

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Dearly loved Friends,

With bright hopes and high expectations, we turn our thoughts towards you, who, serving in a region at the forefront of large-scale expansion, find yourselves poised to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, the central aim of the Four Year Plan. Your region, which claims a substantial percentage of the world's people, has a Bahá'í population that already exceeds by far that of any other area of the globe.

By virtue of its immense natural and human resources, its magnificent history and the rich cultural diversity of its inhabitants, India plays a prominent role in the shaping of human affairs. Throughout the history of the Faith, it has been the recipient of countless blessings and the arena of unparalleled triumphs. Mentioned by the Báb in the first of His Writings, India is eternally honored to have had one of its native sons numbered among the Letters of the Living, privileged to behold the first rays of the Dawn of a New Day. Bahá'u'lláh Himself selected and dispatched emissaries to propagate His Faith in India, and, under the direction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, streams of teachers from both Iran and the West continued to flow to that land to help the believers carry forward the standard of Divine guidance.

In response to the bountiful favors conferred upon them over the decades, the friends in India have made sacrificial efforts for the progress of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and have achieved splendid victories in His Name. They first demonstrated their ability to initiate entry by troops as early as the closing years of the Ten Year Crusade when they enlisted thousands of receptive souls into the ranks of His followers. The sudden influx of new adherents to the Cause from all castes and creeds—clear evidence of the receptivity of that great nation—transformed a small body of believers into a vibrant and broadly based community which gradually learned to shoulder immense and inescapable responsibilities. Its valiant members, relying on the unfailing grace of Bahá'u'lláh, surmounted the obstacles before them, persevered, and sustained their efforts until India came to occupy a privileged place in the eyes of the Bahá'ís of the world.

The Indian Bahá'í community has gone from strength to strength. It has established the institutions of the Faith throughout the length and breadth of that vast country, including suitable agencies to administer the affairs of the Cause in each state; has undertaken countless projects and campaigns of expansion and consolidation; has produced and disseminated literature in a wide array of languages; has pursued numerous projects of social and economic development, especially in the field of education; and, aided by the power of attraction of its House of Worship, has proclaimed the Faith to many millions of people. From every standpoint—its administrative structure, its relations with the government, its experience in large-scale expansion, and the devotion of the active supporters of its programs and projects—the Indian community stands in an enviable position at the beginning of this, the Four Year Plan.

The Bahá'í community of Bangladesh, flourishing in the midst of a Muslim society, is a source of joy to the entire Bahá'í world. In recent years and with astonishing rapidity, that community began to achieve extraordinary success in the teaching field, and throughout the Three Year Plan it has sustained consistently large-scale expansion. Its institutions have demonstrated their capacity to mobilize the human resources at their disposal, and those who have responded to the call for action have sacrificially and with the utmost devotion spread the Divine Teachings among the Muslim, Hindu and tribal populations of that country. The purity of their motives and the sincerity of their efforts to address the needs of society have won them recognition from

government officials in the highest circles. Their exertions to promote love and unity among the majority Muslim and minority Hindu populations are bearing increasing fruit, a striking testimony to the potency of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

In the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, the believers have, through the integrity of their character and the excellence of their conduct, overcome in recent years restrictions on the expansion of the Cause. They are now held in high regard and are successfully engaged in presenting the Faith to the people as a unifying force which can contribute to the progress of the nation. As they grow in strength, they can begin to look beyond their own borders and assist in the propagation of the Faith in those areas to which they have such easy access.

In the Indian Ocean, the Bahá'í community of Sri Lanka, a nation with a predominantly Buddhist population, is addressing diligently the challenges of growth. In spite of a number of setbacks in the past, the friends have persevered and are using the power of their hard-won unity to respond to the needs of that sorely tried country, whose suffering people thirst for the vivifying waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Farther to the east, the Bahá'í community of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has steadily grown over the years and is blessed with sincere and devoted believers, whose efforts won them the distinction of having their own National Spiritual Assembly.

Dear Friends, the receptivity of your peoples and the extraordinary advances you have already made enable you to approach the challenges of entry by troops with vigor and optimism, and to give systematic attention to the tasks that must be diligently carried out to ensure accelerated growth.

Your past exploits were largely the result of the incessant labors of a comparatively few consecrated believers who devoted their time and resources to the spread of the Cause in locality after locality. If you are to sustain rapid expansion and consolidation in the coming years, it is imperative that far greater numbers of dedicated and committed souls arise to promote these twin processes. Training courses—widespread, regular and well-organized—constitute the most effective means to mobilize believers on the scale required. Depending on the conditions of your countries, such courses will be conducted by teachers associated with national, state or regional institutes, some of which may well have several branches. Although the programs of the institutes may vary according to the characteristics of the populations they serve, their essential functions will be the same. They should seek to develop in the participants a good understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's essential Teachings and to help them acquire those skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively. They should also strive to imbue their hearts with a deep love for Bahá'u'lláh—a love from which stems a desire to submit oneself to His Will, to obey His laws, to heed His exhortations and to promote His Faith.

While all the participants in these courses will naturally be directed to the field of teaching, a sufficient number will also have to acquire the ability to assist with the development of local communities. In a region of the world where villages constitute a major component of every nation, a concerted effort must be made to establish in them the patterns of Bahá'í community life on a firm basis. This can only be achieved through perseverance and constancy in working with the local communities. The friends in each locality must be helped to raise their awareness of the efficacy of the Teachings they have accepted and to broaden their vision of the tasks and opportunities before them. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be helped to take up the challenges of community development and of expansion.

In this respect, we call upon you to give special attention to the advancement of women. In almost all of your region, women have traditionally played a secondary role in the life of society, a condition which is still reflected in many Bahá'í communities. Effective measures have to be adopted to help women take their rightful place in the teaching and administrative fields. By teaching entire families, you can ensure that increasing numbers of women enter the Faith, thereby improving the balance in the composition of your communities and beginning in each

family, from the moment of acceptance, a process through which the fundamental principle of the equality between men and women can be realized.

Of course, your successes in the teaching field and in the development of local communities will only yield lasting results if you ensure the proper education of children and youth. Youth will undoubtedly be the most enthusiastic supporters of the programs of your institutes. They are eager to make a significant contribution to the progress of their communities and have shown, time and again, their capacity to respond to the call to service. They can be trained to help shoulder the manifold responsibilities demanded by rapid expansion and consolidation. But it is especially important for large numbers of them to become capable teachers of Bahá'í children's classes. As you are well aware, without the education of children it is impossible to maintain victories from one generation to the next.

All these tasks will require your concentrated attention. It is important, too, that you maintain the momentum which the activities of social and economic development have gained, especially in India. Within their own sphere of competence, the specialized institutes, the schools and other projects are each engaged in work critical to the development of human resources. We hope that those who benefit from such programs will generously offer their talents to the institutions of the Faith in furthering the interests of the Four Year Plan.

As you respond to the requirements of the plans soon to be formulated by your institutions, you must ever bear in mind that you will contribute to the central aim of the Four Year Plan only if you teach persistently, prayerfully, lovingly and wisely. You should endeavor to bring into your ranks individuals from every stratum of society as you vigorously advance in the process of entry by troops. Receptive souls should be sought among the affluent and the indigent, in the various circles of urban society and in schools and universities, in centers of industry and commerce and in the vast rural areas of your countries. You should also remember that your exertions are not to be limited to your own home fronts, but that from among you must continue to arise an increasing number of souls to serve as pioneers and traveling teachers in the international field.

In the coming years, enormous spiritual forces will be acting upon your peoples. You should be confident that your exertions will have a powerful effect on the course of their destinies. Let the words of the Guardian written during the first of the systematic plans to be launched in your region guide your endeavors: "You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of Bahá'u'lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power and arise to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and blessings."

May the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty be ceaselessly showered upon you, and His All-Powerful Spirit inspire and sustain you throughout the collective enterprise on which you now embark.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]