

Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan at Karachi

On Mohammad Ali Jinnah's Election as First President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (August 11, 1947)

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I cordially thank you, with the utmost sincerity, for the honor you have conferred upon me—the greatest honor that is possible for this sovereign assembly to confer—by electing me as your first president. I also thank those leaders who have spoken in appreciation of my services and their personal references to me. I sincerely hope that with your support and your cooperation we shall make this Constituent Assembly an example to the world. The Constituent Assembly has two main functions to perform. The first is the very onerous and responsible task of framing our future constitution of Pakistan; and the second, of functioning as a full and complete sovereign body as the federal legislature of Pakistan. We have to do the best we can in adopting a provisional constitution for the federal legislature of Pakistan. You know really that not only we ourselves are wondering but, I think, the whole world is wondering at this unprecedented cyclonic revolution which has brought about the plan of creating and establishing two independent sovereign dominions in this subcontinent. As it is, it has been unprecedented; there is no parallel in the history of the world. This mighty subcontinent with all kinds of inhabitants has been brought under a plan that is titanic, unknown, unparalleled. And what is very important with regard to it is that we have achieved it peacefully and by means of an evolution of the greatest possible character.

Dealing with our first function in this Assembly, I cannot make any well-considered pronouncement at this moment, but I shall say a few things as they occur to me. The first and the foremost thing that I would like to emphasize is this—remember that you are a sovereign legislative body and you have all the powers. It therefore places on you the gravest responsibility as to how you should take your decisions. The first observation that I would like to make is this: You will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a government is to maintain law and order, so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the state.

The second thing that occurs to me is this: One of the biggest curses from which India is suffering—I do not say that other countries are free from it, but, I think, our condition is much worse—is bribery and corruption. That really is a poison. We must put that down with an iron hand, and I hope that you will take adequate measures as soon as it is possible for this Assembly to do so.

Black-marketing is another curse. Well, I know that black-marketers are frequently caught and punished. Judicial sentences are passed, or sometimes fines only are imposed. Now you have to tackle this monster, which today is a colossal crime against society, in our distressed conditions, when we constantly face a shortage of food and other essential commodities of life. A citizen who does black-marketing commits, I think, a greater crime than the biggest and most grievous of crimes. These black-marketers are really knowing, intelligent, and ordinarily responsible

people, and, when they indulge in black-marketing, I think they ought to be very severely punished, because they undermine the entire system of control and regulation of foodstuffs and essential commodities, and cause wholesale starvation and want and even death.

The next thing that strikes me is this: Here again it is a legacy that has been passed on to us. Along with many other things, good and bad, has arrived this great evil—the evil of nepotism and jobbery. This evil must be crushed relentlessly. I want to make it quite clear that I shall never tolerate any kind of jobbery, nepotism, or any influence directly or indirectly brought to bear upon me. Wherever I will find that such a practice is in vogue or is continuing anywhere, low or high, I shall certainly not countenance it.

I know there are people who do not quite agree with the division of India and the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. Much has been said against it, but now that it has been accepted, it is the duty of every one of us to loyally abide by it and honorably act according to the agreement that is now final and binding on all. But you must remember, as I have said, that this mighty revolution that has taken place is unprecedented. One can quite understand the feeling that exists between the two communities wherever one community is in majority and the other is in minority. But the question is whether it was possible or practicable to act otherwise than what has been done. A division had to take place. On both sides, in Hindustan and Pakistan, there are sections of people who may not agree with it, who may not like it, but in my judgment there was no other solution, and I am sure future history will record its verdict in favor of it. And what is more, it will be proved by actual experience, as we go on, that that was the only solution to India's constitutional problem. Any idea of a united India could never have worked, and in my judgment it would have led us to terrific disaster. Maybe that view is correct; maybe it is not; that remains to be seen. All the same, in this division it was impossible to avoid the question of minorities being in one dominion or the other. Now, that was unavoidable. There is no other solution. Now what shall we do? Now, if we want to make this great state of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor. If you will work in cooperation, forgetting the past, burying the hatchet, you are bound to succeed. If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you—no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his color, caste or creed—is first, second, and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations. There will be no end to the progress you will make.

I cannot emphasize it too much. We should begin to work in that spirit, and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community—because, even as regards Muslims, you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis, and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vashnavas, Khattris, also Bengalees, Madrasis, and so on—will vanish. Indeed, if you ask me, this has been the biggest hindrance to India's attainment of freedom and independence, and but for this we would have been free peoples long, long ago. No power can hold another nation, and especially a nation of 400 million souls, in subjection; nobody could have conquered you, and even if it had happened, nobody could have continued its hold on you for any length of time but for this. Therefore, we must learn a lesson from this. You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state. As you

know, history shows that in England conditions some time ago were much worse than those prevailing in India today. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants persecuted each other. Even now there are some states in existence where there are discriminations made and bars imposed against a particular class. Thank God, we are not starting in those days. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste and creed or another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one state. The people of England in course of time had to face the realities of the situation and had to discharge the responsibilities and burdens placed on them by the government of their country, and they went through that fire step by step. Today, you might say with justice that Roman Catholics and Protestants do not exist; what exists now is that every man is a citizen, an equal citizen of Great Britain, and they are all members of the nation.

Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.

Well, gentlemen, I do not wish to take up any more of your time, and thank you again for the honor you have done to me. I shall always be guided by the principles of justice and fair play without any, as it is put in the political language, prejudice or ill-will—in other words, [without] partiality or favoritism. My guiding principle will be justice and complete impartiality, and I am sure that, with your support and cooperation, I can look forward to Pakistan becoming one of the greatest nations of the world.

I have received from the United States of America a message addressed to me. It reads:

"I have the honor to communicate to you, in Your Excellency's capacity as President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, the following message which I have just received from the Secretary of State of the United States: 'On the occasion of the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly for Pakistan, I extend to you, and to the members of the Assembly, the best wishes of the government and the people of the United States for the successful conclusion of the great work you are about to undertake.'"

Adapted from "On His Election as First President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan," *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad ali Jinnah: Speeches and Statements as Governor General of Pakistan, 1947–48* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Directorate of Films and Publications, 1989), pp. 42–47.