

# Media

# Mandarins in London

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**A** day in the life of a media adviser/minister information at the Pakistan Mission in London begins with the scanning of newspaper, magazines and agency reports.

He arranges for daily transmission by wireless/telex/fax and e-mail of relevant excerpts from newspapers, magazines etc to the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and other relevant authorities in Pakistan. Correspondents of some of the important newspapers, including the Urdu Press, and press news agencies are then contacted personally or over the telephone by the media adviser with reference to certain specific items which have appeared in their papers. Any adverse comment or report is immediately corrected through letters to the editors of those papers or through personal briefings. Contact is also maintained with the BBC, both sound and TV and also with ITN.

In my 27 years service with the Pakistan High Commission in London, I worked for first twelve years, from August 1966 to December 1978. In the Information/Press Division, I worked with six of the most senior media officers of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and some reputed journalists and writers. I still cherish many happy memories of those days.

The person who inducted me into service in the London Mission in August 1966 was the late Sayed. Mohammedul Haq (TQA), Press Attache (February 1964 - March 1967). I came into contact with him during his second assignment in London during 1963 - 67. He served in different capacities in Pakistani missions in New Delhi, Australia, Washington, New York, Turkey, Bonn, and Paris and back home to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting then in Karachi.

With his legal background (he was a Law graduate from London), he brought a touch of professionalism to his job and for some obscure reason he seemed to believe in the maxim that publicity is an art of repetition. He had punctilious habits with a strong tendency for 'nit picking'. He was pessimistic in outlook and some times difficult to commu-

puted journalist and well-known prolific columnist in Pakistan, but his pro-Bhutto stance in his writings could not have anything but a very impressive effect on the local British media.

He was the only Press Officer who prepared a comprehensive 36-page Press Directory concerning the then entire news media, press agencies, TV and Radio networks etc in the U. K. to serve as a ready reckoner. His appointment was a political one and the late General Ziaul Haq cut his stay (April 1976 - September 1977) short owing to the imposition of Martial Law in Pakistan. He preferred to resign and stay back in London for some years.

Mr Zubair Ali succeeded Mr. Khalid Hasan as Counsellor (Press) in July 1979. He was professionally very sound, but invariably gave an impression of being self-opinionated and temperamental. He was a man of moods and emotions and got agitated instantly on occasions, particularly when under pressure.

He held a high opinion of his abilities; he was good in his assignments and very methodical in his work. But he was also recalled in September 1978 owing to political instability and turmoil of general election in the country. Nothing significant was achieved during his short stay of one-year (September 1977 - September 1978) at the post.

Fifthly, his successor the late Mr. Jameel-uz-Zaman belonged to the Punjab Information Service. He was the first Minister (Information) posted in the London Mission following Mr. Zubair Ali's return in 1978. I became acquainted with him while working in the Education Division when I was asked to work in place of Mr Salim Gul, the Assistant Press

Attache? proceeding on two months' home leave. Mr. Zaman was a good speaker, gifted with natural literary qualities.

He was mostly unassuming in nature. His stay in the Mission was, however, cut short due to his untimely death from a sudden stroke while delivering a speech at a Pakistan Society function in London. He remained in coma in the hospital for about two months and ultimately his

body was taken to Pakistan for burial. His contribution in the publicity area

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ing'. He was pessimistic in outlook and some times difficult to communicate with. Someone summed up by calling him a good plodder and I would go along with that description of him. Some of the important events that took place during his tenure were the periodically held Commonwealth Conference, and the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965.

He had good relations with the British media, but had reservations about locally-based Pakistani pressmen. It was to his credit that the first-ever Press Kit was produced by him for distribution in the local media on the eve of late President Ayub's state visit to this country in 1966. He retired from service in 1976, but continued to live in London till his death in August 1978 but was later buried in Lahore.

Mr. Abdul Qayyum, CIS, TQA, my illustrious teacher of journalism at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, followed Mr. Haq in 1967 on his transfer to Turkey. Mr. Qayyum was the first media adviser to be appointed to the status of Counsellor (Press) at the London Mission. Earlier, his predecessors used to be appointed as Press Attaches in 17 or 18 grade.

Mr. Qayyum was just the opposite of his predecessor. He never overlooked his top priorities nor was he bothered with unnecessary details in his professional work. He was very polite and courteous to his staff and very helpful. He was a man of conviction and firm views and conscious of his excellent background; he held a good pen and produced good write-ups on a variety of subjects, political and topical issues of the day.

He had the longest stay as the Counsellor (Press) at the Mission. Some of the main events during his tenure (March 1967 - April 1976), included: the state visit of President Ayub to the UK, Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, the second Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 leading to the break-up of East Pakistan into Bangladesh, in December 1971, followed by the withdrawal of Pakistan from the Commonwealth in January 1972.

The publication of Pakistan Bulletin later called *Pakistan News*, a fortnightly newsletter of the Mission, was a regular feature during his tenure. It ceased publication from June 1975. During its 27 years publication, it provided its readers main features of significant news, events and developments in Pakistan. I had the privilege of editing it during its last five years.

The third media adviser with whom I had the unique opportunity of working in the Information Division, was Mr. Khalid Hasan, Counsellor (Press), who followed Mr. Qayyum in May 1976. Khalid's general traits of character were entirely different from those of the former two media advisers.

He was, indeed, and is still, a re-

body was taken to Pakistan for burial. His contribution in the publicity area was also limited because of his short stay of about six months in office.

Mr. Qutubuddin Aziz, erudite journalist, an eloquent speaker, and prolific international writer of considerable repute, was the last senior most media adviser with whom I had the privilege of working in the Information/Press Division. Directly appointed by the late President Ziaul Haq with a 'special mission' to serve Pakistanis and the Pakistan Mission in London he held dual charge at the Mission, firstly as Minister (Public Relations) from January 1978 to March 1979 and as Minister (Information) from December 1980 to February 1986 respectively. He is a well-read person.

He wrote frequently for the English press where his letters, statements, wit and comments on a wide range of subjects were well received and this earned him the reputation of being "the most visible diplomat" in London. His frequent appearances on the British television and radio networks and his public speeches up and down the country made him one of the most popular Pakistani diplomats and a Government spokesman in England.

It is worth mentioning that he was only the one who has recorded his memories of working in the United Kingdom as an accredited diplomat to the Court of St. James' in his famous book entitled: *Pakistan and the British Media*. The contents of his book are highly revealing as they shed light on many important episodes and events of which so little is known elsewhere. He returned to Pakistan in February 1986 on the completion of his 'special mission' on the crest of immense goodwill and lavish tributes from his British and Pakistani colleagues and Pakistani community in general.

It hardly needs mention that good publicity both home and abroad depends to a large extent on good PR organisation and its publicists. A good tailor can make a better suit even out of an ordinary cloth but not the other way round. London being the centre of international diplomatic activity, and of the Commonwealth, an important member of the EEC, a major centre of large financial market, international power games and traditional imperial relationship, the Pakistan Mission's publicity cell in UK should be manned by the most efficient and skilful staff. They should no doubt also have access to adequate funds and requisite PR facilities such as adequate literature on tourism, documentary films, filmstrips etc.

Two of the incumbents of the six outlined above held the office of the Press Attache from seven to nine years. The longer the period of their stay the more chances of establishing amicable relationships with the host country's important media personnel and agencies.