

London Diary

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Usually my summer vacation in London used to be uneventful. This time it was different in many ways. My youngest daughter Shelley and her husband Tim gave us a memorable present on our diamond wedding anniversary. They treated us to a week in one of the most enchanting country house in Oxfordshire. It belonged to the grandson of British Prime Minister McMillan – Old Rectory in Westwell converted into a modern country house complete with swimming pool, tennis court and accommodation for the entire family and guests which included four generations of Shoaibs, Shelleys parents-in-law, Tim's brothers' parents-in-law, my first cousin Azad, his wife Lubna (who came from Washington DC) and Shelley's headmistress Mrs. Elizabeth Cooper, her husband David.

Following the Anniversary Celebrations, Steve Jones invited me to the London School of Economics where DFID was hosting an international conference including a session on Pakistan which was attended by Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Chairman P&D Punjab and many other government officials from Pakistan, academics including Dr. Ijaz Nabi and Dr. Naveed besides a large number of students and people from Britain interested in Pakistan. Dr. Tariq Siddiqi's son Bilal who had come from Oxford, also introduced himself to me. I didn't recognize him. Secretary General of the PML (N) Dr. Ahsan Iqbal was also there. The session was chaired by Dr. Ijaz Nabi but was being moderated by one who had spent time with AKRSP and was now teaching at Harvard. He made it a point to acknowledge my presence and made me address the session in impromptu.

I thanked Steve for giving me the opportunity to meet so many of my countrymen and friends. A few days later I was distressed to get a call from Steve from the Pakistan High Commission that his visa was held up and he had to lead a 350 million Euro Mission of EU to Pakistan. I was glad that a phone call to the Deputy High Commissioner Asif Durrani enabled Steve to take his flight that evening to Islamabad.

On Shandana's introduction, Carey Schofield invited me to the Cricket Match, she was organizing in aid of flood victims through RSPN. Before the match, I was asked to say a few words about RSPN and what it is doing for the flood victims. The match was played at Chelsea

ground with the military band in attendance. Major Langland's old regiment made the army team and PJ Mir led Major Langland's team which also included Dr. Nasim Ashraf whom President Musharraf also came to see. The match was won by the army but the auction raised funds both for Chitral School and RSPN. It was a very well organized and attended event and RSPN got full publicity.

Come September and I participated in the Fourth International Microinsurance Conference being held in London. Rashid and Sono also came from Pakistan besides the prime mover of our participation in the Conference Captain Mahmood Sultan who gave a most moving and brilliant presentation on what was being done in the field of micro insurance in Pakistan and what was its potential in the wake of the horrendous floods in Pakistan. I followed Mahmood underscoring the importance of fostering a framework of grassroots institutions through the process of social mobilization and how it enables all service providers both public and commercial to reach the masses and Adamjee's experience was a demonstration. No wonder that instead of micro insurance, it is now being dubbed as mass insurance. The Pakistan group created such an impression that the Chairman of the Conference specially asked Rashid to make a brief presentation, even before formal presentation of the Pakistan case by Mahmood. This set the scene very well and the next day every delegate seemed to have been greatly impressed with what was happening in Pakistan, especially in terms of scale. Even the Re Insurer from Switzerland expressed keen interest after Mahmood's plea for their support to the idea of providing insurance against national disasters.

On the footsteps of the Microinsurance Conference came the launch of my book organized by Asia House. It was a full house despite a GBP: 10 entry fee. I met friends whom I had not seen for ages like David Page of BBC, Eammon Taylor of DFID, David Lockwood of UNDP, Victoria Schofield and above all Sir Nicholas Barrington. After my speech, Sir Nicholas Barrington moderated the Q&A and had to apply the guillotine when it went much beyond the allotted time.

Some days later, a few young Pakistani professionals and students organized a charity dinner in aid of the flood victims. One of the sponsors requested me to speak at the Charity dinner. The dinner was held at the Pakistan High Commission. I was most impressed how a handful of youngsters had organized an excellent event which raised about GBP: 10,000 for the flood victims donated to an organization in Karachi to provide clean drinking water to flood affectees. The young professionals also put up a music show and the lead guitarist, a banker, was

the grandson of my good friend and colleague Mr. Fazlur Rahman Khan, who was also present with his daughter.

A phone call from the Vice Chairman, American Pakistan Foundation Mr. Wahid asking me if I would be willing to be a member of the Foundation's proposed Advisory Council, resulted in his introducing me to the sponsors of British Pakistan Foundation being launched on the lines of American Pakistan Foundation. Mr. Kashif Zafar of Barclays Capital invited me to dinner to discuss collaboration between RSPN and the proposed Foundation. After dinner, he asked me for two proposals from RSPN to help flood victims in the fields of health and education in the range of GBP: 100,000 each. He wanted these proposals before the launch of the Foundation on November 16, 2010. I was happy that on my request to Shandana, RSPN sent the proposals within three days.

During my last visit to London, Moazzam Malik of DFID had come to my house and taken me out for dinner. On my invitation he agreed to take him out for dinner in his area to a good Punjabi restaurant near his house. The evening we agreed to meet when I went to his house, he informed me that the restaurant in question, remains closed on Mondays which he was not aware, so Mrs. Malik very kindly gave us dinner at the house. I met Moazzam's lovely daughters and son, who is doing A level and is desirous of doing a short internship before taking a year off after his 'A' level. I encouraged him to come to Pakistan as he was interested in the mountains. I had a most relaxed and indepth conversation with Moazzam on development issues facing Pakistan. Moazzam told me that he, BPF representatives and Kashif Zafar were talking very highly of RSPN, whom he had met a day earlier.

The launch of British Pakistan Foundation (BPF) was a gala affair with nearly 2000 guests at the Park Lane Hilton each paying GBP: 250. The Guests of Honour were Foreign Secretary William Haig and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. I was Kashif's guest and on the dinner table was flanked by Lyse Doucet of BBC and Director of Prince Charles' Asian Charity. Lyse had visited me in Gilgit in 1992 when she had accompanied Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. I mentioned to Lyse that it was the first time in my ten years stay in Gilgit that I found trucks after trucks loaded with timber going down country on the KKH. She immediately went and spoke to PM who issued an order on the spot banning cutting of trees and ordered the local administration to enforce it. Lyse kept on introducing me to everyone at the dinner as a "national treasure of Pakistan". Two days later I received a call from BBC TV that Lyse wanted to interview me on her BBC World Programme The Hub and did so.

Director, Prince's Asian Charity sent me an email asking if I could visit his office in St. James Palace before leaving for Pakistan. In 1992, Guy Salter, Prince's Assistant Private Secretary, after his visit to AKRSP, had arranged my meeting with Prince Charles at St. James. On October 20 I met him at the Palace and he expressed keen interest in collaboration between The Prince's Charity and RSPN to achieve Prince's desire of going to scale. He promised to send his Programme Officer Ms Rabia Nusrat to Pakistan soon.

Before going to St. James, I had lunch with David Page at the Royal Overseas League Club. David is helping UKAID in their programme in Afghanistan. He was interested in getting some of his staff trained and I offered him NIRM facilities for the purpose.

I had never been so busy in London as this time but I was happy that I have made some very good contacts for dissemination of social mobilization methodology and strategy.