

# DEATH SENTENCE TO KASHMIRI FREEDOM - FIGHTER, JOURNALIST

Kashmiri freedom fighter Maqbool Ahmad Butt, a leader of the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front has been sentenced to death by Indian government. This is Mr. Butt's second death sentence. He was first sentenced to death by Indian government in 1968 but pending execution he escaped from Srinagar jail and crossed over to Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir. He was last arrested by Indian government in June 1976. He has been detained in some jail outside Indian occupied Kashmir. Neither his defence counsel nor his relatives are allowed to visit him.

Mr Butt is a Post Graduate and a journalist by profession. Before joining Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front he was Assistant editor of one of the leading daily newspapers of Pakistan. From 1969 to 1974 Mr. Butt was President of Jammu Kashmir Plebiscite Front, the political wing of the National Liberation Front.

Mr. Butt has so far undergone a total imprisonment of over six years in different jails and interrogation camps in India, Indian occupied Kashmir, Pakistan and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. During his detention he has often been subjected to most inhuman physical and mental tortures.

Mr. Butt 39, is married and has three children, now in Pakistan. He is originally from Indian occupied part of Kashmir and had migrated to Pakistan in 1959 as a refugee.

After being completely disappointed due to apathy of the United Nations and undue intransigence of Indian government towards conceding their right of self-determination to the people of Kashmir, some young Kashmiris living in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir (Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir) including Maqbool Ahmad Butt formed an organisation, the Jammu Kashmir National Liberation Front (N.L.F.). This organisation stood for armed struggle "to achieve for the people of Jammu Kashmir State, a position in which they could determine their national future as sole masters of their homeland".

After initial organisational and preparatory work in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, two groups of NLF members one led by Mr. Butt were sent to Indian occupied Kashmir in 1966 to organise in that part of their homeland. They remained in Indian held part for about three months and organised NLF there. On their way back to Azad Kashmir, Mr. Butt's group was detected and followed by an officer of Indian intelligence. When Mr. Butt's men realised that they were being followed and watched by an intelligence officer, they, under apprehension that he would report to Indian army-of-occupation, caught hold of him and took him along. After some time he tried to escape but was pounced upon by two of Mr. Butt's companions and in the scuffle the officer not seriously injured and finally died. When the news of his death reached Indian army, they encircled and combed the entire area and after two days detected Mr. Butt and his group. In the clash that followed between Mr. Butt's men and Indian Army, one of Mr. Butt's men was killed and two injured. Indian army also lost some men. Mr. Butt and his three companions were arrested. About three hundred local people suspected of being sympathisers of NLF were arrested within the next few days.

Mr. Butt and his three companions were subjected to most inhuman mental and physical tortures in the most notorious Mehtab Bagh Interrogation Camp, in Srinagar and in other cells. After some

time a 'Special Court' started their trial for 'revolting and inducing others to revolt against Indian government', 'acting as agent of the enemy', 'posing danger to India's security' and 'Killing an officer of Indian intelligence'. After a fake trial for about two years, Mr. Butt and one of his companions were sentenced to death and the third man to life imprisonment. About three hundred local people who included political workers, lawyers, lecturers and students were kept under detention without trial for periods ranging from six months to four years.

In December 1968 and pending execution, Mr. Butt and two of his companions including the one sentenced to death, escaped from Srinagar jail and after walking over snow clad mountains for sixteen days, succeeded in crossing over to Azad Kashmir where they were arrested by Pakistan authorities, and kept under detention for about three months. It was only after the NLF members staged demonstrations in front of the office of the President of Pakistan in Rawalpindi that Mr. Butt and his men were released.

In November 1969 Mr Maqbool Ahmad Butt was elected President of Jammu Kashmir Plebiscite Front (for Azad Kashmir and Pakistan).

In January 1971, and after all its activities during past few years having been suppressed by Indian and Pakistani press, the NLF got an Indian plane hijacked to Lahore. The sole purpose of the hijacking was to attract the attention of the world towards Kashmir issue. No harm was done to the passengers who were safely repatriated to India. But the military regime of Pakistan arrested about 350 members including entire leadership of NLF and its sister organisation the Plebiscite Front and the two hijackers both of who were from Indian occupied Kashmir. After about 9 months of 'interrogation' of the NLF and Plebiscite Front members and the hijackers, a Special court headed by a senior judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan was appointed to try them. The prosecution submitted charges

against only six of them including Maqbool Ahmad Butt and two hijackers. Rest of those arrested were kept under detention without trial. The Special Court proceedings continued for another one and half a year and in May 1973 it announced its judgement absolving all but the main hijacker Mohammad Hashim Qureshi, of all charges. The court held that both NLF and Plebiscite Front were patriotic organisations and their resort to arms was the natural consequence of their frustration over the continuous intransigence of Indian government to concede to Kashmiris their inherent and internationally accepted right of self determination. Hashim Qureshi was anyhow sentenced to 14 years imprisonment and is in jail since.

After being acquitted after 25 months of detention, Mr. Butt and his partymen reorganised the smashed NLF and in May 1976 Mr. Butt and two others Abdul Hameed and Mohammad Riaz, went to Indian occupied Kashmir again. On their way back they again clashed with Indian occupied Kashmir police and were arrested. During the clash an official of Kashmir government got killed.

After his second arrest in Indian occupied Kashmir, Mr. Butt's death sentence also was revived. Mr. Butt's appeal to Kashmir High Court and Indian Supreme Court have been rejected. In September 1976 after six Kashmiris hijacked another Indian plane, Mr. Butt was removed from Srinagar jail and taken to some jail in India. Neither his defence counsel nor his relatives are allowed to visit him nor do they fully know his whereabouts. Abdul Hameed and Mohammad Riaz are said to be in some jail within Kashmir and under detention without trial.

Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front  
438 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham 8  
UK. Telephone 021 - 328 2647