

Text of

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Shah.

**PRESIDENT  
ZULFIKAR ALI  
BHUTTO'S  
ADDRESS**

*to the*

*National Assembly of Pakistan*

*Syed Muzafar Ali Shah  
P.O. Kashid Wagan  
Distt. Larkana.*

**ISLAMABAD  
July 9, 1973**

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M.A., L.L.B.

Excise Sub-Inspector Larkana Circle.

PRESIDENT ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO'S ADDRESS TO THE  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(Islamabad, July 9, 1973)

Akhtar Hussain  
Abbasi  
M.A.

I have come to address the National Assembly today on the question of a durable peace in the sub-continent without which no progress towards our national objective, economic, social or political, is possible. This is a subject which transcends all internal controversies and is close to the heart of every patriotic citizen of the country.

The Assembly will recall that, after the upheaval of 1971, the Government was confronted with a question of the utmost urgency and poignance : What do we do next ? There were two paths open to us. We could either parade our wounds, wallow in morbidity and dream of revanchist policies which would prove utterly futile. Or, as a spirited and healthy people, we could attend to our reconstruction, establish normal relations with our neighbours, break our isolation from those who were our compatriots and so strengthen ourselves, politically, socially and economically, that even though we were reduced in size and number, we would emerge as a more cohesive nation, less subject to internal strains, less vulnerable to foreign aggression, and more confident of our future. With the overwhelming support of the people, the Government chose the sensible course.

It was this attitude, an attitude of realism untainted by despair or any sense of inferiority, that prompted the many initiatives towards peace taken by the People's Government. Soon after coming into office, we released Mr. Mujibur Rahman unconditionally. To put it mildly, I have not regretted that decision for a moment. Then, we repeatedly expressed our goodwill towards Muslim Bengal. We offered to return some 30,000 Bengali personnel in the Pakistan Army and about 17,000 Bengali civil servants of different categories to assist Mr. Mujibur

Rahman in strengthening his administration. When there was food scarcity among those who were torn apart from us, we made an offer of a gift of 100,000 tons of rice. These offers were not accepted. Were they, therefore, unwise? It is only the small-minded, the people who are torn by insecurity and by an inferiority complex, the people who look only at the immediate results and do not understand the slow-moving forces in international life, who will think so. We made the offers not with a desire to cajole but in expression of a stable and well-considered attitude.

To India we made it clear that we were prepared for a normalization of relations as between equals and that durable peace could be established on the basis of non-interference and a just and honourable settlement of all differences and disputes. This led to Simla.

A few weeks after the Simla Agreement was concluded, I observed that the agreement was the starting point towards durable peace in the sub-continent. At the same time, I could not but express the fear that the goal could prove elusive and the peace that would prevail would be not just and honourable but illusory and iniquitous. Even worse, there could occur a perversion of the process with the result that tensions would persist which had marred relations between Pakistan and India.

We left Simla in a state of hope not unmixed with apprehension. The apprehension existed because of our experience of a quarter century. It is not agreements which matter so much as the will and the attitude behind them. Peace is unattainable without mutual goodwill. Moreover, the search for peace requires a tempo, a momentum, a regard for timing just as much as war requires speed and surprise. Again, the first essential in the normalization of relations is a constancy of communication between the two sides. If these essentials are lacking, an agreement can easily be eroded and its results prove evanescent.

It was with this realization that, since the conclusion of the Simla Agreement, we on our part tried our utmost to maintain the momentum in a step-by-step approach to the normalisation of relations. The

negotiations over the withdrawal of forces were unfortunately protracted and difficulties arose which slowed progress disturbingly. However, when the troop withdrawals were eventually completed, I conveyed to the Prime Minister of India that the most important issue facing us in the sub-continent was the one relating to the Pakistani prisoners of war. It was obvious that this was the biggest obstacle to the normalisation of the situation in the sub-continent.

Some months elapsed. Then on 17 April, a statement was issued in Delhi. As we stated in our response on 20 April, it had many implications which required clarification. The basic truth is that the problems to which the statement addressed itself cannot be resolved by dogmatic assertion, legal quibbling or so-called package deals involving issues one of which is qualitatively different from another. They require good sense and a humane approach. Regrettably, the statement issued in Delhi conveyed a take-it-or-leave-it attitude which could not be conducive to the promotion of peace.

There were several major difficulties inherent in the terms of the Delhi statement. It required Pakistan to agree to the trials by the Dacca authorities of some among the prisoners of war on criminal charges. This was a condition we could not possibly accept. Let me stress that it is not only a question of legal competence. The issue impinges on a nation's sovereignty which Pakistan will under no circumstances be prepared to compromise. Furthermore, the question involved is whether the parties wish to prolong rancour or to work towards reconciliation. How can anyone deny that enormous wrongs were committed on all sides in the tragic conflict of 1971? Were we to embark on their examination in a revanchist spirit, bitterness would sweep the whole area and wounds would be re-opened which we want to heal. I have said plainly that, if these trials are held in Dacca, an irreparable damage will be caused to the fabric of peace which, no one can deny, is still fragile.

Then again, the Delhi statement asked us to agree, in advance of any discussion to accept a blanket exchange of population. How could

we do so ? Of course, no one can be more sensitive to the human plight of what are called in the statement "Pakistanis in Bangladesh" than we. But it is only fair that the concrete human implications of a possible solution must be squarely faced before it is proposed. It would be sheer callousness to approach a matter of this kind un-realistically. Nor must the issue of moral responsibility involved in it be considered in stereotyped terms. Who are the "Pakistanis in Bangladesh"? On what ground can they be considered to comprise only the non-Bengalis? What was the kind of option they were supposedly given? How can the Dacca authorities release themselves from the obligation of respecting the human rights of all the people who had made East Pakistan their home a year before the establishment of Pakistan? How can they ignore the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which forbids exile or arbitrary deprivation of legal and moral claims of people on racial or ethnic grounds? I am posing these questions not to score points in argument but to underline the fact that this is a matter which requires careful examination in a humane spirit. I would not foreclose any workable solution. But no solution will be workable if it does not take into account the physical, economic and social consequences for the life and future of the human beings involved. The human beings involved are not only the members of this unfortunate minority but also those among whom they are suggested to be resettled. I cannot agree to a simplistic and sloganized approach which, instead of ending the misery of the people concerned, will only aggravate it.

I see no problem whatsoever in the repatriation of the Bengalis in Pakistan. We do not want them to suffer. They are our brethren and we want them to resume their normal lives. It has yielded us no happiness that we were forced to restrict their freedom of movement until the day that their repatriation could take place in an orderly manner. It is only due to the attitude of the authorities in Dacca that that day has not already arrived.

All these matters have been clear for quite some time. Our response to the statement issued in Delhi suggested a further dialogue between Pakistan and India. It is essential that such dialogue should not be

unfruitful. It is of the utmost importance for peace in the sub-continent that a deadlock should not be allowed to harden.

To achieve this objective, it is necessary that, on our part, there must prevail a clarity on our attitude towards Muslim Bengal. The issue has excited strong emotions among our people. This is understandable; after all, East Pakistan was an integral part of Pakistan. It cannot but be a painful decision for anyone in Pakistan to accept it as a separate entity. But many a nation has emerged stronger after painful decisions of this kind; history is replete with relevant examples. We must on no account give the impression that we are so obsessed with the past as to be divorced from realities. Whatever be the way one looks at the question, one thing is clear: we cannot interfere in the affairs of those who constituted the majority of Pakistan, far less try to impose our will on them. Whatever be the strength of trends in Bangladesh for a fraternal relationship with us, these would be retarded rather than accelerated if we showed that we suffer from a mental block. We must show that we are prepared to accept the changed realities of December 1971 whenever it is in our best national interest. It is, therefore, for the National Assembly to arm the Government with the authority to accord *de jure* recognition to Bangladesh at a time which the Government may consider appropriate.

I repeat the words: at a time which the Government may consider appropriate. It is obvious that, with our prisoners of war in captivity and with the talk of bringing some of them to trial in Dacca or anywhere outside Pakistan, the time is not appropriate. But we, on our part, are prepared to make an effort towards unfreezing the present situation. We are prepared to co-operate in arrangements for the repatriation of all the Bengalis who wish to leave Pakistan, enter into discussions regarding the international effort to alleviate the plight of the minorities in Bangladesh and extend recognition to Bangladesh. But the pre-requisite to the re-establishment of normal relations is the repatriation of the prisoners of war. Moreover, it is obvious that no discussions regarding the Biharis living in Bangladesh can be fruitful under the stress of the threat of their being penalized or arbitrarily expelled.

This initiative on our part does not require the other party or parties to do anything more than comply with what are inescapable obligations under law and morality. To release all our prisoners of war now would be but to fulfil, albeit tardily, the Geneva Conventions and the jointly accepted Resolution 307 of the Security Council. To refrain from holding any trials would be but to show respect to the principles of international law and to give priority to the future over the past. To abandon vendettas against ethnic minorities would be but to evince some regard for basic human rights.

The same cannot be said of the recognition of Bangladesh. It is a state's sovereign choice to extend or withhold recognition to another state. It is not an obligation. Yet we are showing our preparedness to exercise this choice positively because of the compelling necessity of a durable peace. Peace cannot be established by passivity. Peace requires a dynamism. Indeed, it is hard to make peace, easy to make war. Were we to adopt an attitude of waiting, not only will much time pass but frictions will continue to mount, distrust and suspicion will multiply and the gulf dividing the parties will become more and more unbridgeable. Who can benefit by such stalemates? Who profits from such sterility. Every day the truth is, or should be, borne home that tensions in the sub-continent doom its peoples to insecurity and despair. We have made a commitment to the elimination of the sources of conflict. We intend to do our utmost to fulfill this commitment. But the peace that we seek cannot be ushered in by any imposed solution or by seeking to avoid an honourable settlement of differences and disputes.

Nor can peace be established by any evasion of realities. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the primary reality for us is the existence of a large Muslim national community which combined with us under a single sovereignty but has established its own statehood now. The relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot but be governed by the spirit of mutual forgiveness and understanding which is of the essence of Islamic traditions. It is this spirit which will prevail over the rancour and hate which was engendered by reactionary forces and



which democratic and progressive elements in both communities equally deplore. Such a development cannot even be initiated unless some contact is established between the two communities.

Ordinarily, a matter of this kind falls exclusively in the sphere of responsibility of the executive in a government. Treaties relating to war and peace, the cession of territory or alliances with foreign powers are concluded by governments without parliamentary sanction. In the extraordinary circumstances of this case, however, my Government has thought it necessary, indeed essential, to obtain the approval of, and authority from, the National Assembly through a resolution which will express its considered opinion. The House is aware of the reference which I made for the advisory opinion of the Supreme Court about the validity of such a resolution. I am glad that the opinion rendered by the Court has removed any possibility of confusion being created on this issue. Some people might say that we need not have exhibited such an attitude of abundant caution. But my Government has been the product of a democratic struggle and no cause is dearer to it than that of nurturing respect for the rule of law and an attachment to the processes of democracy in the country. It was, therefore, axiomatic that my Government would seek the highest judicial opinion in the country on this issue as well as the endorsement of its actions and policies by the sovereign people of Pakistan through their democratically elected representatives in the National Assembly.

Though a year has passed since the Simla Agreement was concluded, I do not think it is too late to proceed towards its implementation. Indeed, the year has not been barren of results. In addition to our economic and political recovery, to our regaining a sense of identity, and to our consolidating our integrity, at least one thing has been established. It is that no political advantage can be extracted from Pakistan under duress. It is, or should be, understood now beyond any doubt that we will not agree to any humiliating terms, any conditions that militate against our principles, under any pressures whatsoever. It is, or should be, manifest now that there is no question of our accepting India's dominance in South Asia. It is, or should be, recognized now by all concerned that Pakistan is not constituted to play

a subservient role. In the long run, this will prove to have been a gain for peace. For this result, I owe gratitude to the people of Pakistan who have stood with their Government and demonstrated that hardship and suffering will not make them agree to a dishonourable peace. The nation, in turn, owes its gratitude to the prisoners of war and their families who have shown unexampled fortitude in adversity. They have shown that they consider no sacrifice too great for the nation's honour.

I am sure that the people will extend the same support to their Government in its search for a fair, honourable and lasting peace in the sub-continent. Such peace is essential if this large segment of the human community is to be rescued from futility and put firmly on the path of social and economic advance.

This is a truth which will appeal most to the poor and the down-trodden who are the majority in the country. It should also appeal particularly to the youth of Pakistan who cannot but be sensitive to our social and economic conditions and be impatient for progress. They have not known the plenitude of progress which only real peace can ensure. They have witnessed no breakthrough in their country's tortured relations with its larger neighbour, India. We of the older generation owe them at least the promise of a brighter future. It is true that it has not been Pakistan's fault if real peace has never prevailed over the sub-continent; Pakistan has had to struggle for its existence and its rights. But governments ruled this country which were not anguished by this state of affairs. On the contrary, they represented vested interests which sought to exploit a situation of neither war nor peace in the interest of their own class. The Peoples' Government, which I am privileged to lead, cannot do so. It cannot, and will not, perpetrate a gross injustice on the vast majority of the country by offering them illusions or by perpetuating conditions which throttle our economic and social advance. It cannot, and will not, exploit the sacred name of Islam nor appeal to the most cherished patriotic sensibilities in order to advance the interest, and perpetuate the power, of a limited class. Such hypocrisy is the deadliest sin in its ethic. The

Peoples' Government is determined to do what it can to bring about a healthier situation in the sub-continent without abdicating the rights and interests of Pakistan.

It is my hope that both India and Bangladesh will reciprocate this spirit of ours. If they do, they will respond to the call of the contemporary age. It is an age of detente and reconciliation, not of belligerency and strife. It is an age when the new generation all over the world has rejected the philosophies of hate. Those who fought each other at Stalingrad are now engaged in dialogues of peace. Those who considered each other's ideology anathema are now resolved to pursue the paths of peaceful co-existence and mutual non-interference. Surely, what divides India and Pakistan is not something more than what divided the Soviet Union and Germany or the United States and the Soviet Union or China and the United States. Surely, an antagonism between Pakistan and India is not inherent in their very existence. I say to my people as I would say to the people of India : do not be sworn to eternal hostility against each other ; if you do, only your common enemy, which is squalor and poverty, will triumph. It is time for the peoples of the sub-continent to mount a challenge and give battle to that real foe.

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