**Remembering Sardar Mengal**

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Sardar Attaullah Khan Mengal who breathed his last on Thursday (last week) after a protracted illness was the last of the unmatched Baloch nationalists.

While struggling for democracy, constitutional supremacy and the legitimate shares of his people, Sardar Mengal saw many ups and downs in his political life. Born in 1929 in the Mengal family of the Wadh tehsil of Khuzdar Balochistan, Attaullah Mengal acquired his early schooling from his native area and then moved to Karachi where he received higher studies from Islamia College Karachi. After his father’s departure, Mengal rose to the rank of chief (sardar) of the Mengal tribe. Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, an unmatched nationalist is said to have introduced him to politics.

Sardar Mengal took part against the illegal formation of One Unit imposed by Governor General Ghulam Mohammad in 1955. He was elected to the West Pakistan provincial assembly in 1962 and remained as one of the front line resistance against martial law in the country. For his outspoken nature and unshakable stance, he was sent behind bars many times but never compromised over principles. After the annulment of One Unit in 1970, NAP established government in Balochistan under Sardar Attaullah Mengal as the chief minister in May 1972 but unfortunately, on the basis of some administrative difference with federation, then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto overthrew the NAP government in February 1973.

After the unconstitutional sacking of the NAP provincial government, it is believed that Bhutto later held a meeting with Sardar Mengal, Nawab Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo and Nawab Kher Bakhsh Marri in Murree in order to offer them to restore their government following his return from an abroad trip. But Mengal insisted that ‘he should restore it immediately’. Upon his firm assertion, Bhutto got angry and asked what he would do if the government were not restored promptly to which Mengal replied he would resist against the wrongdoings inflicted upon his people.

Apart from losing an elected government, the NAP leadership continued suffering Bhutto’s wrath, being accused of being involved in anti-state activities and facing a ban. Top leadership of the party and others were arrested under what is called the ‘Hyderabad Conspiracy case’. The prominent leaders of the banned party were freed by General Ziaul Haq who visited Hyderabad jail in December 1977 after toppling Bhutto's regime. Although Sardar Mengal was himself a tribal sardar, he was quite opposed to the contentious Sardari system.

In an interview with BBC in 2010, Sardar Mengal also vehemently opposed the killings of ordinary people and said that those who are killing Punjabis on a daily basis, it is an ‘unforgiveable crime and the perpetrators should be tried and punished’. He was also deeply disturbed by the extrajudicial killing of the Baloch. During his ten months tenure as chief minister of the province, Sardar Mengal founded educational institutions and also introduced multiple reforms in the province.

Apart from enduring many challenges in his long political life, Sardar Mengal suffered a wound he could not recover from till his end when his eldest son Assad Mengal went missing in mysterious circumstances in 1976. Assad is still missing.

Mengal returned from exile in 1989 on the occasion of Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bijengo’s death in 1989. He briefly stayed in Pakistan and soon left for Britain. After returning in 1995, he established a political party called the Balochistan National Party (BNP) in 1996. As a staunch believer in the supremacy of democracy and independence of the judiciary, Sardar Mengal played a vital role as the head of the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM) in 1999. He presided over the last rally of the PONM on June 17, 2006 in Quetta and then gave up his political activities due to his ailing health. May Allah bless his soul in eternal peace.

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