

BANGABANDHU SPEAKS

“The Constitution of Pakistan should guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of press”

Karachi, Friday, the 3rd February, 1956, 3. P. M

The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan met in the Assembly Chamber, with Honourable Deputy Speaker the Honourable Mr. C. E. Gibbon in the Chair to discuss Freedom of Press and freedom of expression.

Honourable Deputy Speaker: Mr. Khaleque told us all about it. Mr. Mahmud Ali: I have also provided in the amendment for non-authorisation. With these words, Sir I, commend my amendment for the acceptance of the House and hope that the Honourable Minister in charge of the Bill will see to

of the Constituent Assembly, our phones are being tapped. Sir, the Minister of the Interior cannot deny that.

Honourable Deputy Speaker: Why do you not bring a privilege motion?

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: I will bring it. Sir, when I have more proof. Sir, the Government is very shrewd.

Honourable Deputy Speaker: You admit it is shrewd.

The Honourable Mr. I. I. Chundrigar: Sir, if the Honourable Member is not sure of his facts, certainly he should not make a statement before the House.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: I have suffered,

because for some time his Paper was also censored.

Sir, we are making a Constitution for the whole country, not for 80 persons sitting here, We want that freedom of press should be guaranteed specifically. Instances have been given here how our friends in the Government are behaving.

Sir, if you see the original clause, they have said that “there will be freedom of expression, subject to any restriction imposed by law”. Sir, according to this, the Government can impose any law. They can say “your letter will be censored, your phones will be tapped, you cannot move” Therefore, it should be laid down that the press will have freedom, the press will have liberty to write their mind and mobilise public opinion. I, therefore, request the Honourable Law Minister to accept the amendment of Mr. Mahmud Ali, categorically mentioning all these freedoms, so that the people of Pakistan may be satisfied that they have some tights for them in the Constitution.

Honourably Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned for half an hour for Asr Prayers. The Assembly then adjourned for Asr Prayers.

The Assembly re-assembled after Asr prayers at twenty minutes past Five of the Clock, in the Evening with Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Mr. C. E. Gibbon in the Chair.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: (East Bengal: Muslim) Now Sir, Supporting the amendment of Mr. Fazlur Rahman, I want to draw the attention of the Honourable Law Minister to the point that there should be no restriction in discussing the pacts or agreements entered into by our government with any other friendly

country. Mr. Mansur Ahmad has already discussed about this point and without going into any further detail, I would request the Law Minister to accept the amendment moved by Mr. Fazlur Rahman. I do not understand what is the harm in expressing our views with regard to friendly relations of the countries which are on friendly terms with us. The people and the Press should have full liberty to talk about it. After all, it is not going to harm the people who are in power. These friendly relations exist for the country and people as a whole, Sir, Honourable Members on that side have a right to put unreasonable restrictions if they do not want to accept the amendment moved by Mr. Fazlur Rahman. They can do it because they are in power. I would appeal to the Honourable Law Minister in the name of better Constitution because it is a matter of fundamental principles of the citizens of Pakistan to accept this amendment. In this connection I would say only one thing. In all democratic countries of the world, there are always two parties, one party is in power and the other is in Opposition. Government may come and Government may go but the country remains for ever. The State will remain, the people will remain. This Government is making some pacts with other countries of the world but that pact might harm the interests of Pakistan as a whole in economic and other spheres of our country. Now, how the opposition party can discuss these pacts? There must be Some ulterior motives in providing these words here. Now Sir, if the Opposition does not like a particular pact entered into by our government, they have got a right to mobilize public opinion against that pact and they might point out

to the people that this particular pact is harmful to the country as a whole and to the people and nation as a whole. But the Government here thinks that whatever pacts they make, they feel, that they are for the betterment of the country. In spite of the fact that the Ministry or the Government in power might not be popular as was the case with the Muslim League Ministry in East Pakistan yet they might think that they are very popular with masses and, therefore, whatever they would do, that would be acceptable to the people as a whole. It might be that the Government in power enters into a pact which is harmful to the Country, which is against the interest of the people as a whole and if the Opposition Party wants to discuss it and mobilize public opinion against this particular part by telling them that it is detrimental to the interests of Pakistan, how would they be able to do this? Our Government Sir, has entered into several pacts with foreign countries, such as SEATO Pact, Baghdad Pact and several other pacts. Many people do not like these pacts. They have a right to discuss these things; Press have got a right to say that these pacts are harmful to the country; some paper may write in favour of Government, some may write against it. I do not know whether the Honourable Law Minister can produce before this House any Constitution of the world, where it has been written that nobody can discuss about the friendly relations of other countries which are friendly to each other. Every country of the world is friendly to each other. There are so many friendly countries in the world with whom we have good and brotherly relations. But who will judge this question?

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▲ Awami League General Secretary Sheikh Mujibur Rahman reads out the welcome address during Chinese Premier Chou En- Lai's (Zhou Enlai) visit to Dhaka. (February 26, 1956)

the justice of those provisions and will accept my amendment.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: Sir, I support the amendment of Mr. Mahmud Ali. I do not like to deliver a long speech, as my other friends have already shown that “freedom of expression” does not cover “freedom of the press”. Sir, it has not been specifically mentioned in the Constitution, because they want to suppress their political opponents. Sir, we are members of this House, but, you will be surprised to know that every letter of ours is censored. Perhaps you do not know but the Interior Minister knows. Every letter from our relatives, or wives is censored in Karachi. Although we are the members

Mr. Chundrigar, I know what they do about these things. Our letters are censored, can you deny the fact? Can the Interior Minister deny the fact? Our phones are tapped and our letters re-censored. You say that “freedom of expression” means freedom of press. Do you know that in East Bengal, the editors are called and it is said “you cannot write this, you cannot write that”. They cannot even write facts Sir, I can prove it. The Government of East Bengal writes, or a clerk writes it; the order goes from the Secretariat that “you cannot discuss these things”. A sub inspector goes on behalf of the Government to stop the Press from writing a particular thing. Mr. Haroon knows that this is done

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I have suffered, Mr. Chundrigar, I know what they do about these things. Our letters are censored, can you deny the fact? Can the Interior Minister deny the fact? Our phones are tapped and our letters re-censored. You say that “freedom of expression” means freedom of press. Do you know that in East Bengal, the editors are called and it is said “you cannot write this, you cannot write that”.

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