

A.I.C.C.

40

41 - 1946

-47



27

HIS EXCELLENCY'S THE VICEROY'S BROADCAST MESSAGE ON  
FRIDAY, THE 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1946.

---

I speak to the people of India at the most critical hour of India's history. The statement of the Cabinet Delegation containing their recommendations has now been before you for twenty-four hours. It is a blue-print for freedom, an outline of which your representatives have to fill in the details and construct the building.

You will have studied the statement, most of you, and may perhaps already have formed your opinion on it. If you think that it shows a path to reach the summit at which you have been aiming for so long, the independence of India, I am sure you will be eager to take it. If you should have formed the view—I hope you have not—that there is no passage that way, I hope that you will study again the route indicated to you, and see whether the difficulties in the path—and we know they are formidable—cannot be surmounted by skill and patience and boldness.

I can assure you of this, that very much hard work, very much earnest study, very much anxious thought, and all the goodwill and sincerity at our command have gone to the making of these recommendations. We would much have preferred that the Indian leaders should have themselves reached agreement on the course to be followed, and we have done our best to persuade them; but it has not been found possible, in spite of concessions on both sides which at one time promised results.

These proposals put before you are obviously not those that any one of the parties will have chosen if left to itself; but I do believe that they offer a reasonable and workable basis on which to found India's future constitution. They preserve the essential unity of India which is threatened by the dispute between the two major communities; and in especial they remove the danger of the disruption of that great fellowship the Indian Army, to which India already owes so much and on whose strength, unity and efficiency her future security will depend. They offer to the Muslim community the right to direct their own essential interests, their religion, their education, their culture, their economic and other concerns in their own way and to their own best advantage. To another great community, the Sikhs, they preserve the unity of their homeland, the Punjab, in which they have played and can still play so important and influential a part. They provide, in the Special Committee which forms a feature of the Constitution-making machinery, the best chance for the smaller minorities to make their needs known and to secure protection for their interests. They seek to arrange a means for the Indian States, great and small, to enter by negotiation into the polity of a united India. They offer to India the prospect of peace—a peace from party strife, the peace so needed for all the constructive work there is to do. And they give you the opportunity of complete independence so soon as the Constituent Assembly has completed its labours.

I would like to emphasize the constructive work to be done. If you can agree to accept the proposals in the Statement as a reasonable basis on which to work out your Constitution, then we are able at once to concentrate all the best efforts and abilities in India on the short-term problems that are so urgent. You know them well—the immediate danger of famine to be countered, and measures taken to provide more food for everyone in future years; the health of India to be remedied; great schemes of wider education to be initiated; roads to be built and improved; and much else to be done to raise the standard of living of the common man. There are also great schemes in hand to control India's water supplies, to extend irrigation, to provide power, to prevent floods; there are factories to be built and new industries to be started; while in the outside world India has to take her place in international bodies, in which her representatives have already established a considerable reputation.

27



It is therefore my earnest desire that in these critical times ahead, in the Interim period while the new Constitution is being built, the Government of India should be in the hands of the ablest of India's leaders, men recognised as such by the Indian people, whom they will trust to further their interests and bring them to their goal.

As said in the Statement, I am charged with the responsibility to form such a Government as soon as possible, to direct the affairs of British India in the Interim period. There will be no doubt in the minds of anyone, I hope, how great a step forward this will be on India's road to self-government. It will be a purely Indian Government except for its head, the Governor-General; and will include, if I can get the men I want, recognised leaders of the main Indian parties, whose influence, ability and desire to serve India are unquestioned.

Such a Government must have a profound influence and power not only in India, but also in the outside world. Some of the best ability in India, which has hitherto been spent in opposition, can be harnessed to constructive work. These men can be the architects of the new India.

No constitution and no form of Government can work satisfactorily without goodwill; with goodwill and determination to succeed even an apparently illogical arrangement can be made to work. In the complex situation that faces us there are four main parties: the British; the two main parties in British India, Hindus and Muslims; and the Indian States. From all of them very considerable change of their present outlook will be required as a contribution to the general good, if this great experiment is to succeed. To make concession in ideas and principles is a hard thing and not easily palatable. It requires some greatness of mind to recognise the necessity, much greatness of spirit to make the concession. I am sure that this will not be found wanting in India, as I think you will admit that it has not been found wanting in the British people in this offer.

I wonder whether you realise that this is the greatest and most momentous experiment in Government in the whole history of the world—a new Constitution to control the destiny of 400,000,000 people. A grave responsibility indeed on all of us who are privileged to assist in making it.

Lastly, I must emphasise the seriousness of the choice before you. It is the choice between peaceful construction or the disorder of civil strife, between co-operation or disunity, between ordered progress or confusion. I am sure you will not hesitate in your choice for co-operation.

May I end with some words which were quoted by one great man to another at a crisis of the late war, and may well be applied to India at this crisis:

“Thou too, sail on, O Ship of State,  
Sail on, O Union, strong and great:  
Humanity with all its fears  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate.”

28