

ANAA's Co-ordinator's report after meeting the Sui Victim in Pakistan:

Dear All,

A visit to Pakistan, however frequent, never loses its novelty. It may be pleasant or otherwise, but never loses the capacity to surprise one.

This time I was asked by Dr Amna Buttar, head of APPNA President anointed Task Force to look into the Sui incident, interview the victim if possible and see if any thing can be done to help her. We knew that Dr Sher Shah, Secretary General of Pakistan Medical Association and Ms Anees Haroon head of Aurat foundation had been in touch with her. I also talked to one of my cousins who has been working as a physician in Sibi practically next door to Sui for many years. She had already planned to be in Karachi for a family function.

I called Dr Shersshah and Ms Haroon. They were both very helpful and promised to arrange a visit with the victim.

On the appointed day I was waiting to hear from Shersshah. The scheduled time passed, I could'nt trace him. He had been trying to contact me, but such are the vagaries of the phone system there that we couldn't get together.

It rained in buckets on the day the appointment was rescheduled for. Ms Haroon called, she lives in the same general area, that roads were not passable. The area, Clifton, very posh, competing favorably with Manhattan in real estate costs, retains nineteenth century drainage system.

On the day of the next appointment Ms Haroon called that the building where the victim was being kept in "in protective custody" was crawling with armed security personnel and won't let any one enter the

premises. I am sure the enhanced security was not in honor of my impending visit.

The victim's husband threatened to go public with the address of the building they were being held in. Security guards, except for a handful were withdrawn and I was able to visit the victim the following day accompanied by Ms Haroon and an activist physician Dr Salamat Kamal.

The victim is being kept in a "safe house" in a small apartment. Her husband conducted most of the conversation. She would only shake her head in affirmative or negative, occupying herself with a rosary. She had a resigned look on her face. Her husband stated that they had only one wish that they be able to leave Pakistan as soon as possible, as they felt highly insecure, would not dare to give the entire story, their life would not be worth much. They would like justice but had despaired of ever getting it, they needed independent legal advice etc. The husband's grand father had declared her "kari" it was not a tribal decision, he had been influenced, even coerced etc. The husband pledged to stand by his wife. I asked if they would be willing to visit a consulate. The couple exchanged a look. The husband said it may not be practical. He won't elaborate. I promised to get in touch with Dr Buttar, reassuring them that her cause was not lost and would not be forgotten, that foreign governments and independent agencies had the matter in hand.

E-mail is rather uncertain in Pakistan, like all other services including the Government. On return from her apartment I approached the computer at a friend's house with a missionary zeal. In Pakistan, unless you focus on the objective with undivided attention, it can be very frustrating. My friend's son helped me connect to an e-mail service. I wanted to send a message to Dr Buttar, if she had news of any new developments. She did have news but not what I would have liked to hear, though I had a nagging feeling that it was out of character for APPNA to take a radical stand. My premonition had not misled me. The President of APPNA, in his inscrutable wisdom, had Thanked the Task Force for the work done- not much had

been done yet- (he must have a very active imagination) and dissolved the task force.

I do not know the gentleman personally, but have not heard much about his mental caliber or capacity to decide or with stand pressure, so can only conclude that he must have been prevailed upon to take a leaf out the book of past APPNA Presidents. Perhaps the powers that be advised him that he had been naive in appointing a task force, if his hand had been forced, he should have chosen a person with less passion for social justice and certainly much less integrity than Dr Buttar, to head the committee.

I did not have the heart to go back to the victim and Tell her that APPNA had pulled the rug from under the task force.

I had, however, to tell Dr Shershah and Ms Haroon that APPNA had chickened out, but reassured them ANAA and DIP would not give up. I had been given the impression That APPNA was highly thought of among the activists in Pakistan. Their reaction held another surprise for me. They had never expected APPNA to withstand the inevitable heat of official attempts at cover up. In their considered opinion, APPNA office bearers, with a few honorable exceptions, had been a bunch of social climbers, job seekers, toadies, sycophants and unprincipled worshippers of the rising sun. Benazir, Nawaz Shareef and Musharraf were all the same to them, they all wielded power. APPNA office holders mostly came from middle and lower middle classes and harbored the fantasy of elevating themselves to the upper class.

Most of the doctors, journalists, human rights and social workers, lawyers, politicians, academics, writers and professors in Pakistan (read Karachi and Lahore) held the same opinion.

A day or two later controversy started brewing on the comments made by Dr Amit Shah in response to dissolution of The Sui Task Force. Several persons with undoubted liberal credentials took exception to his remarks.

Looked at objectively, Amit did not say anything that Pakistani journalists specially Ayaz Amir,

politicians, academics, social workers and other politically conscious persons have been saying for years, and western media have been writing about for longer. But national chauvinism can infect the best amongst us, specially the variety which does not have deep roots in history and which was repudiated by the majority of people in 1971.

Pakistanis are especially sensitive to Indians. They would take the worst from westerners, but not from persons of a similar racial stock. Among the tribals the worst enemy would be a cousin.

At the risk of being accused of using a cliché, for the sake of greater good, I would appeal to all concerned to refrain from any further statements, advice, clarification or pontification. The current tension only provides succor to "enemies of enlightenment" I had discussed the Sui situation with my cousin. She told me that the area was so tightly secured that no one could enter the premises with out the connivance of security apparatus, and it was ridiculous to say that robbers entered the area etc. I asked her to visit the area, she was "establishment" practically a native after all and counted many females of local Sardar households among her patients. She went back and reported that she had been unable to get anywhere near there.

I had assigned another task to myself, that of interviewing leaders of students movement in Pakistan. I was able to interview most of them including such stalwarts as Drs Sarwar and Haroon, Barrister Abid Hasan Minto and a host of other persons active in student politics in late forties, fifties to current times. I also spoke to Syed Munnawwar Hasan a luminary of Jamaat-e-Islami and erstwhile leader of the student wing of the party.

One of my lawyer friends took me to see Mr. Zia Awan's center called madadgar. It is a human rights advocacy group. I must say I was impressed by the organisation and personnel, their record keeping, computers and the lawyers in attendance's can not comment on their effectiveness or legitimacy but if they are genuine they should be good.

I had been asked by Dr Zaffar Iqbal to find a coordinator for DIP, ANAA, and APSA related activities in Pakistan. After interviewing many young men, and being disappointed in varying degrees, I asked for advice from an old friend, a retired Lt Col who could not get further in the army due to his liberal inclinations and his proclivity to take no nonsense from his seniors (his cousin rose to the rank of Lt General) He has an internet marketing/publishing business. He volunteered to work on our behalf till we found a younger coordinator. He also advised that we should not insist on combining the job of coordinator (contacting advertisers, reminding Chowrangi subscribers to send their subscription, calling journalists, radio/tv producers which all entails "good English") with web-site maker who would most likely not have command over English. We don't need to keep a web-site person on a retainer any way.

Dr Sabahat of Upstate NY APPNA had asked me to find a printer for his chapter journal. I was given quotations from Rs 50.00 up for a 20-page magazine four of which would be in four colors. I have brought a calendar one of them printed for some one in England. It looks quite good. Getting Chowrangi printed in Karachi might save a lot of funds and is worth serious consideration. I had planned to attend the PIFFD meeting in Delhi but a family tragedy kept me from going there. Abid Minto and Anees Haroon would be good speakers at DOGANA. If we could get Tariq Ali, nothing would attract a larger audience.

S.Ehtisham