

BOSE-JINNAH CORRESPONDENCE

In 1938 Bose and Jinnah exchanged notes and letters, and discussed the Muslim League's claim of being the sole representative of the Muslim community. The talks broke down because the Congress refused to acknowledge this position.

Note from Subhas Chandra Bose to MA Jinnah, 14 May 1938

In the course of the talks between the Congress President and Mr Jinnah, President of the All India Muslim League, Mr Jinnah suggested any agreement that might be arrived at, should be based on a clear understanding of the position of the Congress and of the Muslim League. He proposed that the conversations should proceed on the following lines:

"The All-India Muslim League, as the authoritative and representative organisation of the Indian Muslims and the Congress, as the authoritative and representative organisation of the solid body of Hindu opinion, have hereby agreed to the following terms by way of a pact between the two majority communities and as a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question."

After further consideration a somewhat different wording was suggested by him as follows:

"The Congress and the All India Muslim League, as the authoritative and representative organisation of the Mussalmans of India, have hereby agreed to the following terms of a Hindu-Muslim settlement by way of a pact."

This second statement, though shorter, apparently embodies the same idea which is given in the first, that is, that the Congress should represent the Hindus and the Muslim League the Mussalmans.

The Congress cannot possibly consider itself or function as if it represented one community only even though that might be the majority community in



India. Its doors must inevitably be open to all communities and it must welcome Indians who agree with its general policy and methods. It cannot accept the position of representing one community and thus itself becoming a communal organisation. At the same time the Congress is perfectly willing to confer and cooperate with other organisations which represent minority interests.

It is obvious that the Mussalmans of India, although a minority in the whole country, form a considerable part of the population and their desires must be considered in any scheme affecting India, It is also true that All India Muslim League is an organisation representing a large body of Muslim opinion which must carry weight. It is for this reason that the Congress has endeavoured to understand the viewpoint of the League and to come to an understanding with it. The Congress, however, would be bound to consult other existing Muslim organisations which have cooperated with the Congress in the past. Further in the event of other groups or minority interests being involved, it will be necessary to consult the representatives of such interests.

Letter to MA Jinnah, 15 May 1938

26, Marine Drive, Bombay.

Dear Mr Jinnah.

Last night I gave you a note explaining our position. You asked me what constructive proposals we had to make. I think the note is self-explanatory. Having made known the Congress's reaction to your suggestion according to us it remains now to proceed to the next stage, namely, appointment of respective committees which will jointly settle the terms of understanding.

Yours sincerely,
Subhas C Bose



Letter from MA Jinnah, 16 May 1938

Little Gibbs Road,
Malabar Hill, Bombay.

Dear Mr Bose,

I acknowledge the receipt of a note you handed over to me on behalf of the Congress on the 14th and also I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 15th of May 1938. The matter will be placed before the Executive Council and the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League at a meeting to be called in the first week of June and I will communicate to you the decision as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,
MA Jinnah

Letter from MA Jinnah, 6 June 1938

Dear Mr Bose,

I am enclosing herewith the unanimous opinion of the Executive Council of the All India Muslim League as promised by the note given to me by you on behalf of the Congress on the 15th May 1938.

Yours sincerely,
MA Jinnah

RESOLUTION NO. 1

The Executive Council of the All India Muslim League has considered the note handed by the President, Mr Subhas C Bose, on behalf of the Congress to Mr Jinnah. the President of All India Muslim League, on the 14th May and his letter of the 15th May, 1938, and find that it is not possible for the All India Muslim League to treat or negotiate with the Congress the question of



Hindu-Muslim settlement except on the basis that the Muslim League is the authoritative and representative organisation of the Mussalmans of India.

RESOLUTION NO. 2

The Council have also considered the letter of Mr Gandhi, dated the 22nd May 1938, and are of opinion that it is not desirable to include any Muslim in the personnel of the proposed committee that may be appointed by the Congress.

RESOLUTION NO. 3

The Executive Council wish to make it clear that it is the declared policy of the All India Muslim League that all other minorities should have their rights and interests safeguarded so as to create a sense of security amongst them and win their confidence and the All India Muslim League will consult the representatives of such minorities and any other interests as may be involved when necessary.

Telegram to MA Jinnah, 21 June 1938

Returned yesterday. Received letter. Thanks. Regret delay acknowledgment.—Subhas Bose.

Telegram to MA Jinnah, 24 June 1938

The following telegram was sent by the Congress President to Mr Jinnah on June 24:

"Papers report you intend publishing notes of your conversation with Gandhiji and myself. Hope you will not publish without obtaining approval first. Subhas Chandra Bose."



Telegram from MA Jinnah, 25 June 1938

To Subhas Bose, Wardha

Your telegram. Newspapers referred absolutely untrue.

Jinnah

Letter to MA Jinnah, 27 June 1938

38/2 Elgin Road, Calcutta.

Dear Mr Jinnah,

Your letter of the 6th instant forwarding the resolutions of the Executive Council of the Muslim League reached Calcutta duly, but as I was on tour, I did not get them till my return on the 28th instant. I telegraphed to you the next day, acknowledging the receipt of your letter.

The Working Committee of the Congress will meet at Wardha on the 9th July. Your letter and the resolutions of the Muslim League will be placed before the Committee and I shall acquaint you with its decision as soon as possible thereafter. I had been to Wardha and have just returned from there.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,
Subhas C Bose

Letter to MA Jinnah, 25 July 1938

Dear Mr Jinnah,

The Working Committee has given all the attention it was possible for it to give to the resolutions of the Council of the Muslim League which you were good enough to enclose with your letter of the 6th June 1938. The first



resolution of the League Council defines the status of the League. If it means that before we proceed to set up a machinery for considering the terms of settlement of the communal question, the Congress should recognise the status as defined in that resolution, there is an obvious difficulty. Though the resolution does not use the adjective "only" the language of the resolution means that the adjective is understood. Already the Working Committee has received warnings against recognising the exclusive status of the League. There are Muslim organisations which have been functioning independently of the Muslim League. Some of them are staunch supporters of the Congress. Moreover, there are individual Muslims who are Congressmen, some of whom exercise no inconsiderable influence in the country. Then there is the Frontier Province which is overwhelmingly Muslim and is solidly with the Congress. You will see that in the face of these known facts, it is not only impossible but improper for the Congress to make the admission, which the first resolution of the League Council apparently desires the Congress to make. It is suggested that status of organisations does not accrue to them by any defining of it. It comes through the service to which a particular organisation has dedicated itself. The Working Committee, therefore, hopes that the League Council will not ask the Congress to do the impossible. Is it not enough that the Congress is not only willing but eager to establish the friendliest relations with the League and come to an honourable understanding over the much-vexed Hindu-Muslim question? At this stage it may perhaps be as well to state the Congress claim. Though it is admitted that the largest number of persons to be found on the numerous Congress registers are Hindus, the Congress has a fairly large number of Muslims and members of other communities professing different faiths. It has been an unbroken tradition with the Congress to represent all communities, all races and all classes to whom India is their home. From its inception it has often had distinguished Muslims as presidents and as general secretaries who enjoyed the confidence of the Congress and of the country. The Congress tradition is that although a Congressman does not cease to belong to faith in which he is born and brought up, no one comes to the Congress by virtue of his faith. He is in-and-out of the Congress by virtue of his endorsement of the political principles and policy of the Congress. The Congress, therefore, is in no sense a communal organisation. In fact, it has always fought the



communal spirit because it is detrimental to the growth of pure and undefiled nationalism.

But whilst the Congress makes this claim, and has sought, with more or less success, to live up to the claim, the Working Committee would be glad if your Council would come to an understanding with the Congress in order that we might achieve national solidarity and whole-heartedly work for realising our common destiny.

As to the second resolution of the Council, I am afraid that it is not possible for Working Committee to conform to the desire expressed therein.

The third resolution, the Working Committee is unable to understand. So far as the Working Committee is concerned, the Muslim League is a purely communal organisation, in the sense that it seems to serve Muslim interests only and its membership too is open only to Muslims. The Working Committee also has all along understood that so far as the League is concerned, it desires rightly, a settlement with the Congress on the Hindu-Muslim question and not on questions affecting all minorities. So far as the Congress is concerned, if the other minorities have a grievance against the Congress, it is always ready to deal with them, as it is its bounden duty to do so, being by its very constitution representative of All India without distinction of caste or creed.

In view of the foregoing I hope that it will be possible for us to take up the next stage in our negotiations for reaching a settlement.

It is suggested that as the previous correspondence has already been published, it would be wise to take the public into confidence and publish the subsequent correspondence between us. If you are agreeable, these documents will be immediately released for publication.

Yours sincerely,
SC Bose



Malabar Hill, Bombay, Aug. 2, 1939

Dear Mr Bose,

I placed your letter, dated the 25th of July 1938, before the meeting of the Executive Council of the All India Muslim League.

The Executive Council gave its earnest attention and careful consideration to the arguments which were urged in your letter for persuading it not to claim the status it has done in its resolution No. 1 already communicated to you.

I am desired to state in defining the status the Council was not actuated by any motive of securing an admission, but had merely stated an accepted fact.

The Council is fully convinced that the Muslim League is the only authoritative and representative political organisation of the Mussalmans of India. This position was accepted when the Congress-League Pact was arrived at in 1916 at Lucknow and ever since till 1935 when Jinnah-Rajendra Prasad conversation took place, it has not been questioned. The All India Muslim League, therefore, does not require any admission or recognition from the Congress, nor did the resolution of the Executive Council at Bombay. But in view of the fact that the position — in fact the very existence — of the League had been questioned by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then President of the Congress, in one of his statements, wherein he asserted that there were only two parties in the country, viz., the British Government and the Congress, it was considered necessary by the Executive Council to inform the Congress of the basis on which the negotiations between the two organisations could proceed.

Besides the very fact that the Congress approached the Muslim League to enter into negotiations for a settlement of a Hindu-Muslim question, it presupposed the authoritative and representative character of the League and



as such its right to come to an agreement on behalf of the Mussalmans of India.

The Council are aware of the fact that there is a Congress coalition Government in NWFP and also that there are some Muslims in the Congress organisations, in other provinces. But Council is of opinion that these Muslims in the Congress do not and cannot represent the Mussalmans of India, for the simple reason that their number is very insignificant and that as members of the Congress, they have disabled themselves from representing or speaking on behalf of Muslim community. Were it not so, the whole claim of the Congress alleged in your letter regarding its national character would fall to the ground.

As regards "the other Muslim organisations" to which reference has been made in your letter, but whom you have not even named, the Council considers that it would have been more proper if no reference had been made to them. If they collectively or individually had been in a position to speak on behalf of the Mussalmans of India, the negotiations with the Muslim League, for a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question would not have been initiated by the President of the Congress and Mr Gandhi.

So far as the Muslim League is concerned, it is not aware that any Muslim political organisation has ever made a claim that it can speak or negotiate on behalf of the Muslims of India. It is, therefore, very much to be regretted that you should have referred to "other Muslim organisations" in this connection.

The Council is equally anxious to bring about a settlement of "the much-vexed Hindu-Muslim question," and thus hasten the realisation of the common goal, but it is painful to find that suitable arguments are being introduced to cloud the issue and retard the progress of the negotiations.

In view of the facts stated above, the Council wishes to point out that it considers undesirable the inclusion of Mussalmans in the Committee that might be appointed by the Congress, because it would meet to solve and settle the Hindu-Muslim question and so in the very nature of the issue



involved, they would not command the confidence of either Hindus or the Mussalmans and their position indeed would be most embarrassing. The Council, therefore, request you to consider the question, in the light of the above negotiations.

With reference to the third resolution, it was the memorandum of the Conference referred to in your letter dated the 15th of May 1938, in which mention of other minorities was made and the Muslim League expressed its willingness to consult them if and when it was necessary in consonance with its declared policy.

As regards your desire for the release of the correspondence including this letter, for publication, the Council has no objection to your doing so.

Yours sincerely,
MA Jinnah

Letter to MA Jinnah

38/2 Elgin Road, Calcutta,
August 16, 1938.

Dear Mr Jinnah,

Many thanks for your letter of the 2nd August 1938. I regret the delay in replying to it. As the issue is a very important one, I desire to place your letter before the Congress Working Committee at its next meeting in September. Thereafter you will hear from me again.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,
Subhas Bose



Letter to MA Jinnah

Delhi
2nd October, 1938

Dear Mr Jinnah

Your letter of the 2nd August, 1938, has been placed before the Working Committee. After due deliberation, it has resolved to reply as follows:

Though there are inaccuracies in your letter, no purpose will be served by dwelling on them. The substance of your letter seems to be that the League does not expect the Congress either implicitly or explicitly to acknowledge its status as the authoritative Muslim organisation of India. If this view is accepted by the League, I am authorised to state that the Working Committee will confer with the Committee that may be appointed by the League to draw up the terms of settlement. The Working Committee will be represented by at least five of its members at the sittings of the conference.

As the previous correspondence has already been released for publication, I am taking the liberty of issuing this to the press.

Yours sincerely
Subhas C Bose

Letter from MA Jinnah

Karachi
October 10, 1938

Dear Mr Bose



I am in receipt of your letter dated October 2, which was placed before the Executive Council of the League. I am authorised to state in reply that the Executive Council regret very much that the Working Committee of the Congress should have entirely misread my letter of August 2, which was quite clear and did not require any elucidation or further interpretation. The Muslim League is still ready to proceed with negotiations for a settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question on the basis defined in my letter referred to above and would appoint its representatives to meet a committee that may be appointed by the Congress on the footing indicated by us in our three resolutions of June 5, already communicated to you.

Yours sincerely
MA Jinnah

Letter to MA Jinnah, 16 December 1938

Dear Mr Jinnah,

The Working Committee have considered your letter of October 10, 1938 and regret the decisions contained therein. Since the Committee do not find it possible to agree with the Council of the Muslim League as to the basis of the negotiation and since the Council insist that an agreement as to the basis is a *sine qua non* on any negotiations between the Congress and the League, the Working Committee regret that they are not in a position to do anything further in the direction of starting negotiations with League with a view to arriving at a settlement of Hindu-Muslim question.

I am sorry for the delay in replying to your letter, but I did not want to say anything till the Working Committee met and considered the matter.

Since the previous correspondence has been published already, I am taking the liberty of issuing this to the press.

Yours sincerely,
Subhas C Bose

