



An open letter to the people of Pakistan

In the early 1960s my parents lived in Malaya and every summer I flew out to spend my holidays with them. Travelling by BOAC on a wonderful aircraft called the Britannia nicknamed the 'whispering giant' for the unusual quietness of its four great propeller engines, the journey from London Heathrow to Singapore took an amazing two days. For a ten-year old schoolboy it was a great adventure that I still remember with excitement.

The numerous stops along the way were names out of storybooks: Amsterdam, Rome, Istanbul, Beirut, Teheran, Bahrain, Karachi, Calcutta, Rangoon and, finally, Singapore. Many of the names have changed but what I remember most vividly were the hours we spent at each airport waiting for the aircraft to refuel and take on supplies for the next 'hop' to an exotic destination. I can still feel the blistering wall of heat that hit me as I clambered down the boarding steps the very first time I landed in Karachi. But as we reached the terminal there was much more to come. Probably to an adult the interior of the building resembled a horror movie, but to me a swarm of giant beetles was a dark dream come to life. A teeming black carpet of crawling *coleoptera* that crunched satisfyingly underfoot covered every surface of the airport building. More used to the southern counties of a temperate England I simply could not believe my eyes. It is a scene that became part of the myth to remember of my yearly journeys to the Far East.

I have since lived and worked all over the world but - sadly - have never returned to Pakistan.

Now, in August 2010, I am the Principal of Alfred the Great College in London. We are an institution dedicated to the education of international students. Many of our students are from Pakistan, as are two of my business partners and various members of staff.

For some time now I have been saddened by the problems besetting your troubled country, but the images that I now behold - flood, famine, death and disease - are truly of an epic dimension. This most recent tragedy is on a scale beyond a single government's ability to react, let alone resolve. Belatedly, perhaps, but also steadily, nations around the world are realising that only a concerted international effort can bring relief and comfort to the Pakistani people. This is an opportunity for old enmities to be forgotten and new friendships forged as we seek to bring relief to the millions who have lost their homes and are now threatened by disease.

We at Alfred the Great intend to set up a fund for the aid and relief of Pakistan as your wonderful country battles to repair the damage wrought by nature on the fabric of the nation and its peoples and I hope that this opportunity for renewal and rebirth will not be missed.

Simon Creese-Parsons
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