

Mr. Surya Bose's Address at 70th Anniversary Conference in Tokyo

It is my very great pleasure to stand before you today at this historic event to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Greater East Asia Conference. I am indeed very grateful to the organizers of this meeting for inviting me and I am delighted to be back in this beautiful and friendly country and to meet my good friends again. I was here just a few months ago and I was moved and humbled by the warm reception that was extended to me wherever I went. I am aware that it had much to do with the deep love and respect that the Japanese people had and still have for my granduncle Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

More than half a century ago in December 1953, the then Foreign Minister of Japan Mamoru Shigemitsu wrote to my father hailing Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as the 'Hero of Asia'. Mr Shigemitsu wrote:

"..... I am extremely pleased to hear the name of Subhas Chandra Bose, Hero of Asia, whom I can claim as one time good and intimate friend of mine which I naturally consider a great honour..."

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, or Chandra Bose as he is known here in Japan, Head of State of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind and the Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army, was invited as an "observer" to the Greater East Asia Conference which was held here in Tokyo on the 5th and 6th of November 1943.

Reflecting on that historic event, Dr Baw Maw of Burma had this to say about Chandra Bose:

"Netaji joined us at the Greater East Asia conference where he met the heads of state of China, Manchukuo, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma. He was warmly welcomed by all. He was a bold, militant figure in uniform and carried with him everywhere the aura of his great and tragic country, and its long struggle to be free and great again. He sat with us only as an observer, because Free India was still a state without territory, but Prime Minister Tojo soon rectified this by ceding the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the new state.

Tojo did yet another thing. At the final session of the conference which was held in the presence of a large international gathering he asked me to give the principal speech which was to be about Netaji and the Indian cause. He

said he wanted a really good fighting speech for the whole world to hear, and I promised to do my best. I really tried hard to do it. My central theme was that Asia or any part of it cannot be truly free unless India is also free. It went down much better than I had hoped, for it struck the racial chords that had already been stirred by the conference which was the first gathering ever to take place of the nations of Asia in a completely Asian setting.

Netaji replied to my speech in some of the most moving words I have ever heard. As he went on his voice broke and his eyes became misty. It was really a poignant, spell-bound moment for all who heard him. Time passes, great and powerful men in their day come and go, and a few of them, a very few, leave behind memories which live on and even grow by themselves with the years. Such men become part of the ultimate story of their people. There is every reason to believe that Subhas Chandra Bose is among these few men."

For his part Chandra Bose in his statement to the Press on 19 June 1943 on his arrival in Japan, had said:

"You may be eager to know the sentiments of Indians towards Japan. Japan was the first country which prevented the people of an alien continent from committing aggression in the Asian continent.

For the past twenty centuries India and Japan had been maintaining close cultural relations. Because of the British rule in India these contacts were somewhat interrupted. But when India becomes free these ties will again be strengthened. It is but natural that Indians will cooperate closely with Japan so that they may live in complete freedom in their country and shape their national destiny independently.

It should be pointed out in this connection that the statements on India made by Prime Minister Tojo from March 1942 onwards have gone deep into the mind of the Indian people and have added strength to the Indian freedom movement."

We are gathered here today not only to commemorate that historic Conference which took place here 70 years ago but also to cast our mind into the future to deliberate on what lessons we can draw from the past and how we can build on these lessons to create a – “new world order”, for which Chandra Bose had said so many years ago that we “should once again turn to the East for light.”

I would like to recall the words of Chandra Bose at the Greater East Asia Conference:

"Your Excellency, as I was sitting, listening to the proceedings of this august Assembly yesterday and to-day, the panorama of the world's history passed before my mind's eye. My thoughts went back to the many international congresses and conferences held during the last 100 years and more. My thoughts also went back to the Assembly of the League of Nations, that League of Nations along whose corridors and lobbies I spent many a day, knocking at one door after another, in the vain attempt to obtain a hearing for the cause of Indian freedom.

And as I sat listening to the proceedings of this historic Assembly, I began to wonder what the difference was between this Assembly and similar assemblies that the world's history has witnessed in bygone days.

Your Excellency, this is not a conference for dividing the spoils among the conquerors. This is not a conference for hatching a conspiracy to victimize a weak power, nor is it a conference for trying to defraud a weak neighbour. This is an Assembly of liberated nations, an Assembly that is out to create a new order in this part of the world, on the basis of the sacred principles of justice, national sovereignty, reciprocity in international relations and mutual aid and assistance. I do not think that it is an accident that this Assembly has been convened in the Land of the Rising Sun. This is not the first time that the world has turned to the East for light and guidance. Attempts to create a new order in the world have been made before and have been made elsewhere, but they have failed. They have failed because of the selfishness, avarice, and suspicion in those who had to play a leading role in the creation of a new order. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things and in conformity with historic precedent that the world should once again turn to the East for light."

I would like to relate an interesting anecdote here: Soon after his arrival in Tokyo, Chandra Bose met a number of Japanese Generals and Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu. Prime Minister Tojo however did not meet with him straightaway and perhaps wanted to keep him waiting for a while. But the all powerful Mitsuro Toyama, the leader of the Black Dragon Society, intervened and Tojo met Chandra Bose without further delay. We know Prime Minister Tojo was deeply impressed by him, and soon after, in

the presence of Chandra Bose, in the Imperial Diet, promised full support to the Indian Independence struggle.

When Chandra Bose came to South East Asia in early 1943 to take over the leadership of India's revolutionary army, namely the Indian National Army, he was already established as a foremost left-wing leader in the Congress movement in India. His vision extended far beyond the struggle for Indian independence. He had clear plans for Free India, where he wanted his people to be free from 'not only political bondage but also economic and social bondage'.

In 1938 as the unanimously elected President of the Congress, which was held in Haripura, Bose advocated economic planning on socialist lines, Hindusthani (a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, spoken among the common people) in Roman script as the official language of India, fundamental rights, secularism, family planning and several other key issues. He introduced for the first time the concept of planning and setup a Planning Commission, which is today an integral part of the government of India.

The Planning Commission published a book, dedicated to Subhas Bose, called "Pioneer of Indian Planning" in his centenary year in 1997. In that book the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission acknowledged that most of his ideas were relevant in India of the present and a major part had yet to be translated to reality. This shows very clearly his far-sightedness and vision in the very midst of the independence struggle.

In 1939 Bose suspected that the Gandhi-Wing of the Congress was intending to compromise on the issue of Indian independence, and so he decided to contest the Congress Presidential election for a second term. He defeated Gandhi's candidate Pattabhi Sitaramaya. After the election when the results were out, Gandhi issued a statement "*Pattabhi's defeat is my defeat. But after all Subhasbabu is not an enemy of the country*".

The right-wing of the Congress, assisted by Nehru, was not to give up and compelled Bose to resign from the Congress Presidentship. Bose then formed the Forward Bloc and established the Left Consolidation Committee comprising all the Left political parties in India.

When Chandra Bose setup the Provisional Government of Free India on 21st October 1943 in Singapore, he put into practice many of the proposals that

he had himself made as President of the Congress. He was able to establish complete unity among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the Indian National Army (INA) and also in the Indian Independence League. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the Indian National Army had one common kitchen as distinguished from the separate kitchens in the British Indian Army and - you will be surprised to know - there are separate kitchens in the Indian Army even today!

When Bose was in Rangoon he was invited to a Hindu Temple to receive a donation from the trustees of that temple. He made a point by going there accompanied by his Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian officers of the INA. By his own example, Bose was able to unify the different sections of Indians irrespective of religion, caste or creed. The application form for the INA did not have any provision for religion or caste.

It is quite remarkable that more than seven decades ago, Bose also brought women into the mainstream of the Indian freedom struggle and gave them equal status with their male comrades. He felt very strongly that no nation could achieve complete freedom until women were given equal rights.

He also introduced Hindusthani as the lingua franca of the Provisional Government and "Jai Hind" became the common greeting.

Coming back to the Greater East Asia Conference, I would like to again extract some parts of Chandra Bose's speech, which still has relevance in the world of today - and I can do no better than let him speak:

"As your Excellencies are well aware, from the earliest times, universalism has been a marked feature of Indian thought and culture. In the earliest days, through Buddhism and all the culture centered around Buddhism, India stretched out her hands to the whole of Asia.....

Your Excellency, may I humbly point out that the establishment of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, is of interest, of vital interest, not only to the people of East Asia but, if I may say so, to the people of the whole of Asia and to mankind in general.

I pray that Nippon's role in the creation of a new and free Asia may be fully and finally consummated. In conclusion, I may assure Your Excellency, that if you and your distinguished colleagues succeed in this mission, as I hope, I trust, and I believe, you will - your names will go down in history not merely as the makers of a new Nippon, not merely as the makers of a new East Asia,

not only as the makers of a new Asia, but as the makers and architects of a new world"

India and Japan have come closer since those stirring words of Chandra Bose. India is greatly indebted to Japan for the whole hearted support that Japan gave Chandra Bose and the Provisional Government of Free India. The INA with the support of the Japanese forces had entered the sacred soil of India and had raised the Indian Tri-colour in Moirang in the north-east of the country. But the onset of early monsoons coupled with superior airpower of the Allied forces led to the defeat of the INA and the Japanese forces on the Imphal front.

The INA officers and soldiers were taken as prisoners of war to India by the British authorities and put on trial. This raised fundamental questions in the minds of the people - where did their loyalty lie - with the foreign rulers or the patriots - the men and women of the INA who had been fighting for their freedom ? The British Indian Army, the Airforce and the British Indian Navy rose in revolt. General Auchinleck informed the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy that the sympathies of the Indian officers and soldiers in the British Indian Armed forces were on the side of Bose and his INA, and hence could not be relied upon to suppress a possible Indian revolution. Subhas Chandra Bose certainly lost in battle but he won the war for Indian independence.

It is most heartening to see that Japan and India have come much closer over the years and Indo-Japanese understanding in the field of economic cooperation, science, technology as well as culture, have matured into lasting and strategic partnerships. Japan has been, and still is, a source of inspiration to Indians from all walks of life. The Prime Ministers of India and Japan have defined a new framework for bilateral relationship which would lead to closer ties between the two countries. We now live in a connected world and hence close cooperation between Japanese and Indian industries would contribute to their global success.

I would like to conclude by reading the last few lines from a letter written by Colonel Yamamoto to my father in 1957:

"...I know that his (Chandra Bose) way was nothing but for the unity of Asia and the peace of the world. May his spirit guide us as the apostle of peace"