



Nigar Ahmed passes away

By Xari Jalil

LAHORE: The country's civil society lost a star on Friday when Nigar Ahmed, known for her immense contribution to women's rights, passed away at a hospital here after a prolonged illness. She was 72.

She leaves behind her husband Tariq Siddiqui and two sons, Bilal and Ahmed.

Informally known in activist circles as Nigar 'Apa', Nigar Ahmed came to the forefront with her activism, especially during the Zia period, and helped form the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in Lahore in 1982. She is also known for founding the Aurat Foundation in Lahore in 1985.

One of Nigar's closest companions Nighat Khan says she was a forceful and determined personality, never ready to take no for an answer.

"Nigar's strategy was that the WAF made the space with their movement and the Aurat Foundation would enter that space to move into the mainstream," she said. "During the oppressive Zia years she would never back down even though at that time all progressive elements were pushed against the wall. She was one of the

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came with the late Shehla Zia who was a lawyer and provided her intellectual input and Nigar who gave it fire with her vision and dynamism. A rationalist and practical person she wanted the foundation to remain in the mainstream and work on legislation and other issues.

"It was initially meant for research but slowly spread out to other areas," said Nighat. "It started out after a three year project in villages led to an understanding of the women in rural areas and the need for them to be in leadership roles and to have economic empowerment."

She went to the Convent of Jesus and Mary, followed by the Government College and then Cambridge where she specialised in development economics. She was also the recipient of many

national awards for her work. Under her, the Aurat Foundation mobilised women candidates for national and local government elections to generating debate across the country about women's political and economic empowerment and has worked on issues relating to peace and democracy.

"I have had a very long association with Nigar Apa," said Naeem Mirza, CCO of the Aurat Foundation. "She was visionary, and back in 1986, she was probably the first to stress on the fact that women needed to be given information. Foundation's motto is still 'Information is Power: Share It', he added.

"It's a great loss for everyone," said rights activist IA Rehman. "She has had a huge role in raising women's issues. She faced every difficulty with the establishment with bravery and strength. She was a

largehearted person."

Muhammad Tahseen from the SAP PK said that apart from her work, she was a warm and doting person. "I can never forget how often we went to her house to seek refuge from Zia's 'loyalists' when we were under attack. I was her friend and that has made me the luckiest person today having learnt so much from her."

Nigar contracted Parkinson's disease in 2001 and she was on medication. In her last days, she developed a pulmonary infection which could not be sorted out by the doctors. She was on ventilator for 12 days, but because of the Parkinson's disease, was kept drugged. She passed away on Friday evening after suffering from a heart attack.

The namaz-i-janaza will be held at 4 pm today, at house 163, street 4, Cavalry Ground.