

## Note for Record

**By: Shoaib Sultan Khan**  
**September 25, 2012**

**Subject:                   30<sup>th</sup> YEAR OF AKRSP**

In 1982, when I was serving as Social Development Consultant to UNICEF in Sri Lanka, I persuaded the UNICEF Resident Representative Dr. Hoda Badran to invite Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan (AHK) for a one day Retreat with UNICEF professional staff. On arrival, AHK sprung the news on me that Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Geneva was looking for a General Manager (GM) to initiate their Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Northern Areas (NAs) of Pakistan. He advised me to accept the offer. The circumstances surrounding the demise of Daudzai Project in 1975 and both AHK and mine departure from Peshawar and my seeking new pastures under UN, leaving Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and AHK returning to Michigan State University, were still fresh in my mind. I had no desire to return to Pakistan.

AHK, on his return from Michigan, had initiated the Orangi Pilot Project with Bank of Credit & Commerce International (BCCI) in Karachi urban area. A month after my meeting with AHK in Sri Lanka, I got a call from him to come to Karachi to meet Agha Hasan Abidi, President of BCCI, because AHK now wanted me to work with him in Karachi. Agha Hasan Abidi met me in his personal Boeing 707 converted into a full fledged office, parked at Karachi airport and repeated AHK's offer. I explained the circumstances under which I left Pakistan, as the project I did under AHK's tutelage as Director, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD) was not looked upon favourably by the government of the day, in fact I was charged with subversion and hounded with an FIA enquiry and thrown out of the Academy for no rhyme or reason. I told Mr. Abidi that I would love to work with AHK but he will have to secure my services from UNICEF on deputation. Mr. Abidi agreed to do so.

A couple of months later, Mr. Robert d'Arcy Shaw (Bob) came to visit me in Sri Lanka and to enquire if I would be willing to appear for an interview before the AKRSP Board of Directors at Karachi. I put forth the same condition before Bob as I had before Mr. Abidi. Bob promised to do so and in due course of time, I was invited to Karachi by AKF and appeared before the Board to have lunch with the members. I had no idea that there were other candidates also, till Bob, rang me up at my house and briefed me what sort of questions were being asked by the members

of the Board. Bob did not want to take any chances. I returned to Sri Lanka after the interview and a two day trip to Gilgit with Bob. Our return flight from Gilgit was cancelled and Bob hired a taxi to drive us back to Islamabad. From Chinar Inn to holiday Inn (Now Marriott), we did it in ten hours. I never did it that fast ever.

One day Hoda Badran called me and handed me UNICEF HQs' agreement to my deputation to AKF for posting in Pakistan. This was most unusual because UN agencies do not post international staff to their home country. I was greatly touched to learn that it was on the personal request of His Highness that Executive Director UNICEF Mr. James Grant agreed to this arrangement. After three years when I terminated my deputation and resigned from UNICEF, I received an intimation of Mr. Grant's desire to visit AKRSP. He flew directly from New York to Islamabad and hopped on to AKF helicopter to come to Gilgit. After two days visit of AKRSP, when I went to see him off at Gilgit airport, he asked me if I knew why he came to Gilgit and informed "I came to see why you resigned from UNICEF" and added "If I were you, I would have done to same". That was typical of Mr. Grant, a legend in UN circles.

I was due to leave for my AKRSP assignment on November 30, 1982, a month earlier I received a first class air ticket from BCCI London requesting me to meet Mr. Abidi. As I was planning to go to London for a medical condition, I availed of BCCI invitation. Mr. Abidi gave me an open ended letter of appointment with posting in London and interest free loan for purchasing a house. I excused myself saying I have already accepted AKF offer. Obviously, God was taking care of my interests and in my wildest imagination, I could not think what was in store for me.

Mr. Kashif Zafar of British Pakistan Foundation (BPF) over the last two years, has espoused the cause of Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) with such consideration and sincerity that words fail me to describe it. He has introduced me and Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and the CEOs at umpteen forums including the MPs and Lords, BBC, journalists and of course the Diaspora. . One of the events Kashif invited me to, was a luncheon hosted at the Savoy by BPF in collaboration with Baroness Warsi to launch British Pakistanis Young Conservatives. The Prime Minister of Britain Mr. Cameron and of Pakistan Mr. Gillani were Guests of Honour. I happened to share the table with Mr. Brooks Newmark, MP and Mr. Peter Osborne, Senior Political Correspondent of the Daily Telegraph. Both of them expressed a keen desire to visit AKRSP. I sent an email to Chairman AKRSP Board of Directors Ali Rattansey requesting availability of AKF helicopter. Since travel by the helicopter, requires clearance of foreign passengers by the agencies, I thought that would take care of intelligence clearances. How mistaken I was, those days were gone when I used to invite foreigners overnight and by next

morning all clearances and formalities, to enable them to travel by the helicopter, were done. Now three months were not enough to complete the formalities. Everything happened at the last minute on the basis of personal contacts. Inviting foreigners to Pakistan is now a nightmare. How sad, considering such visitors invariably become true lovers of Pakistan and the country's best propagandist.

Having overcome all the hurdles and enthusiastic support by CEO AKF Karim Alibhai in arranging the helicopter, news came that the helicopter met with an accident resulting in damage to the rotor. Fortunately a replacement was flown to Karachi but it did not fit in the cargo belly of the PIA planes coming to Islamabad. Karim Alibhai does not give up easily. He requested and got arranged the AKF helicopter based at Doshanbe to come to Islamabad and also somehow arranged the agency clearances from the Ministry of Interior for our foreign guests. News came that unlike the Italian Pilots, the Tajik Pilots who were to fly from Dushanbe were not entitled to visa on arrival in Pakistan. The CEO RSPN Shandana Khan, who was dealing with the visit and for the last three months, facing every problem with patience and uncanny skill, got into action and within a few hours got the visas for the Tajik pilots. The last hurdle was to get clearance from army corps commander based at Peshawar to allow the foreigners to travel in KP. This seemed impossible as there was only one day to get it. Mrs. Munawar Humayun, Chairperson SRSP, persuaded an ex-corps commander to get the requisite no objection. We were now all set to leave, when the news came that the AKF Dushanbe based helicopter also developed a fault and is grounded. The only option was now to fly by PIA, which due to bad weather had not been operating flights to Gilgit for last over four days. Fortunately, we managed to get seats to Gilgit the next day and lo and behold the flight operated.

Brooks, Peter, Con Coughlin (another Telegraph correspondent), Mudassar of Unitas, a Director of British Pakistan Foundation, Shandana, Malik (GM AKRSP) and myself could not believe our luck when we landed at Gilgit airport. Without losing any time, Straight from the airport, we drove to Sust, the last border village in Pakistan bordering with China. However, the journey involved 100 km travel by Karakoram Highway (KKH) where Attabad lake devours the road and we got a speed boat to cross the lake which took an hour and again travelled for two and half hours to reach the channel tunnel project at Sust. The visitors marveled at the courage and expertise of the villagers who had tunneled the mountain to bring water from the glacier to irrigate a barren piece of land, nearly 1,000 acres. A monetary support of Pak Rs. 300,000 had enabled villagers to create assets worth billions of rupees for the original 64 households and their off springs. After the project visit, the visitors had a lively discussion with Gojal Local Support Organisation members.

By the time we returned and reached the lake, it was dark and by moonlight we traversed the vast expanse of water, created by a massive landslide in 2010. By 9 pm, we reached Serena at Karimabad. Having got up at 5 am to take the flight from Islamabad, the visitors were on their feet for over 16 hours but they seemed to enjoy every minute of it.

The next day we all made our way to Eagle's Nest high up in Altit, where AKRSP Management had organized, in collaboration with Baltit Rural Support Organisation (BRSO) a "Shoaib Sultan Khan Service Medal" award ceremony. Over 50 village activists of over 70 years age, both men and women, who had served as volunteer office bearers of the Village Organisations (VOs) were given Awards. They came both from Gilgit-Baltistan. In the current charged environment of sectarian hatred, it was a most moving scene. To be honoured and remembered, after 18 years of my departure from Northern Areas and Chitral, in this beautiful way overwhelmed me with emotions which I could not control. There was a dispute between Malik and Izhar, as who thought of the idea. To me, whoever thought of the idea, it was one of the most cherished moments of my life, meeting so many "diamonds" of the community, as Akhter Hameed Khan used to call them. I am grateful to both Malik and Izhar for honouring me so.

Peter and Con, on our journey back to Gilgit, were fascinated by the Nilt terrain and wanted a commemoration plaque for those British army soldiers who gave their lives and won Victoria Crosses. Peter offered to raise funds back home. Malik suggested some kind of community project for commemoration and agreed to discuss it with the Nilt community. Peter and Con also tasted the water of the Juglote spring which Evian had declared as one of the best quality water to their knowledge.

Next morning we were faced with the dilemma of getting PIA seats. Fortunately, the first flight brought the Chief Secretary Sajjad Saleem Hotiyana to Gilgit and like magic, he solved our problem by giving his two priority seats to Brooks, who had a flight to catch at Islamabad for London and Con who had to go to Malakand to collect material for his book on Churchill. On reaching Islamabad, Brooks sent me an email expressing profuse thanks.

Sajjad insisted on my having lunch with him, where his cook produced trout, and accepted my invitation to have dinner at Serena with AKRSP management. He also brought the Home Secretary and Deputy Commissioner with him. Malik and his colleagues had a very productive discussion with the Chief Secretary, especially the modalities of implementation of the CIDA funded Youth Project. Sajjad promised full support and also agreed to have a brainstorming

session with representatives of Local Support Organisations. I urged the Chief Secretary to use the Institutions of the People, VOs/LSOs, for bringing about peace and harmony in the area and delivery of services and supplies by the government departments. AKRSP would be most willing to facilitate the interaction between government departments and the institutions of the people. In December 1982, on arrival at Gilgit, I had rented two rooms in PTDC Chinar Inn motel at Rs. 3,000 per month. When Captain Qayyum, who had served as my Assistant Commissioner in Kohat in 1963, became MD PTDC, he ordered the conversion of the two rooms in 1985 as an apartment and fixed the rent in perpetuity on the same terms and conditions as offered to Justice Cornelius in Flettis Hotel in Lahore. Even after my departure from Gilgit in 1994, AKRSP has maintained the apartment for me. I am ever so grateful to AKRSP for this gesture of kindness and hospitality. I feel as if I have never left Gilgit when I stay in the apartment.

Non-availability of helicopter meant I could not go to Chitral, as my flight to London was in two days time. I could not postpone the departure as Musarrat was alone, my daughter Roohi having left London on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Peter, Mudassar and Shandana left early morning by road for Chitral over Shandur Pass, the highest polo ground in the world. I felt envious of them and felt sorry for disappointing my friends, the village activists and the AKRSP staff who were waiting for me.