**[‘One as beautiful as you’](https://www.dawn.com/news/1712698/one-as-beautiful-as-you)**

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CRITICALLY important national institutions always need persons who may be said to embody its aspirations, essence and experience. The Pakistan Foreign Service is one such institution. It has been fortunate enough to have had a select few who achieved such a standing in the estimate of their colleagues — and especially their younger colleagues. Among the very first rank of such diplomats was Dr Humayun Khan who passed away on Sept 22, 2022, at the age of 91. He was indeed an extraordinary person: brilliant, articulate, broad-minded, humble but frank and straightforward, civilised, cultured, a riveting raconteur and bon vivant, a sincere friend, a wonderful host, a demanding boss who brought out the best in his subordinates, a true patriot — in short, a unique role model.

Moreover, Doc H, as he was affectionately referred to, exuded class and breeding leading some to describe him as “the last of the Tories” and even “the last of the Anglo-Indians”. But in fact he was deeply imbued by ‘Pashtunwali, Pakistaniyyat and Insaaniyyat’. Pashtunwali reflected the fact that he was from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. His patriotism and humanity were his hallmarks. Doc H saw the larger picture and the longer-term imperatives of foreign policy. He wasn’t always appreciated and he suffered at the hands of inferior political superiors. He was similarly at times misunderstood by the often simple-minded and less than sincere security establishment. But, while sometimes disheartened and even driven to questioning his own judgement, he never compromised on the integrity of his assessments or the realism and quality of his recommendations.

India is arguably the most challenging assignment for a Pakistani diplomat. This is not just because of the state of India-Pakistan relations, but also due to the often narrow range of feasible policy options open to the smaller country. Accordingly, the measure of Doc H’s standing is indicated by some of the comments of Indian intellectuals and diplomats. Amitabh Mattoo observed “even his formidable adversaries within the Indian establishment spoke of his generosity in thought and action”. Mattoo noted, “As high commissioner to India and foreign secretary of Pakistan he believed the two nations can resolve their issues if India has a larger heart and Pakistan develops a more thoughtful head.” He went on to observe, “the Indian subcontinent has lost a wise almost sagely soul who was also a formidable diplomat, a thinker of high calibre and a genuine humanist.” Even the rather hawkish former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, Parthasarathy, conceded Dr Humayun Khan “was a class apart”.

Nevertheless, Doc H was critical of India’s “ununderstanding” attitude towards Pakistan. For a big country India demonstrated “a small heart”. It often displayed a “small mindedness” towards its smaller neighbour. India had not yet developed the “personality of a great power”. Indira Gandhi, who was India’s prime minister at the time, had a special animosity towards Zulfikar Ali Bhutto whom she blamed for having deceived her at Simla where he allegedly promised to work towards converting the Line of Control into an international border. (In fact, Bhutto bluntly told the Indian prime minister that if he were to accede to her demand she would have to deal with his successor.)

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Despite these “scarlet threads” of the India-Pakistan relationship, Doc H was able to win the abiding respect and admiration of his professional adversaries. I recall during my tenure in India (1997-2002) how many friends and admirers he had made. A common refrain was that as high commissioner he saw his job as cultivating as much understanding and appreciation for Pakistan’s point of view as was possible in a very unpromising environment. Similarly, he sought to improve the relationship wherever possible through a variety of confidence-building measures including people-to-people contacts, trade promotion and cultural exchanges. During the ‘Brass Tacks’ crisis of 1987, he played an important behind-the-scenes role to help avert what at one time looked like a slide towards nuclear confrontation.

Regarding policy towards Afghanistan, Doc H noted that the shots were being called from elsewhere — as is still the case. He warned Pakistan “should not try to have a Government of Afghanistan of its own liking”. Such an attempt was neither necessary nor feasible. Such sane counsel was not always welcome. One of the intelligence heads had the temerity to accuse him of “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory” in Jalalabad. This nonsensical charge and implacable lack of foresight deeply troubled him. At times he felt he was a misfit unable to make a positive contribution. He felt he was a failure. This was simply not true. Doc H was an inspirational leader of a critically important but necessarily low key service operating in a politically dysfunctional environment. The frustrations were at times almost unbearable.

Doc H was surrounded by the love of a wonderful wife, three beautiful daughters, three grandchildren and the doting care of two younger sisters and two elder brothers who survive him. Yet he often brought to mind the haunting words of the song Starry, Starry Night: “This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you.” He should be commemorated as one of the great diplomats and servants of Pakistan.

There is talk today of the need for ‘technocrats’ to take over policymaking including foreign policy making. This would allegedly circumvent the political need for and avoid the perceived costs of essential socioeconomic structural change. In reality, this would only preserve a dysfunctional status quo. Technocrats may facilitate the provision of policy advice. They cannot provide policy advice. This is the task of specialists. In the field of foreign policy, these specialists are career diplomats whose advice is often necessarily more political, strategic and at times intuitive than technical. Accordingly, diplomats and other policy specialists of the calibre of the late Dr Humayun Khan will remain indispensable. Political leaders who ignore the advice of such policy specialists will do so at their peril. They will also imperil the interests of the country they lead but do not serve.

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