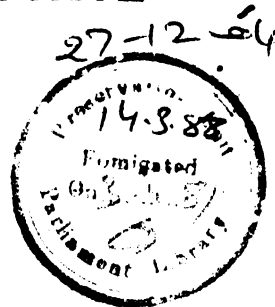


THE COUNCIL OF STATE DEBATES

VOLUME II, 1940

(19th November to 2nd December 1940)

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE FOURTH COUNCIL OF STATE



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COUNCIL OF STATE.

Wednesday, 20th November, 1940.

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE VICEROY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL LEGISLATURE.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE VICEROY : Gentlemen,—I am very glad to meet you all again today.

The fourteen months that have elapsed since I last addressed you has been a period of great events, events of profound significance both in their immediate effect and in their ultimate reaction on the fortunes of civilization and the history of the world. I warned you in September 1939 that we should be ill-advised if we thought that victory was easily achieved or that the course of the conflict would be free from reverses to our arms. I expressed at the same time complete and entire confidence in the outcome of the war. I emphasized how vitally important it was to India, the Empire, and to the world's civilization that that outcome should be satisfactory, and I added that I felt certain beyond any question that the response which India would make in a conflict for ideals so dear to her would be one of the utmost value and importance, and one worthy of her traditions and her ancient name.

When I spoke to you we could none of us have foreseen that fourteen months later the Empire would be bearing single-handed a burden so heavy as it bears today ; that of its allies at the beginning of the war Poland and France would have been overrun and conquered ; that unprovoked Nazi aggression would have added to its victims Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium ; and that Italy would have made an equally unprovoked attack on the gallant people of Greece, whose superb resistance commands our admiration today. But we should have been well content fourteen months ago had we, with any foreknowledge of the events which have happened, of the vastly increased burden placed upon the Empire, of the intensification of the most ruthless and unprincipled forms of attack on human life and human property by air and sea, of the singular disregard with which our enemies have continued to treat international obligations and treaties so long as they could derive a temporary advantage in doing so, had we, I say, been enabled to foresee, too, the valour and the success of the resistance offered. The work of the armed forces of the Crown by sea, by land, in the air, in every theatre of war ; whether they are drawn from India, from the Dominions and Colonies, or from the Home country, is such as to fill us with pride, with thankfulness, and with confidence for the future.

While the war lasts, its implications, its consequences, are such that it can never for a moment be out of our minds, that in everything that we do it must always be present to us. But I do not propose today, nor would this be the place, to enlarge in this speech on the detail of India's war effort, on the splendid work which Indian troops have done and are doing in the fighting line, or on the magnificent achievements of India, whether British India or the Indian States, in the provision of men, of money, of materials. No praise could be too warm for that achievement. It is one that has struck the imagination of the world, one for which the whole Empire is I know deeply grateful. And, substantial as that achievement already is, no pains are being spared to enable India to give still further effect, in all the ways I have mentioned,

[H. E. the Vice roy.]

and with as little delay as may be, to the universal desire in this country to help the Allies and to see the triumph of the ideals for which they are fighting. The confident hope that I expressed a year ago that India would live up to her highest traditions have been fulfilled in the highest degree. You may be confident, Gentlemen, that in this vital matter I and my Government are fully alive to the importance not only of responding to India's desire to help, but of making her in the matter of defence as self-sufficient as possible; and to the necessity of bringing her defensive equipment to the highest practicable pitch of adequacy and efficiency.

I said, Gentlemen, that the war must be continually in our thoughts and must be related to everything we do. Of the matters on which I shall touch in the remainder of my speech, the great bulk arise out of, or have some connection with, war activities or the war situation. There are one or two which I shall also mention, which are not so directly connected. But in their case the interest taken in them by the general public is sufficiently great to justify me in making a reference which I should not otherwise have made.

It was with much regret that I learned of the refusal of the Legislative Assembly to take into consideration the Finance Bill designed to facilitate the financing of India's war effort. It will, I think, be very generally appreciated that it would be impossible for me to acquiesce in the decision of the Assembly, and I have made a recommendation which will be placed before the Assembly this afternoon.

The work of the Department of Supply, which as you will remember was established shortly before the outbreak of the war, has been of great value in connection with India's war effort; and I should like to pay a tribute to the importance of this work, and to the work of the Ordnance factories (which were not until recently brought under the Department). I should like to associate with that tribute the business community in this country, whether Indian or British. At a time of considerable strain the Department has had the most valuable assistance from business firms, and I am glad to think that that friendly collaboration and patriotic assistance, so readily given, has led to some remarkable results. In the field of munitions, the Ordnance factories since the beginning of the war have been able to export to His Majesty's Government about one hundred million rounds of small arms ammunition and nearly four hundred thousand rounds of gun ammunition. On the stores side, Indian industry has made contributions on the largest scale to the war effort in the shape of engineering stores, jute goods, and many other manufactured products. I and my Government have been at pains to endeavour to secure that such changes should be made in the organisation of the Department as practical working showed likely to produce still better results. You may be confident that the lessons of experience will not be lost upon us, and that such further modification of the supply organisation as experience may dictate will be made without hesitation or delay. As I speak today, indeed, further changes in the Supply Department are in view, designed further to speed up work, and to ensure that the organisation as a whole is as compact, and as economically run, as is consistent with the magnitude and the character of the operations which fall to be performed.

It was with the greatest satisfaction that I recently welcomed to India the Members of the Eastern Group Conference, and the Mission from the Ministry of Supply headed by Sir Alexander Roger. Much as may have been done, much still remains to be done if India is to make her full contribution to the war effort; and the importance, whether to India or to the Empire as a whole, of the labours of the bodies to which I have just referred cannot be

over-estimated. I should like to take the opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the non-official Advisers from India who have, with such public spirit, placed their services at the disposal of these bodies.

The need for harnessing India's economic resources to the task of making her a great centre for supplying the requirements of the military forces engaged in the war must take first place in our attention. But the Government of India are in no way blind to the pressing problems that war conditions have brought to Indian trade and industry. The dislocation of our export trade by the cutting off of nearly all European markets has been receiving the closest attention not only of my Government but of the Export Advisory Council, in the hope of dealing with the problem of surplus production and of reducing the size of any surplus by finding new outlets for our products and manufactures. This last attempt is being pursued in various ways, of which mention may be made, in particular, of the exploratory mission of Dr. Gregory and Sir David Meek to America, and of the decision to increase the number of our Trade Commissioners in continents other than Europe, beginning with Australia. On the other side of the picture, the cutting off of many supplies which normally came from abroad has created many gaps, not only in India itself, but also in neighbouring countries, which Indian industry can hope to fill. I am glad to note that business and industrial interests in the country have not been slow to undertake enterprises designed to fill these gaps, while my Government have done their best to mobilise technical skill for their assistance by setting up the Board of Industrial and Scientific Research, which, through its numerous Sub-Committees and in collaboration with the Director of Research, has already produced valuable results.

The war has thrown a considerably increased burden upon the Provincial police forces, for, apart from their normal responsibility for law and order, they now are under obligation to undertake the safeguarding of places of vital importance to the internal defence of the country, such as power plants, major installations, and a number of protected places, in addition to affording an enhanced degree of protection to railways, and to watch and ward against sabotage. That burden has been materially eased by the establishment in all Provinces of the Civic Guard, and by the assistance given by that body in maintaining internal security. The response to the call for volunteers has been most encouraging. The Civic Guard has on many occasions already given practical proof of its usefulness and efficiency, and I am confident that it will, as its training progresses, play a most valuable and important part in India's war effort.

Though immediate danger to India from enemy air raids may not be apparent at the moment, he would be a wise man who could accurately foretell the development of the war, and we must be prepared for all eventualities. For this reason Air Raid Precautions in India have been initiated in a manner designed to form a solid basis on which further expansion can take place. Close liaison exists on this most important matter between the Central Government and the Provinces; and its expert advice, and substantial grants-in-aid, have been placed at their disposal. Good progress has been achieved in the past year, a progress made possible by the willing co-operation and voluntary effort of the people of India. There is however still much to be done, and I need not remind you, Gentlemen, of the value of the help which you can individually give to stimulate interest and co-operation on the part of the public and of local bodies in the areas from which you come.

Since the last meeting of the Legislature, compulsory national service has been introduced in India for European British subjects. For the smooth

[H. E. the Viceroy.]

working of the machinery for enrolment I gratefully acknowledge the work of the National Service Advisory Committees—all of it voluntary ; and the spirit of willing service has been evident on every hand. The European community in India have yielded to none in the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice which they have shown in the common cause.

In the treatment of enemy aliens the policy of my Government has been guided by the desire not to disorganise the good work of missionary institutions, and to avoid imposing unnecessary hardship on innocent and harmless people. Although, as a result of events in Europe last summer, reinternment, or restriction to parole centres, was necessary for most of those who had earlier been released on the recommendation of a special Committee, the case of some priests and missionaries, of certain Jews of enemy nationality, and of other enemy aliens who can show that they have consistently and publicly opposed the Nazi or Fascist régime, is receiving special consideration.

The outbreak of war found many Indian students in the United Kingdom. Arrangements were promptly made through the High Commissioner in London to repatriate those desiring to return to India, and to maintain a register of those who preferred to continue their studies overseas. To both categories the High Commissioner was authorised to make financial advances where necessary. In the case of students returning to India the Universities have all, I am glad to say, agreed that the period already spent at a British University should be recognised for the purpose of enabling them to complete their degree courses in India. Special arrangements have also been made, under the general control of the Chief Justice of India, for holding Bar Examinations in this country.

Realising as I do the importance attached by the Muslim community to the performance of the sacred duty of pilgrimage to Mecca, I am happy that, in spite of war-time difficulties, it has been possible to arrange shipping facilities,—at Calcutta, this year, as well as at Bombay and Karachi,—and, with the collaboration of His Majesty's Government, to prevent fares for the sea passage soaring beyond the reach of the classes from whom the pilgrims are mainly drawn. Indeed, I understand that, thanks to a substantial reduction in charges announced by the Saudi Arabian Government, and to our being prepared, even in war time, to permit the taking of gold sovereigns out of India by the pilgrims, to enable them to overcome exchange difficulties in the Hedjaz, the minimum cost to the pilgrim will be substantially lower than it would otherwise have been. In fact it will be lower this year than last.

The greatly increased burden which has fallen on the Government of India in connection with war preparation and war work has inevitably necessitated some expansion of staff and some additional expenditure. It would clearly be a shortsighted policy to reject expenditure which, on a broad view, would assist in the mobilization of the economic resources of the country and further the successful prosecution of the war. But I would take this opportunity to say that I am fully alive to the vital importance of economy in the civil administration, and of eliminating all forms of avoidable expenditure at a time when we have no choice but to spend large sums of money on defence and to augment the revenues of the Government by additional taxation.

In spite of their immediate pre-occupation with questions arising out of the war my Government continue to keep a vigilant watch on the interests of Indians overseas. In the Union of South Africa, the Broome Commission, which was appointed in May last to enquire into alleged penetration of Indians into predominantly European areas in Natal and Transvaal, commenced its labours last month. The ban on the assisted emigration of unskilled labour

to Malaya continues while questions of the wages of Indian labourers and of the status of the Indian community are still under discussion with the Malayan Governments. In regard to Burma, my Government are awaiting the results of Mr. Baxter's enquiry into the facts concerning Indian immigration into that country, and they are also watching with close attention the course of certain recent legislation which may directly affect the Indian community. An experienced officer was sent to Mauritius to ascertain recent developments in that Colony, so far as they affect Indians. I regret that the recent conversations between my Government and the representatives of the Government of Ceylon should not have had more satisfactory results.

In the field of foreign affairs, my Government's relations with Nepal continue to be most cordial. The friendly attitude of His Highness the Prime Minister of Nepal and of his Government is evident from His Highness' offer of two Brigades of Nepalese troops for the defence of India and from the generous donations of money made by His Highness and the members of his family. This attitude of ready and friendly co-operation is greatly appreciated by the Government of India.

His Holiness the thirteenth Dalai Lama died in 1933, and his incarnation was discovered towards the end of 1939. The installation ceremony of His Holiness the new Dalai Lama took place in February last. A mission headed by Mr. B. J. Gould, who is responsible for the Government of India's relations with our friendly neighbour, Tibet, was deputed to Lhasa to attend the ceremony on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the Government of India.

In October I and my Government had the pleasure of welcoming to India a Mission of Goodwill from Thailand. The Mission were the guests of the Government of India. During their visit they were able to make wide contacts and to cover much ground. On their return to Thailand they took with them precious Buddhist relics from Taxila presented to the Thai Government by the Government of India, who also arranged, at the request of the Mission, for earth from certain sacred Buddhist places in India to be placed on the aeroplane on which they returned to Bangkok. I am confident that the visit of this Mission will help to cement still further the bonds which already exist between India and Thailand.

From China we are glad to welcome Dr. Tai Chi Tao, an eminent Buddhist scholar, and Chairman of the China Public Service Commission.

His Excellency the Governor of the French Establishments in India issued an announcement in September last identifying French India with the cause of free France.

It gives me great satisfaction to be able to inform the House that the relations between India and Afghanistan continue to rest on a firm and friendly basis, and that there are signs that the bonds between our two countries are being drawn even closer in the cultural and commercial fields. I am glad, too, to say that in spite of the disturbance of men's minds by a period of war and intensive rumour the Frontier tribes have on the whole remained remarkably steady. The whole tribal belt from Chitral to the sea has been entirely quiet save in Waziristan, and there are many signs that the tribesmen are in sympathy with the democratic front. And in Waziristan, largely as the result of measures undertaken to control portions of tribal territory which had served as harbourage for the collection of gangs, a better spirit prevails, and the peace of the Districts of the North-West Frontier has recently been less disturbed than at any time during the last few years.

Since I last addressed you Labour in India has not been without its problems; but I am happy to say that owing to the good sense of all concerned there has been no major dislocation of work since the war began, and I believe

[H. E. the Viceroy.]

that Indian labour will continue its substantial contribution to the war effort. When disputes have arisen, the influence of my Government has always been thrown in favour of adjustment and conciliation rather than dictation. Complaints of inadequate wages in the circumstances of the war situation have always received careful and anxious consideration: an examination has already been made of the cost of living in the coal-fields and an enquiry has also been instituted into the claim of railway labour for a dearness allowance.

My Government has taken steps to obtain skilled labour for those industries which are engaged on war production, ensuring at the same time that the interests of the artisan are safeguarded. Under the Technical Training Scheme, in the operation of which I have to acknowledge the willing assistance of Provincial Governments, we have planned not only to meet the immediate needs of the war effort, but by providing well-equipped and competently staffed institutions for training thousands of our young men to be skilled technicians, we have kept in view the needs, when peace is at last restored, of India's expanding industries.

Let me turn now to the constitutional field. I will not detain you with any detailed recapitulation of the discussions with political parties that have taken place since the outbreak of war. As you know I have had discussions at various times with all the leading political figures in this country, and with representatives of all major parties and communities; and I can, I think, claim to have spared no effort to bring the parties together, and to reach an accommodation in the constitutional field which would be generally acceptable. It is a matter of profound disappointment to me that those endeavours should not have been more successful than they have been, and that the differences which have stood in the way of that constitutional advance which His Majesty's Government have been so anxious to see should still persist. The latest and the most important of the endeavours made by His Majesty's Government is represented by the statement which I was authorised to issue three months ago.

On August the 8th I published a statement on behalf of His Majesty's Government. That statement reaffirmed the attainment by India of free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth as the proclaimed and accepted goal of the Imperial Crown and of the British Parliament. In order to remove all doubt as to the intentions of His Majesty's Government as to the method and time of progress towards that goal, it declared the sympathy of His Majesty's Government with the desire that the responsibility for framing the future constitutional scheme of Indian self-Government should—subject to due fulfilment of the obligations which Great Britain's long connection with India has imposed on her—be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves, and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life. At the same time it emphasised the concern of His Majesty's Government that full weight should be given to the views of the minorities in the framing of that scheme, and it made it clear that His Majesty's Government could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority was directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. The method by which these two indispensably linked objects were to be secured was the setting up, on the basis of friendly agreement, of a body representative of all the principal elements in India's national life to devise the framework of the new constitution. This body was to be set up immediately after the war, but His Majesty's Government expressed their desire to welcome and promote in the meantime every sincere and practical

step taken by Indians themselves that could prepare the way for agreement upon its form and procedure, as well as upon the principles and outlines of the constitution itself. Meanwhile, in order to associate Indian public opinion more closely with the Government of India at the Centre, and in the hope of promoting the unity of India by the creation of new bonds of understanding through practical and responsible co-operation in the task of governing India and directing the Indian war effort, I was authorised to invite Indian political leaders to join my Executive Council, as well as to establish a War Advisory Council containing representatives of the Indian States and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole.

Outside India these proposals, both in their immediate and in their larger ultimate aspects, have been welcomed as liberal in conception, and as representing the best practical solution of existing differences. In India itself, too, they have met with the support of a large body of opinion : in their more immediate aspect, however, namely, the expansion of my Executive Council, I have not secured the response that was hoped from political leaders in India. The reasons for which they have been unable to accept the proposals of His Majesty's Government are conflicting, and, indeed, in some ways mutually destructive. However that may be, the effect is that the major political parties concerned are not in present circumstances prepared to take advantage of the opportunity offered to them.

His Majesty's Government note this conclusion with sincere regret. The proposals in question would place real power and real responsibility in Indian hands. Their acceptance would afford the most hopeful contribution which Indian political leaders could make at this critical time towards the preservation of Indian unity, and towards an agreed constitutional settlement for the future. His Majesty's Government do not propose to withdraw them, and are still prepared to give effect to them as soon as they are convinced that a sufficient degree of representative support is forthcoming. But as that degree of support has evidently not yet manifested itself, His Majesty's Government have decided that I should not be justified in proceeding with the expansion of my Executive Council, or the establishment of the War Advisory Council, at the present moment.

Gentlemen, I do not wish to conceal from you the deep disappointment which I feel at this failure to secure, within the frame-work of the constitution, due expression of that ultimate and essential unity in which the hopes and the labours of so many of us have been founded, and upon which must depend the future position and influence of India in time to come. Nevertheless I would counsel you not to be cast down by the immediate difficulties that beset the path of political advance in this great country. For, indeed, stress of war may well in the end come to strengthen and extend that very process of unification, and to hasten the achievement of those constitutional changes implicit in self-government with unity, which at this moment it appears to obstruct. Meanwhile in the circumstances of the world today the duty of my Government is clear. It is to press forward with all speed and in every field of activity those preparations upon which rests the capacity of this country to wage war with ever-growing strength and successfully to overcome the hazards that confront her. Many things may happen before I address you again ; but whatever the trials and anxieties that lie before us, however sharp the tests to which we may be subjected, we may have faith in the capacity of India to continue to play a glorious part in this righteous war against the forces of darkness and oppression. With all faith and confidence in your resolution and affection, I invite you and all men and women of goodwill throughout this land to support in this critical hour, with all strength of body and spirit, the cause of India and the Empire.