

## Kashmiris Diaspora demand return of mortal remains of Shaheed Maqbool Bhat to Kashmir

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Altaf Hamid Rao:

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At a large gathering in a Shaan restaurant in South River, New Jersey state, speakers paid homage to Maqbool Bhat, who was hanged in 1984, saying that he laid down his life for the cause of Kashmir's freedom.

"Leading the tributes to Maqbool Bhat's epic struggle, Sardar Imtiaz Khan, newly elected President of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, North America said that "The spirit of Maqbool Bhat is alive", says a message reaching and released to the media here Tuesday night.

The message continued "Today, he is an inspiration to millions of Kashmiris and those striving for human rights and human dignity. Maqbool Bhat's life has inspired countless Kashmiris to persist in the struggle of independence. His vision of an independent Kashmir did not die with his death. He gave his life for the cause because he believed in it with all his sincerity and honesty.

Sardar Imtiaz Khan added that the sacrifice of Shaheed Maqbool Bhat will never die with his passing. The blood of Kashmiri martyrs brings the goal for freedom and justice nearer, he said and demanded of the Government of India to return the mortal remains of Shaheed Maqbool Bhat to his relatives in Kashmir. It has been a sacrilege to have kept them in India for forty-one callous years, he added.

Sardar Imtiaz Khan announced that he is appointing Ms. Sumaira Ayaz, a highly qualified educationist and scholar as the Chairperson of JKLF Women's wing and he has also established a youth wing of JKLF, North America.

Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai, Chairman, World Forum for Peace & Justice expressed his appreciation to Sardar Imtiaz Khan, newly elected President of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, North America for organizing such an amazing event to pay tribute to the most recognizable and iconic personality who has become the living legend in the history of Kashmir. Shaheed Mohammad Maqbool Bhat was an intellectual, brilliant scholar, author, columnist and well-known journalist. He was an electrifying and captivating personality because of his long involvement in the Kashmir freedom struggle. He was a man with the mission, always selfless and always pro-Kashmir who earned the respect of all factions of the Kashmiri resistance movement.

Syed Ali Geelani, chairman, Tehreek Kashmiri said "Mohammad Maqbool Bhat is the national hero of Kashmir, and the people of Kashmir are proud of him. He was a source of inspiration for us. The best way to pay tribute to Maqbool Bhat is that nation of Kashmir should not forget this son of soil and his sacrifices." Source: "Kashmir Press," February 8, 2019

“February 11 is observed in Kashmir and around the world as the day of mourning. That was the day when Maqbool Bhat was sent to gallows by India’s authorities for protesting their illegal and iron fisted occupation of Kashmir since 1947. It is a somber day but at the same time the day of remembrance and a day to revitalize ourselves to be true to the mission of Shaheed Maqbool Bhat,” Dr. Fai illustrated

While talking about the philosophical outlook of Maqbool Bhat, Dr. Fai elucidated that he had clarity of vision about the future of Kashmir. No ifs and no buts. He was bold enough to say it loud and clear that the only solution of Kashmir dispute is an independent Kashmir. Maqbool Bhat visualized a democratic, independent Jammu and Kashmir as the ideal solution, To Maqbool Bhat that was the only practical solution that could satisfy, by and large the urges and aspirations of the broader spectrum of the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Even Sunil Gupta, former public relations officer of Tihar Jail, wrote in his book, “Black Warrant: Confession of a Tihar Jailer” on page # 108 that, “Mohammad was a political prisoner and he told me on many occasions that he stands for an independent Kashmir.”

Dr. Fai added that Maqbool Bhat proved to be prophetic what Sunil Gupta, former public relations officer of Tihar Jail, wrote in his book, “Black Warrant: Confession of a Tihar Jailer” that As a last wish, Maqbool Bhat was allowed to leave a will. A Sikh magistrate was called a day before the hanging. Bhat got his will recorded in English. He said, “There will be many Maqbool Butts that will come and go, but the freedom struggle in Kashmir should continue.” Today, Dr. Fai stressed, the whole nation of Kashmir is following the footsteps of Maqbool Bhat for the liberation of their motherland: Jammu & Kashmir.

Dr. Fai again quoted Sunil Gupta, who wrote that an Intelligence Bureau officer who had interrogated Butt after his arrest in 1966 for the murder of the police head constable, said almost the entire interrogation team was impressed by “his clarity of thought, manner of speech and knowledge of various political ideologies.” He added that Maqbool Bhat has said: “I want a fair trial for my people and myself. But I don’t expect to get it in this subcontinent. “

Sardar Haleem Khan, former President of JKLF, North America said that government of India could jail Shaheed Maqbool Bhat and silence him by execution, but they could not silence his ultimate desire – the struggle for the people of Kashmir for independence. Maqbool Bhat has given us an important message that we may have to give more sacrifices till the whole nation is liberated.

“Today,” Sardar Haleem added, “Jammu and Kashmir Liberation (JKLF) chief Mohammad Yasin Malik, who is languishing in Tihar jail, embodies the legacy of Maqbool Bhat. His (Malik’s) commitment to democratic principles in his fight for Kashmir’s freedom has garnered widespread support from the Western world. We demand his unconditional and early release. Sardar Haleem, however, urged the audience that we need to join hands and if at times we need to disagree, we must do it without being disagreeable.,

Raja Mukhtar, Spokesperson, JKLF, North America said that the moral high ground was everything to Maqbool Bhat. His formula for Kashmir was simple but powerful – The aspirations of the Kashmiri people must be ascertained in order to establish an independent Kashmir.

Martyrdom of Maqbool Bhat generated a wave of a new generation of freedom fighters like Ashfaq Majid, Abdul Hamid Bhat, Afzal Guru and Yasin Malik. “Majority of them took the forces of occupation head on and in the footsteps of Maqbool Butt sacrificed their lives in the process of struggle.

While coming back from New Jersey, my colleagues, Sardar Shoaib Irshad, General Secretary, Kashmir American Welfare Association (KAWA), Sardar Aftab Roshan Khan, founding member of KAWA and Sardar Shakeel Anjum, senior leader of JKLF, Washington metropolitan area were debating about the life and legacy of Maqbool Bhat on our way to Washington.

Sardar Shoaib Irshad said that Maqbool Bhat was a political warrior who had the sagacity to discern the evil intentions of Indian establishment towards Kashmir and was cognizant of the fact that commitments made by India to the UN or other international organizations were nothing but a ruse.

Sardar Shakeel Anjum said that it was due to the unwavering devotion of Maqbool Bhat to the cause, much to the chagrin of Indian occupation forces, that the flame of freedom has not extinguished. Noting that the people of Kashmir, despite all the odds, have never lost hope in their quest for independence.

Sardar Aftab Roshan Khan remembers the days when he was the Secretary General of JKLF at Rawlakot in 1984. He added that we must pay rich tributes to the memory of this great martyr, our true tribute will be emancipation of the Kashmiri people from under the Indian brutal occupation and senseless subjugation.”

Sardar Mehmood Iqbal, a well-known political leader of Azad Kashmir said that throughout his endeavors, Maqbool Bhat demonstrated selflessness in his dedication to the people of Kashmir, tirelessly advocating for their rights. He maintained that hanging of Maqbool Bhat was the murder of Indian democracy and judicial system.

Sardar Mehmood Iqbal related an event when Amanullah Khan was not feeling well, and Sardar Khalid Ibrahim visited his home to ask for his health condition. Amanullah Khan shook the hands of Sardar Khalid Ibrahim and held it tight and told him that we are together in this struggle.

Shafiq Sahib, an energetic, young newly elected Secretary General was the emcee.

Others who spoke during the event included Sardar Anwar, an articulate speaker and former Chairman, JLKF, Political Bureau, Ms. Sumaira Ayaz, fourteen years old Heba, Shaukat Hameed.

The event was concluded with the best ethnic dinner.

Dr. Fai is the Secretary General, World Kashmir Awareness' Forum.

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