to visit the regional office and sign the `Proof of Life` form. I was required to go where my name was listed. He assured me that the concerned officer would facilitate me even come to my car to get my signature if I had a disability.  That is how I landed up at the EOBI regional office at West Wharf, Karachi, to sign a piece of paper that was proof of my being alive though I have been going for my biometric every six months to keep my Alfalah ATM operational. The gentleman at the regional office was most unwelcoming and rude. He even had the cheek to suggest that if his senior had assured me that I would be assisted then I should go to him.  He kept me waiting for half an hour when I visited the regional office after an appointment. He was visiting the doctor I was informed at the reception. At long last he made his appearance and took my thumb impression.  He refused to accept my signature. That had me wondering whether he was also a misogynist.  It has been three weeks since I proved to the government of Pakistan that I am living. However, I have not yet been informed about the fate of the pension that the EOBI owes me. One simply cannot afford to be complacent. Google `EOBI scams` and EOBI`s billion rupees scams that show up on your computer will astound you.  It is shocking how the government treats us, the 1.21pc. If you have any disability then be prepared for the worst. Probably few government functionaries have even heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that entitles a person with a disability to be facilitated.  Pakistan had signed this treaty in 2008 and ratified it in 2011.  Take PIA. It actually charged me Rs6,664 for a wheelchair on a recent visit to Canada. The icing on the cake was that on my return to Karachi, I was not given a wheelchair. I was informed that all wheelchairs had been taken. My fault why didn`t I rush when the plane landed? m www.zubeidamustafa.com |