

June 9, 1988

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Meeting with the President of Pakistan

Venue: Army House, Rawalpindi

An informal telephone call to my friends, Mr. Hasan Zaheer, the Cabinet Secretary resulted in its meeting. On hearing what I had to say about the Gilgit disturbances, the Cabinet Secretary felt that I must see the President and himself arranged the interview.

The President, despite a long and busy day, was his usual gracious self and apologised for the late hour of the evening for the meeting and added he had no choice, as he was told that I was due to leave for Gilgit. On the President's query as to how the development programme was progressing, I poured out to my heart's content the anguish, frustration and sorrow I had been harbouring since the unfortunate events. I informed the President that during my 55 years of life time, I had lived through many difficult situations, including the days of Indian attack, as Commissioner Karachi in 1971, but I had never seen such fear and panic, as I witnessed at Gilgit, when even women and children came out on the street to run for their lives, irrespective of the sect they belonged to. I was inundated with requests from Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis alike for transport to evacuate families. This was like medieval times, when invaders used to terrorise and subjugate populations. I handed to the President our preliminary estimates of losses, indicating how nothing was spared - human beings, houses and property, animals and trees, which came in the way of the Lashkar. I mentioned about the contingent headed by an absconder which descended on Punyal and ransacked two villages and only went back, after transport had been provided to them by the Administration. I showed him my NFR and requested him to read the last page containing the big question marks in the minds of the people as to why the lashkar was allowed to come to Gilgit and once it had reached, why the Administration failed to repulse it. I submitted to the President the acute lack of confidence of the people in the government to protect their lives and properties, which I found not only in the areas visited by the Lashkar but even far flung 40 odd villages which I had visited since these unfortunate happenings. I also gave to the President "Proceedings of the Village Managers Conference" addressed by His Highness, in November last, at Gilgit in which more than 500 villages of Gilgit and Baltistan districts sent their representatives and addresses of welcome were presented to His Highness by a Shia and a Sunni delegate. I informed the President of His Highness' great pleasure and satisfaction at this development and now how our six years work was being destroyed by outside incursions and interventions. The President asked if he could keep, the different documents I had shown him, which I most willing acquiesced.

The President said he was most distressed by these happenings and had already appointed a Supreme Court Judge to hold an enquiry and has already ordered action the local administration. I submitted to the President what could the local administration with 200 policemen against 20,000 armed persons. It is the people who allowed the lashkar to reach Gilgit should really be answerable. I added that according to my information, for 36 hours the police tried to keep the attackers at bay, because there were not sufficient troops, the police was overwhelmed. The President said that he had personally spoken to the Chief Minister NWFP, who had assured him that no one will be allowed to cross over to Gilgit are and yet he did nothing. The Federal Minister went there and further compounded the issue. I submitted to the President that unless measures are taken to instill confidence in the local population that such a lashkar would not attack again, the credibility of the government would not be redeemed. The President said that he was planning to visit Northern Areas soon and on my request that in the meanwhile, he might consider sending his emissary to have a dialogue with different sects, with a view to helping them sink their differences; the President agreed with the suggestion and said that he would ask the new Minister to do so, and made a note to this effect in his notebook.

The President that if he could do anything for the programme and on my observation that the President's greatest contribution was asking the Intelligence Agencies to leave us alone. The President smiled and then on a serious note referred with great regret to the campaign started by some periodicals against His Highness and observed that some people in the country do not allow any good work to be done and if someone succeeds in doing it, they gang up in decrying it. He considered this attitude very unfortunate. He asked me to approach him anytime that I need his help in any matter.

I presented to the President a copy of Ujala, in which his photographs and reference to his briefing on AKRSP had appeared. He greatly appreciated the get up of the magazine and enquired if it came out regularly, to which I replied in the affirmative.

While taking leave I said to the President that my sole purpose in seeing him was to convey the anguish of the people of Northern Areas. The President gave the impression that he was determined to see to it that this would be healed up fully. Despite my protests, the President graciously saw me off upto the car.