

Noel's Book Launch

I have nothing more to say. The Book says it all. In fact I have come to know many things about myself from Noel's book, which I was not aware of especially what my wife and children thought of me.

The Book would never have seen light of the day but for Masoodul Mulk who mistook the script of the book I had written as Fayyaz Baqir's and declared it rubbish and took upon himself the responsibility to get a proper biography written on me and of course he knew the best person to do it and persuaded Noel Cossins to take up this exhausting, tiresome and thankless job. It simply amazes me how could anyone put in so much passion, love and affection in writing someone else's life history without asking for any monetary compensation. How can I ever thank Noel and his lovely wife Felicity enough for what they have done for me except perhaps explain this phenomenon in Tolstoy's words "The only certain happiness in life is when you live for others". This is what Noel and Felicity did for me. Another reason for my eternal gratitude to Noel is the way he wrote about my wife Musarrat, who passed away last February but not before I had read a few chapters to her from the book.

It was Shandana who enthusiastically encouraged Masood with RSPN funds to enable Noel to travel half the world from Australia or may be three fourths, to collect the material for the Book, most of it through face to face interviews in England, Monaco, India, Pakistan and Thailand.

It was Najam Sethi who accepted Fayyaz Baqir's request to publish the book and the final product is in front of you. I have always held Najam and his lovely wife Jugnu in high regard. This action of theirs has endeared them to me beyond measure. I am again indebted to Shandana and Rashid Bajwa for ordering enough copies of the Book in advance for RSPN and NRSP respectively.

I am most grateful to all those who gave their time to sit down with Noel and patiently tell him what they thought of me. My special thanks are to Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Sir Nicholas Barrington and Asma Jahangir who so kindly contributed to the Preface of the Book. Jairamji's Preface is an acme of kindness, generosity and open mindedness.

Above all I owe a debt of gratitude to my mentor Akhter Hameed Khan, His Highness the Aga Khan and donors who supported AKRSP, the UNDP who asked me to initiate the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP), the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, the successive Federal, Provincial and Gilgit-Baltistan governments in Pakistan, the Indian Union and State Governments, the Rajiv Gandhi Trust and people of Andhra Pradesh especially K. Raju and his team and I am so glad that Raju's right hand man Vijay Kumar is here who is now implementing the world's largest Poverty Reduction Programme, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) to pull 70 million households nearly 350 million people out of poverty in India, the Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan and their Chief Executive Officers and their team and their Network, the RSPN and the wonderful volunteer Directors of RSPs/RSPN/IRM/NRSP Bank who made it all possible which became the subject matter of the Book.

I am greatly touched by the response of the guests to the invitation to the Book Launch for gracing the occasion and thank them from the core of my heart.

I am also fully conscious of the sustained hard work put in by the RSPN team in organizing the event and making it such a grand success. I am greatly indebted to them.

I am personally grateful to Fayyaz Baqir who gave hours and hours of his time to get the book printed.

I have no words to thank the speakers Amjad Saqib and Ejaz Rahim who volunteered to give their impressions without my asking and whatever they said is more a reflection of their qualities of magnanimity and the affection and regard in

which they hold me. It is all most humbling for me and my good fortune to have such well wishers and friends.

My special thanks to Vijay Kumar who left Delhi at 5.00 pm and arrived Islamabad next morning at 4.30 am in the morning. My apologies for the inconvenience he had to suffer. I am deeply touched by his kindness and wonderful words about me and the Book.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain is a student who found a job for his teacher. Ishrat was responsible for getting the UN consultancy at UN Centre for Regional Development Nagoya, Japan. When Sartaj Aziz rang up day before yesterday that he has been asked by PM to go to Brunei, it was Ishrat who came to my rescue and accepted to be the Chief Guest of the event. I am deeply indebted to him for this kindness.

Mr. Sartaj Aziz has been an ardent supporter of my work since his first visit to AKRSP in 1984 alongwith late Jamil Nishtar and the prime mover in setting up of the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) in 1992 and of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund in 1998. On the last page of the book, Noel's question to Sartaj as to why the miracle of AKRSP did not spread like wildfire throughout the country, I quote Sartaj's reply from the Book Noel writes:

“On this one last point, he is adamant. The failure is not Shoaib's, it is the failure of the nation-state of Pakistan to truly serve its people”

No one could have given me a higher compliment.

This is also an emotional moment for me. My brothers Sohail Sultan, Mahmood Sultan, Adnan and other members of my family and their friends are here. My daughters Roohi, Afshan, Shelley, my son-in-law Tim and my granddaughters Zahra and Ayesha have all travelled from Europe to Pakistan to be with me here today. I wish Musarrat was alive and also here too.