

## **Youth Parliament Pakistan Study Trip to UK: A Step Towards Democratic Pakistan**

Youth is a precious treasure for prosperity and glorious future of any country. If youth is involved in activities which can polish their hidden talent and make them aware of political and democratic processes, then future governance of that country can be brought up to the great standards.

Youth Parliament is such an initiative taken by Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) to spread political awareness among the youth of Pakistan. Main purpose behind creating this Youth Parliament is to provide a platform to Pakistani Youth where they can learn about parliamentary affairs, democratic processes and can raise their voice on any issue of their country. The selection process of youth parliament is purely based on merit giving representation to all four provinces including FATA, Gilgat-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. Five sessions take place in duration of one year, in which members discuss problems which they consider to be discussed like war on terror, Balochistan issue, water issue, unemployment poverty, national identity etc.

On the bases of best performances delegation of eight people were selected for UK study Trip sponsored by FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), UK. Main objective was to provide opportunity to these people to see one of the best democratic country where all institutions are working smoothly under the democracy. This delegation included Syed Manzoor Shah (Balochistan), Hanan Ali Abbasi (Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa), Lehasip Hayat Dar (Punjab) Anum Javed Cheema (Punjab), Madeeha Shahid Rana (Punjab), Bilal Nasir (Sindh), Imtiaz Ali Khuhro (Sindh), Zile Huma (Punjab) and PILDAT officials. In this one week study trip July 4 to 10, our delegation had meetings with Pakistani origin Muslim MPs like Mr. Anas Serwar, Ms. Yasmin Qureshi and Lord Nazir Ahmed etc. This delegation also got chance to observe proceedings of House of Commons, House of Lords and Supreme Court of UK, The Chatham House. We also interacted with Syeda Warsi Chairperson of Conservative Party, Deputy Mayor of London, Young Muslim Advisory Group, British Youth Council, British Youth Parliament, The conservative future and National Union of Pakistani Students and Alumni. We were also invited on BBC and Geo office in London to give our views on this study trip. Being a student of international relations, I got a chance to directly negotiate issues with British officials which I consider important in Pakistan UK relationship in the wake of new coalition government of UK. First impression that I got about London city was that whole history of UK is printed on every corner and wall of London city in the form of sculptures and old traditional buildings. During this visit I found many differences in Pakistani Parliament and British Parliament. It was quite

amazing for me that how every week British prime minister is made accountable to whole parliament in question answer session. We were also informed that there is no particular conditions like education from any political party for granting a ticket to any candidate from any constituency other than he should be popular, politically aware and fully informed about party manifesto. Besides this fact, there is no restriction of education; most of MPs are graduated from Cambridge and Oxford University. There were no squads for security of Prime Minister or any other cabinet member unlike Pakistani Parliament. One reason behind their successful democratic process is Parliamentary command over army. Institution of Army is so weak as compared to parliament that every year parliament decides that what size of army should be kept this year. They have no written constitution but still their constitution is more permanent than ours and has proper guidelines to be followed.

During our lunch in British Parliament with Pakistani originated Muslim MPs, we got chance to discuss issues which are of great importance regarding the Muslim settlers in UK. This discussion produced a ray of hope and great expectations related to the future of Muslims in UK. They assured us that they will take any possible step for the projection of positive and right picture of Islam. They will also try to take initiative for rights and security of Muslims.

In our visit to Chatham House which is independent world leading source of analysis ,informed debate and influential ideas on how to build a prosperous and secure world for all, which also arranges meetings and conferences for members of parliament. Each plan is coordinated with related ministries by Chatham House. They have staff for Asian related researches on many key areas .According to their researches War On Terror is a waiting game, it cannot be exactly predicted at the moment. Kashmir conflict can be resolved through negotiation between all three parties.

One important element that I discovered in this visit was misperception in the Pakistan regarding the security and discriminatory behavior against Muslims in UK. During the meeting with National union of Pakistani students and Alumni in Imperial College of London, Pakistani origin students told us that there is wrong perception that Muslims are discriminated in UK. One example of this argument is that two of the Muslim Pakistani MPs are elected from the constituency where 99.9% are non Muslims. In this meeting, this fact also pleased me that well established Pakistani students are working for security of new coming Pakistanis. They also put their efforts in making report with Mr. Talat Hussain on fake and unregistered colleges in UK which invites and give admissions to Pakistani and other students and make money. They are also working

with British High commission to send back those students which are cheated and admitted in these fake colleges.

Another secret I found that their youth is active and energetic because they have so many platforms to raise their voice inside the political parties and also outside these political parties. Their youth parliament is permanent and sustained body which practically involve the youth at regional levels. The members of their youth parliament are properly elected from particular constituencies. The age limit for their members is 11 to 18 which shows that want to train and develop youth political skills from the very early stages of life.

Meeting with the Deputy Mayor of London and constituency visit to Crydon made me to understand how local governments and elected MPs work together. All funds are allocated to Mayor for developing projects. The Deputy Mayor also showed his concerns regarding the integration problems of various nationalities in London. We were also invited on BBC news to share our experience with them. One particular question that was asked by different UK officials was regarding the Ahmedis Status in Pakistan. We told them that it is given in Pakistani Constitution that as long they don't call themselves Muslim, they can practice their religious beliefs freely. As far attack on their Mosque is concerned, all Mosques in Pakistan are facing terrorism. On our second last day we were invited by Geo office in London and we were impressed by their hospitality and generous reception.

This trip concluded on 9<sup>th</sup> July but left us with many question marks like when democracy in Pakistan will be so strong like UK. This small initiative of Youth Parliament for democracy is even on temporary bases because it entirely dependent on funds. If funds are blocked for any reason, this small platform will be vanished. One suggestion that I want to put in front of Pakistani government is that they should make Youth Parliament a permanent institution under the Youth Ministry coordinated by PILDAT. They must take steps to convert this platform from selected member criteria to elected member criteria slowly and gradually which is essential for making our youth to take care of their country in future.

**ZILE HUMA**

General Secretary Green Party

Youth Parliament Pakistan 2009-10