

DATELINE DERA GHAZI KHAN Nadeem Saeed Malik

Return of the tumandar

PRESIDENT Leghari's resignation has created a feeling of loss in his home district, Dera Ghazi Khan, because the future of ongoing development projects here may be jeopardised.

Local Muslim League workers took out two processions to celebrate the Mr Leghari's resignation but they were small affairs.

After becoming president, Mr Leghari, who is the chief of the Leghari tribe, visited his home district every month despite other pressing engagements. These visits were a burden on the national exchequer, they also paralysed normal life in the city during his stay here as all the government functionaries concerned had to remain on call and attend briefings which were generally held at his Choti Zarin residence or the local circuit house. The president's briefings were usually high-profile events as secretaries of various departments had to attend them.

However, after the February general elections and the shrinking powers of the president, Mr Leghari's visits to Dera Ghazi Khan started losing their pomp and ceremony and only the divisional heads of government departments came to attend upon him.

As president of Pakistan, Tumandar Leghari enjoyed the authority of his office in Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur districts. He had full control over all the affairs in this part of the country whether they were about postings and transfers of government officials or the decisions or financial allocations for different parts of the two districts.

Whether they held public office or not, members of the Leghari family used to address meetings with government officers. During the February elections, funds belonging to government departments like WAPDA, Sui Northern and local bodies were utilized for the campaigns of the Leghari clan. From WAPDA, transformers, pylons and wires worth more than Rs 60 million were given to favoured few without meeting the routine rules and procedures. Ten teams of Sui Northern were seen working day and night for the success of the Legharis. Apart from this, local body officials were made responsible for organizing election meetings of the candidates of the Leghari group.

As typical feudals, the Legharis always maintain cordial relations

with the bureaucracy because of the permanent nature of its power. After getting their favourite set of officers posted in the divisional and district administrations, they relied on them in all matters including selection of political teams at the local level.

Talking advantage of this weakness of the Legharis, bureaucracy exploited the situation. With Mr Farooq Leghari taking personal interest several projects were completed here during the last four years, including an airport. The supply of gas, construction of bridges on hill torrents and the Mitrawan pilot project to control and make use of seasonal torrents.

According to the coordinator of the Leghari group's advisory committee, Mian Hafeezullah Dajli, projects of various kinds worth Rs 10 billion were approved for this part of the country during the last four years. Most of them have been completed or are nearing completion.

However, all is not milk and honey here. Since the Leghari's were indulgent, officials, especially of the nation-building departments, misappropriated large sums out of development grants. This can be judged through the quality of the completed projects and the pace of work on the ongoing schemes. Dera Ghazi Khan became a haven for corrupt officials. Recently, in a letter to the editor in this newspaper, a resident of Dera Ghazi Khan rightly termed the city 'heap of rubbish'.

Several people became government contractors overnight in league with officials. Both defended each other whenever searching questions were asked by the president during his frequent visits to DG Khan.

Actually, Mr Leghari had a split personality. In Islamabad, he was a suave politician who always stood by the constitution and rule of law. He was Mr Clean in the federal capital. But back home he was a Tumandar to the core.

He strengthened his class whether he was in the PPP or in the presidency. He always supported candidates belonging to his class irrespective of their party affiliations. During his days in the PPP, he discouraged leaders and workers belonging to other classes.

His cousin, Maqsood Leghari, is used to contesting elections as an independent candidate and Mr Farooq Leghari has always sup-

ported him even against PPP candidates when he himself was a party leader. His interest in local affairs can be judged through the following incident.

In March last, he publicly expressed his resentment over some transfers of PTC teachers reportedly carried out on the recommendations of a Muslim League MNA, Amjad Farooq Khosa, and directed the education department that in future, no transfer should be ordered without prior permission.

THE FUTURE: After having strained his relations with the two major political parties, the future course of action of the Legharis has become a favourite topic for discussion in political circles here. At presently, the Leghari family is being represented by a senator, an MNA and three MPAs including the outgoing president's younger son, who is a member of the Punjab Assembly. Excluding Senator Mansoor Leghari, who was elected on a PML ticket, all the remaining legislators of the family are independents.

When news of Mr Farooq Leghari's resignation spread here on last Tuesday jubilant PPP workers gathered outside the residence of a prominent party leader, former banking tribunal judge Manzoor Lund, to request him to lead a procession. He refused by saying, *dushman marey te khushi nakariay* (let us not rejoice at the death of an enemy) they might one day have to join hands with the Legharis.

The question most frequently being asked here is: what about the future of ongoing development schemes? During Mr Leghari's presidency, whenever the problem of scarcity of funds surfaced, he chipped in with a presidential grant. But now as departments are already facing financial constraints, the big sewerage system, water supply, road construction and, above all, taming hill torrents may be shelved. So far, despite criticism from various circles, the flow of funds had continued because of the strong local representation in the corridors of power.

However, no matter what his flaws Mr Farooq Leghari got national recognition for little known Dera Ghazi Khan. As a cynic put it Mr Farooq Leghari won for this district national recognition while the Kanshi kidnapping made it known internationally.