

Hurricane Harshad: Indian mayor ends record-breaking stint in Britain

The Indian-born mayor of one of London's largest boroughs has ended his tenure with a blistering record of attendance at well over 600 events in a less than a year.

'At one point we were doing seven days a week,' said Patrick Alvaranga, chauffeur to Harshadbhai Patel, whose one-year tenure as Mayor of Brent came to an end Wednesday night at a fittingly ceremonial farewell at the town hall.

'Some days, we were on the road from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m, starting with a school and ending with a dinner reception. Finally, the borough forced me to take a holiday,' said Alvaranga, who has worked with 19 mayors.

Clearly, Patel, an elected Conservative councillor, took his largely-ceremonial mayoral duties very seriously.

He not only did schools, but for good measure took in old people's homes, mosques, temples, churches and synagogues, went on walkabouts on high streets, raised large sums of money for British and Indian charities and opened restaurants.

'I suppose I just never stopped working,' Patel, who is also a familiar face at the Indian High Commission, told IANS.

So popular is Patel, one Conservative councillor told Wednesday's large gathering he had been given what could be 'the longest goodbye in British mayoral history' - lasting several weeks.

'Every Friday, every councillor got sent a list of Harshadbhai's coming engagements, and it never ceased to amaze us,' the councillor, who did not want to be named, added.

Ralph Fox, the new mayor, said he wouldn't dream of competing. 'I want to get out alive you know,' Fox said.

Patel said he was present at around 600 official engagements during his tenure - just two days short of a year. Family members say the figure is well over the 600-mark because he hasn't counted the large number of events that he attended outside office hours.

When the native of Gujarat visited India last year he got - and accepted - 60 invitations during a 28-day stay, his wife said.

So will things ease up a bit now that Harshad Patel is no longer a mayor? 'Not at all,' said Mrs Patel. 'People are now trying to persuade him to become an MP.'

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