

Speech delivered by Dr. Ba Maw at the Subhas Chandra Bose Birthday Anniversary Celebrations held in Calcutta on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1965.

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I want to begin by telling you how grateful I am for the honor you have done me by asking me to be with you at a time when you are celebrating the memory of a great and beloved national figure. Indeed, Netaji Bose was even more than that. Taking a historical view now that time has made this possible, Netaji is by any measure an Asian figure whose shadow stretched out across the whole of this part of the world during the last war and has remained there ever since. As one who was with him throughout most of the war years I assure you that what I have just said is true. I myself have seen it happen. I witnessed almost from beginning to end Netaji's work and achievement during those years, how he molded out of the rawest possible materials lying scattered throughout all Southeast Asia an independent Indian state and government and army and made them a positive force in the world war. A single mind and will turned a dream into a reality. It pursued the Indian dream across half the world, through the Middle East, and then into Russia and Germany, then to the farthest edge of Asia, then back again to Southeast Asia, and finally to Burma and for a few delirious weeks across the Indian border into India itself. Very soon the man and his dream set aflame the hearts of three million of his countrymen who answered his call from every office and bazaar and workshop throughout Southeast Asia and gave him practically everything he asked for. Within a year of Bose's coming Azad Hind was a full-fledged state recognized by nine other states; it had acquired a large piece of territory, its armies were fighting on eight sectors of the Burma-India border and soon set foot on Indian soil, proudly planted the flag of Free India on it, and came within a few inches of winning a great and decisive victory there. When all that reality forged out of a single dream crashed together with half the world the dreamer refused to see his dream crash too, but sought to pursue it in other ways and places. However, as we know so poignantly, this lone and tragic dreamer vanished into a sudden silence which remains unbroken to this day. But the Indian dream went on. It passed into other hands to follow other roads. I like to think that we are here today to pay homage to the memory of a great Asian dreamer who left us suddenly, leaving behind an unfinished dream as a gift "richer than gold" for all of us. Today that dream has turned into the final reality of a free and sovereign India and, I might add, of Pakistan too.

"I often have my mystical moments", Bose once told me, "when I would like to give up everything and spend my life in prayer and meditation. But I must wait till India is liberated." Again, when someone laughingly asked him when he intended to get married, he laughed back and replied, "As soon as India is free." The dream of a free India haunted him all the time.

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We were comrades-in-arms during most of the war in Asia. In fact, I believe that is why you have asked me to speak to you today and that is why I am doing so. Netaji and I fought together with the same friends against the same enemies to win the same goal of liberation for our people. Consequently, almost all our problems, difficulties, dangers, in fact everything which really mattered during that period were more or less the same. No wartime bond could have been more complete. In these circumstances both of us had the good sense to remember the old saying that if we did not hang together we would hang separately. We therefore did just that; we kept close together till everything ended. That was how our paths met and became one.

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But the best way for me to talk to you about Netaji is to tell you factually what I came to know of him as a result of our comradeship. That would be the truest homage we could render him, to tell his story exactly as it happened and allow his essential greatness to emerge by itself.

To start with, I must tell you that even before I met him for the first time in Singapore in July, 1943, I, like most other politicians in Burma, had already heard of Bose. It was in a vague and rather romantic sort of way, but factual enough to enable many of us to visualize him as one of the most ardent, militant, and progressive leaders in India. The impression was strengthened when we later heard that he was confined in a prison in Mandalay for an indefinite period. That fact brought him closer to us and our struggle. As many of you probably know, the Burmese are an impulsive people; religiously, we as the right of Buddhists believe in the sinfulness of force and violence, but in politics we do not always really believe that, for we cannot, for instance, think of a mass revolutionary struggle carried out successfully without revolutionary violence, and the more violent it is the more real and revolutionary it will seem to the masses and so more likely to win them over. To such a people during a period when they were watching the men and events in India it was inevitable that a figure like Subhas Chandra Bose, young, brilliant, revolutionary, should appeal to them, and in particular to the youth. So Bose became for many in Burma the symbol of the new Indian revolutionary wave, and when he took a new road and formed his Forward Bloc it brought him still closer to the more restless part of our growing national movement. This was proved when the war came and we formed our Freedom Bloc to start an armed struggle as soon as we were ready for it. In this way the first links between the Indian and the Burmese wartime struggles were forged.

To show how our two lives had already begun to move along parallel lines even before they finally converged I must say something about my own progress during the same period. As the leader of the Freedom Bloc and the anti-war movement in Burma I was imprisoned in August, 1940, that is, a month or so after the British put Bose under detention in India. Bose escaped from British hands at the end of 1940 while I escaped from Mogok prison in April, 1942, at the beginning of the British debacle and flight from Burma. While Bose first sought foreign help from Germany and attempted to organize an Indian liberation army with the Indian war prisoners captured by the Germans, I turned to Japan and helped to send some young men there in 1940 for secret military training, and by the end of that year the Burma Independence Army was a fully organized military force and marching into Burma with the Japanese armies. Thus, the stars or something prepared the way for our eventual meeting and war time comradeship.

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To continue the actual story of Netaji, even before his dramatic appearance in Singapore as the leader of the Indian forces who were joining us in the war in Asia his name had travelled widely in the region, so much so that when people thought of India they thought of him more than anyone else, and when, fulfilling their thoughts, he actually stood before them poised to enter the combat on their side his fame became almost legendary. It gave all of us a new hope by demonstrating that we were not alone, but others in Asia were coming in to fight together with us against the imperialist enemies. For us it was a sign that the Asian resurgence and revolution were real and widening. This was what Subhas Chandra Bose and the three million Indians he brought into the war meant for us, and their impact all over East Asia was tremendous.

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As I am relating the story step by step I will next describe my first meeting with Netaji Bose. It happened in Singapore, or Shonan as it was then named, in July 1943. Bose had been brought from Tokyo to that city which Premier Tojo was about to visit. I also went to Singapore to meet Tojo to settle the certain questions raised by the impending declaration of independence by Burma.

I must say something about Tojo here. He completely dominated Japan in the first years of the war. He was bold, dynamic, and clear-eyed in everything he did and never believed in half-measures. It was this driving will in him which led to his triumphs in the early years, and later, when Japan began to lose the war, to his downfall. He was also very far-seeing. (It positively amounted to political vision when he decided to grant independence to Southeast Asian countries Japan had conquered and occupied; he saw

that Japan could never win the war without the whole-hearted support of those countries. I believe this was really the reason for Tojo's decision which came at a critical juncture. Almost alone among the militarists running the war he realized the need to give the conquered countries something of their own to defend, something more than the vague airy talk about Asian liberation and destiny and so on which could mean nothing to them when they themselves remained unliberated and without a destiny, and he also saw that even after victory only such a visionary concept of a Greater East Asia composed of truly independent states could endure. Many Japanese in power then, especially in the armed forces, did not have vision enough to see that much and that far, and the result was the incredible amount of trouble we had in dealing with those of them who came to our countries. These local militarists refused as much as possible to regard the newly-independent states as being really independent and so turned them into enemies at a time when they were critically needed as friends. Eventually Tojo lost his post, the old militarists took over, the new states were increasingly alienated, and so the way was prepared for the anti-Japanese resistance with which the war ended.

Tojo impressed Bose and me tremendously, and in fact he did the same to all the other the other Southeast Asian leaders. We found that he really understood us and our problems, and often showed it by acting in defiance of the militarists. Incidentally, he was a militarist himself as most in Japan were in those days of phenomenal military successes. But Tojo could be very unmilitaristic when necessary, as the eventual revolt of the militarists against him proved. When Bose and I paid our last official visit to Tokyo in November, 1944, we called upon him, although he was then living under a cloud. It was an act of gratitude and remembrance which we felt we owed him. Tojo appreciated it very deeply, and all Japan took note of it.

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Going back to Netaji, I saw him for the first time on the airfield in Singapore where we were waiting for Tojo's arrival. He made a fine, striking figure, tall, erect, handsome, and at ease with all. Soon after Tojo had arrived and wished both of us warmly and left we were brought together by the Japanese officers. "This is a historic meeting," one of them remarked rather dramatically. He was probably right, but I did not at all feel that way. Abstractions did not enter my head at the time. I simply saw Bose as a very physical presence whose poise and general bearing and personality stood out even in that vast, glittering scene of military pomp and power. Then my thoughts began to wonder, so that the past and the present became inextricably mixed, and I began to see Bose as a symbol of the long and passionate Indian revolution that had at last found its way into the wider Asian revolution which would change all Asia. I was in that kind of mood. Even more, I seemed to see a revolution within a revolution in India, for Bose's

presence with us was a sign that that long-enduring country was at last turning away from its passive philosophy to the more realistic one of meeting force with force, particularly at a time when half the force in the world was fighting the other half. For me who had always believed that the struggle for liberation in India and Burma was single and inseparable, it was a consummate moment which rekindled all my hopes and dreams.

This first meeting was a brief and formal one and both of us knew better than to make it something more before a whole crowd of strange military men who were closely watching us. It was at once arranged that Bose should call on me soon. Tojo's unfailing interest in us prepared the way for such an intimate meeting at the earliest possible moment.

For the next few days Netaji was kept very busy getting together his movement and strength, holding a public meeting of his countrymen before whom he was offered and accepted the leadership of the Indian Independence League in East Asia, reviewing with Premier Tojo the Indian National Army which he had created almost overnight, and again holding and addressing an enormous Indian mass rally which he captured emotionally with the historical slogan of "Chalo Delhi" and then started to into the war with his order for total mobilization. It was marvelously done.

Very soon after Tojo's departure Netaji and I met and were at last able to talk freely. We talked of a great many things, but mostly of the war and how we were to get all we could out of it for our own people. I have forgotten most of the things we said to each other, but one thing which will always remain in my memory is Netaji's impact upon me. Quite truthfully, it was immense. Netaji had recently met the German and Russian leaders and had also witnessed the total character of the war in the West and this made him thoroughly total and realistic in the way he looked at the whole world conflict. I too had learned from my own struggle as well as from the Japanese a good amount of this realism. The result was a true meeting of minds between us. But where I, according to my nature, was inclined to be emotional and often a bit too subjective in my views, Netaji showed a cold, clinical objectivity, or rather a fine balance between his subjective and objective attitudes. It was not that he did not have his emotional moments; there were plenty of them in his public speeches or statements in writing; but he held them all locked away when he was at work. Then he was, in the phrase that was once used to describe Lenin, "an axe that thinks." As I saw it, this was the principal source of his strength. Calmly and without any self-pity or self-deception he faced every fact in a situation, whether it was good or bad or the usual mixture of the two: he brought them all together in a complete picture, and then he drew his conclusions. A plan of action quickly followed. And behind it all there was a faith and a pervasive sense of destiny, both personal and national, which was almost mystical or fatalistic as some would call it.

When Bose really got down into his subject he gave you a feeling that you were listening not to a man, but to a force or something big and impersonal like that, to a long-pent, primordial force suddenly breaking through. I thought of all the similar forces which have appeared from time to time in the history of various nations and made them great. Netaji displayed the essential qualities of such a force, dynamism, dedication, and a sense of destiny. This thought leapt to my mind even at that first meeting and it comes back whenever I recall those years.

Before parting we agreed upon all the fundamental questions we could think of at the time as arising out of the war, that the war was ours in every sense, that British colonialism was our enemy with whom we could never come to terms, that in a war the enemy of one's enemy was one's friend and ally, that there could be no going back on the road we were taking. That was the beginning of our comradeship, and without any further need to talk about it we adhered to the words we spoke then to the very end. It cost both of us dearly to do so, as you all know, but we had pledged ourselves to do it and we kept the pledge faithfully. We could not do more.

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We next met in August 1943, when Burma declared her independence. I personally invited Netaji to come to the celebrations in Rangoon, and he came and witnessed them. He also heard us declare war against Britain and America. I saw the dream again in his eyes which I had seen before, but it was now a little sad and wistful, and so was his smile. Quietly, we guessed the reason for it: seeing Burma as the first colony to win its independence out of the war he must have been thinking of the long, desperate journey still ahead of him and his forces before India too would be free.

Upon his return to Singapore, Netaji acted swiftly. In October, 1943, he proclaimed the establishment of the government of the free and sovereign state of Azad Hind; on the same day the new state declared war on Britain and America, and the next month Netaji joined us at the Greater East Asia conference held in Tokyo where he met the heads of state of China, Manchukuo, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma. He was warmly welcomed by all. This time 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 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 every 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.

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At the end of 1943, Netaji requested me for permission to shift his headquarters to Burma. He had no need to tell me that he must operate from a base as close as possible to India in order to launch his military campaign successfully. I openly welcomed him; and so in January, 1944, Netaji and his government and army arrived in Burma and remained till the final defeat of the Japanese in 1945. They received the utmost Burmese hospitality and co-operation. At the same time the bond between the two peoples became closer and the racial tensions which had once existed under the British disappeared. Netaji and I met frequently, discussed our common problems, and did our best to help each other.

I have said that Bose was a great force. In Burma he became a positive whirlwind. Within a few months of his arrival he sent his army into action in Arakan, and then further north and finally to the Indian border in the northwest. The Indian Independence Army fought its greatest battles in that northwestern area. As I have already told you, it got right into India, captured Kohima and the hills around, and was all set to attack and enter Imphal which lay open before it on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1944, when it was stopped by the Japanese. Whatever military or political reasons the Japanese had for their action, it proved to be the most crushing blow that Netaji and his army suffered during the entire war. From then on one disaster followed another for that brave and battered little force; the British poured into the area colossal reinforcements by air while the Japanese and the Indians had none whatever and had lost all their planes so that they were fighting blindly; and then the rains came down in torrents before their time. The plucky little Indian army was forced to retreat in disorder and confusion.

Netaji took the blow courageously. I cannot, of course, say how he felt within himself, but outwardly he was exactly the same man as before. He at once told the people the whole truth and told them that in a war only the last battle and victory counted, and began to act up to his words by reorganizing his troops in order to get them ready to fight another day.

The true story of the defeat and debacle in Imphal is a long one which I cannot tell here, but when it is told in full someday it will be found that Netaji Bose truly lived his finest hour during that long,

hopelessly unequal fight and the agonizing retreat which followed, and the subsequent creation of a new army out of the bare bones of the old.

And so we come to the final tragedy which began in April 1945. Everything was giving way round us and the British forces had broken through in Burma. I remember vividly my last meeting with Netaji before we retreated with the Japanese forces in Rangoon to Moulmein hundreds of miles away. We had previously planned to continue the fight together even if the British recaptured Burma, but that had to be abandoned when the Burmese army started a resistance against the Japanese. It was a very dark hour for both of us. Netaji was deprived of his base of operations in Burma; in fact he was deprived of so much that he had to think of starting all over again almost from the first bricks somewhere else. If I remember rightly, we spoke little at that last meeting, for we already knew each other's thoughts and were sure that they would not be changed by defeat.

However, to say something I asked Netaji what he intended to do next. "Why," he replied calmly lighting a cigarette, "start again and go on fighting when ready. What else can we do? The fight certainly has to go on." These words echoed my own thoughts so much that I nearly wept to hear them. In my case, of course, with Burma and the Burmese army in the hands of the British and nothing ready in my hands I would not be able to do anything, at least for some time. I explained that to Netaji and he understood completely. Later I heard that he told his men, "Now that Germany and Italy are out of the war we must continue it with the Japanese as long as they are still in it; and if they too are knocked out we must fight on by ourselves." Those words spoken during the greatest crisis of his life sum up the essential spirit and character of the man.

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So we finally parted to undertake each with his own men the long, harrowing retreat to Moulmein, by foot and broken-down lorries at night across swamps and bridgeless rivers, through interminable jungles, and with the enemy planes bombing and machine-gunning us brutally the whole way. It was just hellish. Upon reaching Moulmein I remained behind, determined not to leave Burma as long as the Japanese were there and the fighting went on. Netaji, however, left for Bangkok from where he shifted to Singapore to start work again.

The next I heard of him was when, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1945, my plan stopped at Taiwan on the way to Tokyo. The Japanese officer who met me there broke the tragic news to me. Numbed by the crisis I had been passing through for days and nights continuously my mind did not take in fully what this officer had said. Dazedly I listened to it as I would have done to a routine report made to me while flying

or on touching down. It was only when, after the night's rest, I arrived at the airfield the next morning that I asked the same officer for the details of the tragedy. He gave them to me. Just after he had finished, the pilot of my plane came to explain to me how terribly perilous our journey to Tokyo that day was going to be. He wanted to know if, after having heard of Netaji's fate, I still wanted to go. "Certainly," I yelled at him, "let's go at once and end the whole damn show if it has got to end that way." Incredibly, we got through to Tokyo. The next day the news of Netaji's death was splashed across the front page of all the newspapers in the city.

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My story ends here. I could, of course, tell you much more because Netaji and I went through so much together. The fortunes of war were much alike for both of us, particularly the preposterous situations we got into, for both of us found ourselves fighting nearly all the time against two enemies: the open British enemy in the front, and the hidden enemy behind, and within and around. When one comes to think of it, the whole thing was often like a nightmare: a fantastic mix-up of the best and the worst, of joy and pain, and victory and defeat; there was so much of ecstasy in it and also so much of heartbreak.

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. I need not say any more.