



Pakistan-Canada Association

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Speech by President Raza Mirani given at PCA's Independence Day Celebration held on August 13th, 2006 at Michael J. Fox Theatre in Burnaby.

Today we are here to celebrate the 59th Anniversary of the creation of our homeland of Pakistan. The idea of an independent and progressive Pakistan will always be linked to the man who led the long journey towards sovereignty: The Great Leader, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He was someone who embodied the best aspects of modern political life, while remaining conscious of his cultural identity. It is in this sense that I see Independence Day not only as a celebration of Pakistan's inception but as a celebration of the ideals which inspired our Great Leader.

As a student of both parliamentary democracy and liberal political theory, Quaid-e-Azam worked unceasingly for co-operation, political reform and independence. Despite the tensions that existed between various regions and factions, Quaid-e-Azam was a firm believer in unity and constitutional methods for the achievement of political ends. He worked to bring diverse peoples together peacefully in order to attain independence for the sub-continent.

Struggling to win a voice for the Muslim minority within a parliamentary system, Quaid-e-Azam was an advocate for the equality of all people under the banner of Pakistan.

It was his positive nationalism, the spirit of community-building and co-operation towards peace, freedom and prosperity, that led to the creation of the state of Pakistan. Despite setbacks and hard times, Pakistanis have remained true to Quaid-e-Azam's vision, continuing to work towards the democratic ideals of freedom and equality within a strong national identity.

As Pakistanis living abroad it is vitally important for us to remember the struggle and sacrifice made by countless individuals towards the establishment of our mother country. It is even more important for us to remember the ideals that led to the vision of Pakistan: faith, unity and discipline.

For well over 40 years, Pakistan-Canada Association has strived to be the voice of Pakistani's in the lower mainland. We have organized events where Pakistanis can come together to meet and establish new bonds and friendships. We have worked to excite the younger members of our community into learning about Pakistan and being proud of their heritage. We have also been witness to the unfortunate break-up of our own Pakistani community. 59 years ago the bells of unity rang loud and far and reached the shores of every nation on this planet and 59 years later those bells are but a faint whisper on our shores. Old wounds inflicted years ago have yet to heal and the scars can now be found on future generations of Pakistanis. Today is a time of celebration but it is also a time for us to reflect on the journey that has led us all to this point. For the past several years, we as an association have worked tirelessly to re-establish the pride, culture and heritage of Pakistan in Canada. We have worked tirelessly to be a positive force in

Canadian society by working with mainstream organizations and societies towards the eradication of disease, hunger and bigotry. And we will continue to work to heal old wounds and have a unified community that has a clear identity, culture and an overwhelming pride in being Canadians of Pakistani origin. The world has labelled us already, let's not label ourselves. Let's not be satisfied to fit in but let's work to stand out. We as an association have realized that reaching out to mainstream Canadians doesn't mean neglecting the achievements of our own community. If we don't recognize each other, no one else will.

Now having said all that it is impossible for us to go back in time and make things perfect. We can only keep the inspiration of Mohammad Ali Jinnah in our hearts and minds and move forward in a positive and constructive manner. We have an opportunity before us today that will go a long way towards establishing our own identity and ringing those bells of unity once more. We have an opportunity to establish a home away from home, our own Pakistan House. Next Sunday all members of this association will visit the site and make a decision on whether or not Pakistan-Canada Association works towards the purchase and establishment of a Pakistan Community Center. For years we have talked about the desperate need of our community to have a place to go, meet, laugh, cry... to have a place where everyone is welcome and where all Pakistanis can take pride in. As a younger member of the community I understand the need of our youth to connect with members of their own community. Not to neglect others but to join with those that have a common culture, heritage and set of values. Talk to your parents, aunts, uncles and ask them what it was like to live here 20 – 30 years ago and compare that to the reality we live in today. We have let the world define who we are, what our ideals and beliefs are... now look forward 20 years and imagine the world your children will grow up in. We need to take charge now, if not for us then for them.

Pakistan-Canada Association is committed to planting our own seed of faith, unity and discipline in British Columbia. Our goal is not as lofty as our Great Leaders but is no less important in establishing a voice and identity for Pakistanis in the Lower Mainland. My hand remains outstretched to anyone wanting to make a positive change in our community and to anyone wanting to help us achieve our goal of being a progressive, vibrant and strong voice for Pakistanis. I am proud to stand with you today in celebration of the birth of our homeland. I am also proud to serve this community as it's President and to be part of Pakistan-Canada Association. I wish you all a Happy 59th Independence Day... Long Live Canada and Long Live Pakistan!!

Raza Mirani – PCA President