

Thirteenth Session

774th Plenary Meeting, 7th October, 1958

by Mr. V.K. Krishna Menon

My delegation wishes to add its voice, Mr. President, to the many that have been heard from this rostrum conveying to you their felicitations on your election to the high office of the presidency of the General Assembly. We should also like to take this occasion to recall the services rendered by your predecessor, Sir Leslie Munro.

The general debate is usually an occasion for surveying the events of the last year and dealing with the many problems which may strike a delegation as being particularly important. Some seventy-two speakers have preceded me, and they have taken about fifty hours of the Assembly's time. It is therefore not to be expected that I shall have very much new to say. My delegation has had the benefit of a survey of world affairs from the different points of view of different continents and different so-called ideologies and also of those who prefer to remain outside the conflict of ideologies. In all these speeches, in addition to the expression of great concern about the present state of the world, which is not unusual in expressions of opinion from this platform, there has been an emphasis on the outstanding importance of the problem of disarmament, concern about the exclusion of China from the United Nations, and an unusual but welcome stress on economic affairs.

It has been our privilege to benefit from these speeches that

have preceded ours, and we would like to take this opportunity of echoing what has been said here by many delegations in the way of an affirmation of their loyalty to the United Nations and to the Charter and its principles and to the determination of our Government to implement those principles to the best of our ability and understanding.

It is usual on these occasions to refer to conditions prevailing in one's own country, and that is not done because of any national egoism. In the case of a country like ours, in part representing the new resurgent Asia, we do so not in the sense of having any priority of representation over anyone else but merely by way of providing a fair example of that new Asia. Therefore, if I take the time of the Assembly on a few matters of detail, I feel sure that the Assembly will forgive me.

In this connexion, the statement made by our Prime Minister a few hours ago in New Delhi, at a meeting of delegates of the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Finance Corporation, appears to us to be relevant, because in this Assembly, especially having regard to the incidents of the last two or three years, it would not be out of place at all to quote these words which, in our humble view, are an expression of the sentiments of the peoples of Asia. Our Prime Minister asked delegates to bear in mind the fact that millions in Asia and other under-developed countries "are no longer going to keep quiet, and they want the better things of life". He went on to say: "Normally, you have in the past been surrounded by Europe or America. It is good, therefore, that for a change you should feel the environment of Asia and all other things that pertain to a part of Asia."

Mr. Nehru said that he did not mean to argue that Asia was one

solid bloc. He said that there were differences; that there were problems of West Asia that there was great tension and danger at present in the Far East of Asia, and that there were also the problems of South Asia. "They are different", he said, "but the main connecting link is that there is tremendous ferment in Asia, whether West, East or South. It is an important factor to remember."

He said that there was now a vast difference in living standards, and all that goes with it, between the highly industrialized countries and communities and the non- industrialized ones. He went on to say:

"What is even more significant is that the gap is ever increasing - it is not being bridged but it is ever increasing. The pace of progress, through development of science and technology, is tremendous where they have been developed, while other countries, like India, struggled hard just to keep themselves going. For us -for all Asia and for Africa in part - it is a struggle for survival. It is a life and death struggle for the nation as whole, for the 400 million people. I want you to feel this human element. We have to look upon it from the point of view of resources and money and all that. But even more important is the tremendous ferment going on in the minds of hundreds of millions of people in Asia.

"For Asia is and will continue to be in an explosive state because the recent change during the last few years have unleashed a giant, political changes and the like have unleashed a giant kept tied for 150 years or more. It has been unleashed not entirely, but considerably, and naturally it does not propose to behave as if it were leashed either in political domain or in an economic domain."

The Prime Minister pointed out that, if the Conference had met in New Delhi 300 years ago, the terms of economic relations would have appeared different. The thoughts of that vast continent are rooted in the conditions of the people, and it is not easy for those who live outside or who do not have intimate contact with it to realize the reactions and responses to various appeals that are made here or to realize generally how we function in the context of newly-liberated area.

Therefore, as I said a while ago, if one may refer briefly to conditions that exist, it is also because we represent in many ways the conflicts of ideas and ideologies that take place here. To us, it is not the conflict of ideologies that seems to be real; it is the conflict between the "haves" and the "have-nots". It is these economic divisions that tend to drive the world into conflict, even though the day of classic imperialism is proclaimed to have passed.

We live in conditions of a planned economy, and we make no apologies for it. Without that planning, it would not have been possible for us to bend our energies and our meagre resources and to keep our head above water in this world. In that economy, a degree of balance between the old country, with its hundreds and thousands of villages, and the needs of modern production, including our defence, becomes important.

Also, we are attached to a way of thinking where we like to make experiments for ourselves and not take orders hereafter from any people and to the method of trial and error even though often it becomes expensive. Added to that is the necessity of being able to keep pace with changes in the context of a parliamentary democracy and by ways of consent. All this added together makes

in our country a set of circumstances which provides for the world a great deal of opportunity for study and observation.

Each year we have drawn attention to the vast changes that occur in the villages of India. There are some 600,000 of these, and today 272,000 of them have come under village self-government - under what is called the Community Projects Scheme, which I am glad to think has attracted the attention of the technical side of the United Nations. By these small-scale efforts of villages, somewhere about 2.72 million acres of land have been reclaimed and another 4.9 million acres brought under small irrigation schemes. These figures do not refer to the larger schemes at all. I mention this in particular because in countries like ours, however much one may read about great industrial advances and achievements, the bulk of our people lives in these villages and is dependent upon agriculture.

Equally, in the conditions of planned economy, where we are trying to avoid the dangers and the diseases of a scramble for property and power and at the same time of attempting to beat people all into the same pattern, there lies a co-operation that has become very important. Although we are rather late in the field in this particular matter, in the last few months and years some 60,000 co-operative societies- of which over a thousand are of the industrial type-have come into existence. Over and above that, it is not possible in modern conditions, if we are to maintain stability in our country, to do without the maintenance of democracy to the lowest level.

A whole civil service has also come into existence - and I use this term advisedly -because without it policies cannot be implemented by adequate administration.

The Government of India today has in training over 400,000 men and women who are functionaries in the villages, and they hope to reach the target of one million trained men and women at the end of next year.

These planned efforts have to a certain extent required a great deal of sacrifice from our people, and the main resources have come from our country itself. We could not keep the pace of our efforts without assistance from other countries. It would take us more time and necessitate other methods. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity of expressing the appreciation of our country to countries large and small that have come to our assistance, either technically or with other resources. It is not necessary for me to go into the details because they are always published in the Press and are available.

There has been a considerable amount of talk to the effect that a country like ours, attempting to industrialise itself and to spread and implement democratic institutions on a large scale, may fall by the wayside owing to the pressure that these endeavours must impose on us. There have been expressions of opinion outside India that our Five-Year Plan should be cut down. The maintenance and success of our Plan, however, is of more than national concern, because if, we, with our modest efforts, could not get there, it is unlikely that other people, similarly placed, could do so. Our targets have been modest. I am glad to be able to say that in the two and a half years of the Second Five-Year plan, we have on an average reached 62 per cent of our targets, and there is no reason why we should not exceed them.

The Community Projects referred to the smaller and rural aspect of the Indian social and economic revolution. But, at the same

time, it is not economic revolution. But, at the same time, it is not possible for a country like ours to survive in this world without considerable industrial development, and this industrial development has gone on - although not as fast as we would like it to - and schemes on which the future of our country, the production of good and our ability to survive depend, have also gone on apace. Since it is not possible to give a detailed account, I should just refer to one or two aspects.

One of the major items in this enterprise has been in relation to the harnessing of the water of our country. The greater part of rain-water flows into the sea, as may well be the case everywhere else. The famous Bhakra Dam, however, which is 740 feet high and provides for 650 miles of canals, is nearing completion and should produce for us nearly a million tons of food. In the arid desert of Rajasthan canal irrigation has now reached the position where this desert is going to be irrigated by nearly 200 miles of canals.

Now these facts are not submitted to the Assembly in any sense of national egotism, or even with any feeling of satisfaction much less complacency. But it is one of the main problems in this world where large numbers of us, who but a few years ago were part of colonial empires, where our economic and political processes have either been thwarted or stunted, or at any rate have not made their full development have now come into other contexts. That development is not possible in any country in isolation from the rest of the world.

From there we come to the United Nations. It is our obligation on these occasions to look both forward and backward. While looking to what has happened in the past should be confined to seeking to avoid errors in the future and, if we have had any successes, to draw inspiration from them, looking in front of us we are faced

with many difficulties and obstructions which seem to project themselves from the past. Broadly speaking, I think we can only say that the achievements of the last year in the big political matters are largely of a character where we could feel that it might have been worse. In other words, it would have been possible, as I shall point out later on, to avert what could have been a larger conflict by the operation of, not necessarily the machinery, but the expression of the will of, the United Nations.

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