LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION SERVICE FOR THE MEMBERS
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF PAKISTAN.

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The bicameral Parliament of Pakistan consists of the National Assembly and the Senate. The National Assembly is composed of 237 members elected for 5 years. Twenty of the seats are set aside for women members, who are elected by the Assembly itself. Beside these 20 seats there is no bar on the women to contest against any general seat which are 217. Ten seats are reserved for non-Muslim minorities members.

The Senate consists of 87 members, of whom 14 are elected by each of Pakistan's four Provincial Assemblies; 8 members from the Federally Administered Tribal Area and 3 from the Federal Capital are elected by the National Assembly Members, 5 are elected by each of the four Provincial Assemblies to represent Ulema (Muslim Theologians and Scholars), Technocrats and other professionals. The term of Senators is 6 years, one half of them retiring every 3 years.

After the General Elections in November, 1988, 29 standing committees of the National Assembly were constituted in March, 1989. The committee on House and Library has 7 members including Dy. Speaker as Ex-Officio Chairman. Finance Committee of the National Assembly has 10 members with Speaker National Assembly as its Chairman and Finance Minister as ex-officio member. Beside
these 29 Committees the House can constitute Special Committees Select Committee. The Senate of Pakistan has 12 standing committees.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LIBRARY 1947-85.

The National Assembly Library began with a small collection of books and documents received as Pakistan’s share from the Library of the Indian Legislature in August 1947. By 1966, the Library’s collection had grown to about 40,000 volumes.

However, when the National Assembly was shifted to Dhaka, only 10,000 books and publications were left in Rawalpindi. Unfortunately no materials could be retrieved from Dhaka on the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

The National Assembly Library in Rawalpindi/Islamabad was gradually built up again, subject to the availability of funds and accommodation. The Library also subscribed to some of the English and Urdu newspapers of the country, as well as to a few domestic and foreign journals.

By the end of 1984, there were 22,000 books entered in the Library’s Accessions Register. Unfortunately, due to lack of space, newspapers and periodicals could not be retained as part of the permanent collections.

Soon after the National Assembly started functioning in March 1985, Members expressed the need for improved Library
services. In response, the Assembly's leadership decided that steps should be taken to enlarge the Library's collections.

It was felt that approximately 100,000 books and a much larger number of domestic and foreign newspapers and periodicals were required in order to meet the Members' requirements for information on significant national and international developments. In addition, there was a critical need to expand the Library's reference services and to introduce research assistance on important legislation and major policy issues. Presently the Library has a collection of about 30,000 books. The Library subscribes to 125 foreign/local newspapers and journals. Most of the collection has been built up by purchase and over the past four years by donation. However, the Library has exchange relations with some other Parliaments and receives Parliamentary documents. The Library welcomes the donations and exchange of publication in English language only.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 1985-89.

Since adequate technical know-how and funding for a library modernisation programme were not readily available, the National Assembly, with the concurrence of the Economic Affairs Division Government of Pakistan, approached The Asia Foundation for assistance in developing a modern Library and Research Service. On a grant basis, The Foundation committed $ 283,500 for a three-year period for the expansion project. This was in addition
to the annual budgetary allocations earmarked for the Library acquisition namely Rs. 300,000 (U.S $ 16,500) for 1986-87 and Rs. 600,000 (U.S $ 33,000) for 1987-88 Rs. 10,00,000 for 1988-89 (U.S $ 50,000) Rs. 10,00,000 (U.S $ 50,000) for 1989-90.

As a first step, a Library Consultant from the Library of Congress was engaged by The Foundation to undertake a detailed study of the National Assembly’s requirements and to formulate a plan for development of Library. A comprehensive proposal was submitted to the Speaker.

After thorough consideration by the Speaker, and the House and Library committee, the proposal was accepted in principal.

The Library Consultant’s service were engaged for a two-year period, commencing in November 1986, which was later extended for two years (upto Sept., 1990), to guide the development programme. During the summer of 1986, The Asia Foundation made its first instalment of aid in the expansion of the Library by donating subscriptions to several major foreign newspapers and journals and an up-to-date reference collection for the Members Reading Room in the new Parliament House.

**THE EXPANSION PROJECT.**

The Library modernisation project is comprised of three major facets. These are:
1) improvements in the Library's collections building effort, recruitment and training of Library staff, expansion of reference and general information services, and the development of an in-house capability for the conservation and preservation of Library materials;

2) the establishment and development of professional cadre of research specialists for the provision of substantive legal and analytical assistance to Members in the pursuit of their legislative work; and

3) the introduction of computer technology for the production of the National Assembly proceedings of Debates and for rapid access to information by bringing the Library's diverse information resources -- books, journals, newspapers, governments documents, and research reports -- under automated bibliographic control.

During the course of the past four years, significant progress has been made in all aspects of the developmental effort. To date, the collection numbers some 50,000 items, including the periodical literature which now being retained in the permanent collections, in addition to the debates of other Parliaments obtained in microform.

The number of Library staff positions has been augmented. The complement of positions now includes a Librarian, a Deputy Librarian, two Assistant Librarians, two Catalogers, one
Assistant, three Clerks, one Operator for the photo-copier, two Book-Binders, a Microform Technician and two messengers.

In April 1988, the former Library was transformed into a bonafide Library and Research Service with the addition of five new positions for professional Research Officers. Four of those positions have been filled.

To enhance the staffs skills, the Librarian and four Research Officers have been sent on study tours to selected national legislatures in Europe, North America, Canada, Asia and Australia. The study tours are part of The Asia Foundations's grant of assistance to the project. Additionally, the Library Consultant has given on-the-job training on a day-to-day basis to the Library and research staff.

In June 1987, the modernisation project was further assisted when the National Assembly, with the concurrence of the Economic Affairs Division, Government of Pakistan, received a $250,000 grant of assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for the procurement of various equipment. Under the USAID grant, a Xerox-1075 photo-copier was installed in the Library. This high-speed, high-volume copier has the capacity of producing 70,000 photo-copy images monthly.

The Xerox-1075 greatly enhances the Library and Research Service's ability to provide timely information service. In
addition to the immediate servicing of Member’s requests for newspaper and journal articles from the Library’s distribution to Members of the Research Officers’ reports, a current awareness service, and working copies of the Daily Proceedings of Debates.

In May 1988, the Service acquired five pieces of Kodak microform equipment, as part of the USAID grant. This equipment (which includes a microfilm/microfiche camera, processor, duplicator, jacket filler, and reader/printer) enables the Library to index and preserve — as well as to integrate into an on-line information data base — selected materials from newspapers, journals, and documents. The debates from 1967 to 1975 has now been transferred to microfiche. With the shortage of both space and staff, it provides the means for the efficient, permanent storage of such material and for the rapid retrieval of information from these sources.

The major portion of the USAID grant has been utilised for a pilot project to develop an integrated information management system for the National Assembly. A DEC MICROVAX-II mini-computer system (along with four micro-computers, five video display terminals, a laser printer, and four dot-matrix printers) has been procured.

Besides the operational software packages procured with the system, a contract was let with Systems (Private) Limited of Lahore to write the software that has been produced on the basis of the generic specifications developed by the Library Consultant
which is called PLIMS (Pakistan Library Information Management System), the software package integrates the primary functions of the Library, eliminating the unnecessary duplication of record creation in the acquisition, cataloging, and circulation of Library materials. It also allows the Library user to identify and locate information by subject, author, or title, irrespective of the form in which the information was published or its location in the Library's collections.

Enhancements to the system will be made as additional hardware can be procured and technical staff are hired. New positions have been authorised, one System Analyst, two Computer Programmers, a Manager for Word Processing/Operations, and three Data Entry Operators have been recruited.

The computer system will also be used to produce and index the daily Proceedings of Debate with a bilingual Urdu-English word-processing package. Two of the micro-computers were dedicated for this purpose as part of the pilot project. The final part of the pilot, linked to the indexing of the Proceedings, is the development of a specialised data file to track the rulings of the Chair.

It is anticipated that the Libraries of the Provincial Assemblies will be linked electronically with the National Assembly Library to form a national legislative, information system in the near future. The Senate Library will be linked this summer. In due course, other major Pakistani research Libraries
may also become participants in a PLIMS-based network, as the development of national telecommunication capabilities permit.

In the Spring of 1988, with the expansion project in mid-stream, The Asia Foundation generously agreed to continue its assistance to the project for two more years. At the request of the Speaker, this included the extension of the Library Consultant's services through September 1990, the continuation of subscriptions to foreign newspapers and journals, and additional training grants. USAID is also providing additional assistance in the form of training grants for staff involved in the development of the automation system.

The British Council has recently indicated its interest in supporting the project as well. Additionally, the Parliaments of Australia, Canada, Korea, and Turkey have offered cooperative assistance in the form of exchange of parliamentary documents and, in the case of Turkey, staff exchanges also.

Negotiations are in progress for a new grant of aid from The Asia Foundation, in cooperation with USAID, for a multi-year, multi-million dollar extension of the project to fully incorporate the Senate and the Provincial Assemblies into the legislative information and support service development. The National Assembly in particular, the grant will provide the means to expand the computer facility to all of the sections of the legislation Branch in a legislative management system. PLIMS, mentioned earlier in reference to the Library Debates, will become the
Pakistan Legislative Information Management System, having a number of integrated legislative databases linked together with the library database. By the end of the five year project, it is expected that we will have an on-line interactive national legislative information network functioning in Pakistan, with the National Assembly, Senate, and all four Provincial Assemblies participating in the network.

In sum, a dramatic transformation of legislative support service has begun in the National Assembly of Pakistan during the past four years. An evolutionary process (even in the long-established Parliaments of Europe and North America), it will undoubtedly take yet several more years for the project to come to fruition; but the foundation has been laid for a preeminent Library and Research Service to flourish in due course.