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**45TH INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
KARACHI**

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CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

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45TH INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Dr. CHOITHRAM P. GIDWANI'S SPEECH

SISTER AND BROTHER DELEGATES,

It is the proudest privilege of my life to welcome you to-day on this momentous occasion in the history of our National Struggle for Freedom. On behalf of the Reception Committee and the people of Sind who have eagerly sought this opportunity ever since the Nagpur session of 1920, I extend to you a most hearty welcome. Eighteen years have passed since Sind was privileged to hold a session of the Congress and in that interval we have lost two of our foremost public men, Seth Harchandrai and Mr. Bhurgri, who were among the pioneers who built the Congress tradition in this province. Seth Harchandrai, who organized the last Karachi Congress, as the chairman of the Reception Committee, we proudly recollect as the first martyr, in the present campaign that started with the national boycott of the Simon Commission, against which he was going to register his vote, in spite of the protest of his medical advisers, when he met his death. As a humble tribute to his memory we have named our hastily improvised camp, Harchandrai Nagar. Mr. Ghulam Mahomed Bhurgri has been our foremost Muslim Congressman who always regarded himself an Indian first and a

Muslim afterwards. No one in our province Hindu or Muslim, had won the confidence of both communities to the extent to which Mr. Bhurgri did. The Souls of Bhurgri and Harchandrai are with us in our welcome of you in our midst.

We are fully conscious of the defects and shortcomings in the arrangements that we have been able to make for your bare necessities. We seek your indulgence in view of the extraordinary circumstances in which this session is being held. A little more than a fortnight ago most of my comrades and co-workers who have shouldered the heavy task of this organization were prisoners of war, and the few who happened to be free could not tell even at the beginning of this month if the Congress session would be held at all. And almost on the eve of the Congress session came the tragic news of the execution of Bhagat Sing and his comrades which has plunged the whole country in sorrow and indignation, and which has led us to abandon even the public entry and procession of the President elect whom Karachi, in other circumstances, would have loved to give the gayest of welcomes. We have sought rigidly to exclude all gaiety from our decorations in keeping with the seriousness and solemnity of the occasion. We take comfort in the knowledge that we are welcoming comrades in arms, nearly all of whom have laid all thought of comfort

aside, and who come to us fresh from the rigorous discipline of prison life, added during the last twelve months, to their previous records of service and sacrifice, and who know full well — especially after the indecent hurry with which the executions of Bhagat Singh and his comrades have been carried out against the unanimous public opinion of the country that the sentences may be commuted — that they may be only having a brief respite that this truce affords.

Proud as we are to be your hosts on this historic occasion, great is our sorrow that fate has deprived us of the inspiring presence in our midst of that Prince among Patriots, the late Pt. Motilal Nehru, whose magnificent sacrifices in the cause of our freedom form one of the most glorious chapters in the history of that struggle which he led with consummate ability and brilliance. His death was hastened by the privations and sufferings of jail life which he cheerfully embraced at his advanced age, in spite of the precarious condition of his health. Pt. Motilal takes his place among the immortals of Indian history, Dadabhoy Naoroji, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Chita Ranjan Das and Lajpatrai, whose names will for ever remain a priceless treasure for lovers of liberty. It is with a heavy heart that Sind offers a special welcome on this occasion to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru who unfurled the flag of Independence at Lahore on the midnight

of 31st December 1929 and who has held it aloft ever since, with single minded devotion and reckless courage. Death has deprived us also of another great leader, Moulana Mahomedali who also died serving the nation with fearless independence in far off London, martyr to his sense of duty. Karachi witnessed the famous trial in 1921 of which Moulana Mahomedali was the central figure and Karachi prison never held a more distinguished or a more determined foe of foreign domination.

Friends, we are meeting at a critical juncture in our history. For twelve months from the march to Dandi to the Delhi truce we have really lived. In 1920-21 we reached a wonderful height of emotional exaltation and ten years later in 1930-31 that emotion has been translated by the nation into heroic action. During those ten years of probation there has been a steady absorption of the teachings of our great souled leader Mahatma Gandhi to whom the world pays homage today for having successfully evolved a matchless weapon that provides for righteous warfare, a righteous method. It is nothing short of a New Dispensation in which brute force will no longer be the final arbiter in human affairs and might will not be acceptable as indisputable evidence of Right. Mahatmaji's message is not for India alone. The evolution of that technique of satyagraha in the course of this struggle

is leading the world to claim the message as its own and from far off lands are heard echoes of the great message. What sounded like only a creed ten years ago at Nagpur has been proved to be a potent practical weapon that claims superiority over steel and demands for its effectiveness, its exclusive use relegating old-world steel to rust. Undreamt of powers of endurance and resistance have been brought out by the exercise of this new instrument that brings a new hope to those that suffer from oppression and inequity anywhere. Indian women, who the world had been taught to believe, were only domestic chattel or Harem toys have established records of heroism for which history will find it difficult to find a parallel, and even children have found a scope in the movement that has acted a corrective to a century of denationalizing education. Peasants and farmers, to whom British Rule has brought only hunger and starvation, have felt the glow of freedom and made sacrifices before which the better advertised woes of liquor dealers and foreign cloth merchants pale into insignificance. The nation has 'successfully stood brutal Lathi charges and trampling under horses' hoofs which are ingeniously described by our alien rulers as the exercise of minimum force, leaving it to stagger imagination to conceive what the maximum of that brutality could achieve. I have no doubt that, in spite of any misgivings and distrust that the more impatient among us may

feel, the country will continue to follow with an ever increasing steadfastness and courage the path of non-violence chalked out by our illustrious leader. I even venture to hope that those fearless patriots who have counted their lives as naught in the pursuit of a different path — many of whom are unfortunately still in prison cells — will, at no distant date, be our comrades in arms, enforcing the will of a United Nation wielding this invincible weapon that will win Freedom in India and Peace for the world.

It will be a fruitless task to discuss in detail the terms of the truce that has enabled us to hold this session of the Congress, not that there is any need of apologizing for them. The critics seem to forget that they are terms for a *truce* and not for a *Peace*. What has been agreed to is a suspension of hostilities and not a termination thereof. The Working Committee was entirely justified in calling truce when they were satisfied that our opponents were in a frame of mind for peaceful negotiation on honourable terms. There is no other way of termination of the struggle at any time except by a successful negotiation. The only question is whether the ground has been cleared for a reasonable hope of successful negotiation. The history of previous efforts of Lord Reading and Lord Irwin to enter into such negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi should amply illustrate the determina-

tion of our illustrious leader not to let the Congress be drawn into a trap. He declined compromise in 1921 when valued co-workers put him down as an unpractical blunderer. He declined compromise on the eve of the Lahore Congress when equally valued colleagues regretted his action. The Yeravada pourparlers are another instance in point. At Delhi, at last, after prolonged conversations he was convinced and he convinced the Working Committee that a change of heart was visible. He has surrendered nothing. The national resolve stands unaltered. We have met here to re-affirm it. While however, I view with no misgivings Mahatmaji's decision and decision of the Working Committee to agree to a truce, I cannot help thinking that the Lahore execution represents a grave error of judgment on the part of Government. Mahatmaji agreed to forego the inquiry into Police excesses in order that atmosphere may not be vitiated for a peace effort by mutual recrimination. We had a right to expect that spirit of comradeship to be reciprocated. But now Government have made it difficult for us to believe in their desire to part with power. The continued detention of the detenus who have certainly not been convicted of any crimes of violence is also a source of greater discontent than ever. I am willing to place implicit faith in Mahatmaji's leadership but I must say that signs do not appear to be propitious for the conclusion

of an honourable peace that would leave us masters in our own home. Britain must acknowledge our inherent right to be masters in our own home. She must abandon the insolent theory of trustee-ship, agreeing to no longer lecture to minor wards but to talk on equal terms to people who are her equals in stature and who claim their rightful equality in status. All reservations and safeguards must be ruled out if they violate that fundamental basis of any honourable negotiation. No curtailment of our inherent and inalienable right to manage our own affairs can be accepted merely to suit Tory prejudices or vested interests of England. Every safeguard must be in India's interest. The Army of Occupation as such must go and our financial administration must be as unfettered as that of Britain. England's management of Indian Finances has not been so honourable that she can claim to retain control over them even in part, in *India's* interests.

It will be your duty, friends, to discuss these terms for Peace and issue your instrument of instructions to your plenipotentiaries during this session. The fundamentals of our demand have to be stated in explicit terms. We have to define the basis of the proposed Federation. We can never be content with the dangerous doctrine evolved in London, that Federation with ruling princes rather than the states

practically on their own terms based on no guiding principle, will be the condition of central responsibility. Central responsibility is not a mere detail of the Indian constitution, the inclusion of which can be treated as hypothetical and conditional. It is the essence of our demand. In comparison, federation itself is a mere detail, being only the form while responsibility is the substance of self-government. Federate with the states by all means but there must be real recognition of common ideals and not merely geographical necessity for federation. The princes in their own interests will do well to take this opportunity of coming into line with modern ideals. There are among them rulers who have shown enough intelligent anticipation to give grounds of hope that they will see that their best interests lie in their immediate conversion into constitutional potentates deriving their authority from the will of the people. It is only with such States that an India entering into a new era of Freedom can federate to any advantage.

I will not encroach on your time any further. I have only to add that all our dreams of immediate Freedom will be idle fancies if we do not present a united front in the ensuing negotiations. Our domestic issues must be finally disposed of to prevent a repetition of the sorry spectacle of the first Round Table Conference in London.

Communal adjustments will admit of no further delay, and we must not go to Chequer or Whitehall for the solution. The case for all parties has been stated ably, unequivocally and authoritatively by properly accredited representatives. Repeated restatement and revision of demands will not take us any nearer the goal. We will be only going round and round the whole problem without ever finding a solution. Satisfaction with *status quo* is ruled out by every community that claims to be patriotic. How then shall we proceed? Arbitration may ultimately prove to be the best way. Can we not find one man or more men, good and true, in whom Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians Parsis and Jews and all other sections of the people who claim this country for their motherland, can place implicit trust for maturity of judgement and impartial outlook, state our different cases before them and agree to abide by their award?

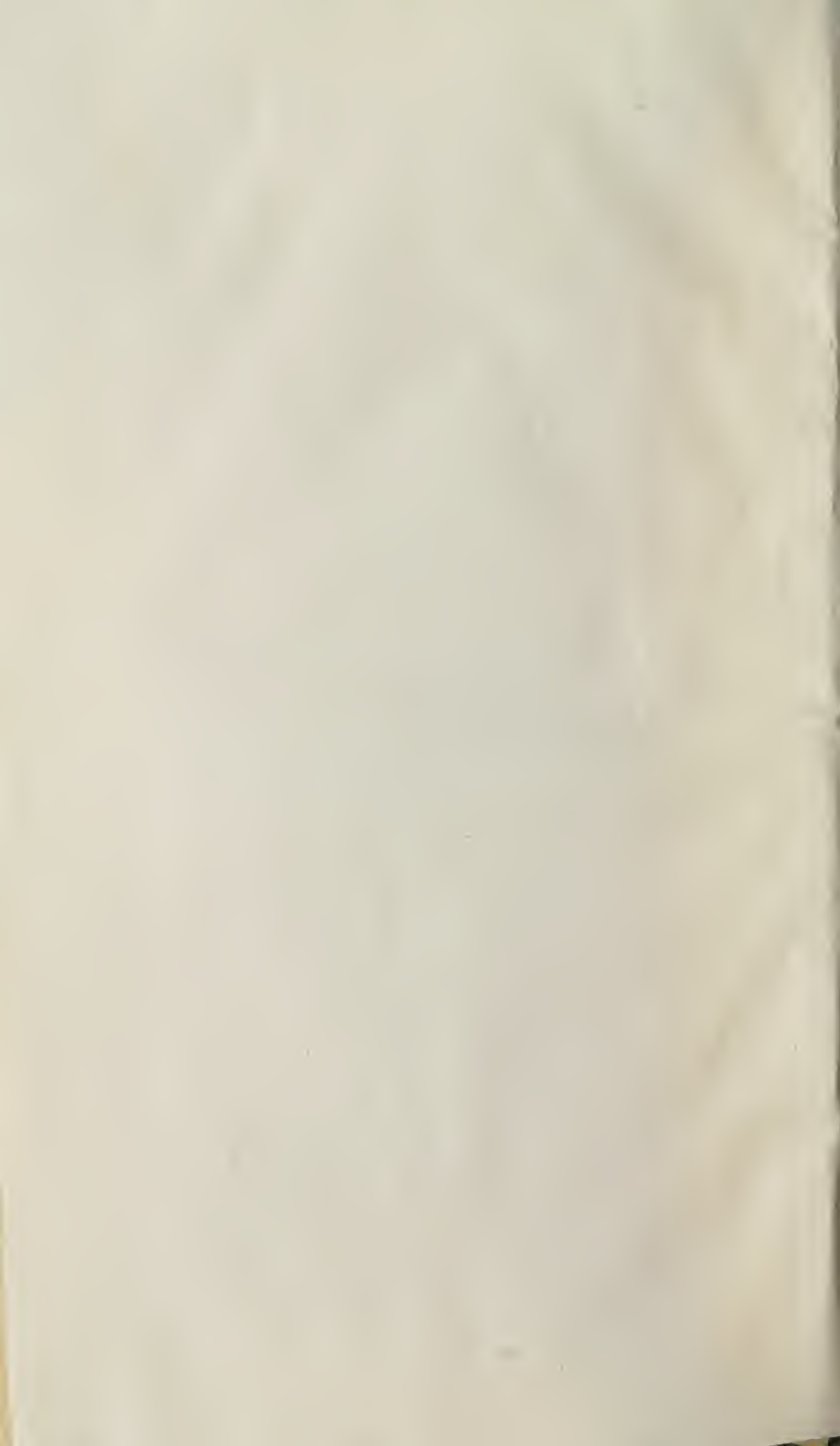
Friends, I would once again request you to overlook the numerous deficiencies in the arrangements, we have been able to make for your brief stay. We have had to run a race against time and complete in one month a task never before performed and our modest success is due in no small measure to the co-operation of the Karachi Municipality under its patriotic president Mr. Jamshed N. R. Mehta to whom I take this opportunity of expressing my

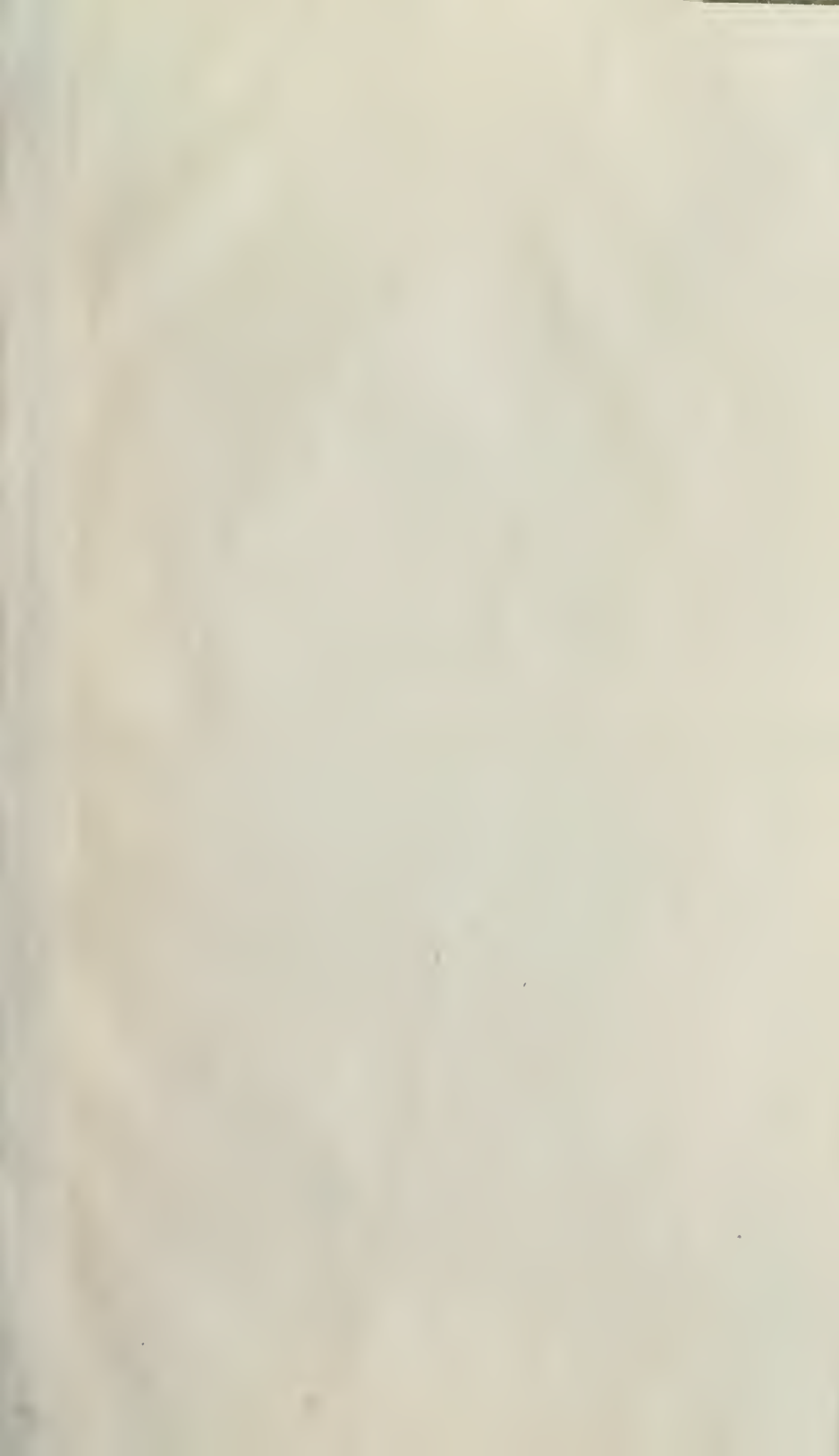
heartfelt gratitude. The merchants of Karachi have also laid us under a debt of gratitude by their whole-hearted co-operation. Volunteers, many of them fresh from prisons, have spent sleepless nights working under tremendous pressure and they will do their best to make your brief stay comfortable. I hope that some of you will find it possible to stay with us after the session is over to see something of our province while you are here. Karachi has no ancient associations but as a modern city administered on progressive lines, and a geographical position that entitles it to be the Gateway of India by sea and air, it is amongst the most important cities in the country and the first city of the future. Its harbour and its Clifton sands stretching over miles, and its hot water springs at Magar Pir will provide enjoyable outings. Tatta in the district is one of India's most ancient towns that witnessed Alexander's invasion and there are ruins of more ancient towns that will appeal to the antiquarian. The Mohan-jo-daro which takes us many a century beyond what used to be known as the dawn of Indian history is only a night's journey from here. The picturesque town of Sukkur with the beautiful island temple of Sadha Bela lies the same way. A visit to the place is called for also by the Sukkur Barrage, round which center the problems of modern Sind. Four hours from here stands Hyderabad, the old capital of the Mirs

of Sind, and the modern centre of Sindhi culture. I extend to you a cordial invitation to stay with us and see more of the life of this province where twelve centuries of contact have created adjustments and understanding between Hindus and Moslems that amount almost to a new culture which I feel confident will endure and grow, inspite of the ugly reactions of recent times.



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