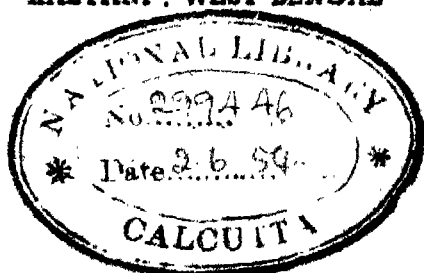


Address
of
ATULYA GHOSH
Chairman,
Reception Committee

59th Session
INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
KALYANI : WEST BENGAL



23rd January 1954

Panditji and Friends,

It is my proud privilege to accord you a hearty welcome on behalf of the Reception Committee. We offer you all a hearty welcome, respectful felicitations and brotherly greetings on this auspicious day, the birthday of our Subhas Chandra.

It is fortunate that we are meeting today in this area which is called Kalyani. This area has been taken over by the Government of West Bengal for the purpose of establishing a township for the middle-class people who now live in wretched condition in the big towns. It is being developed not merely for the purpose of providing accommodation but also for the realisation of an idea of providing township amidst rural surroundings, and such township to be in close touch with the village areas adjoining it. We have at the outskirts of this area large settlements of refugees who have been able to find some means of livelihood here. It is significant that this area is in the district of Nadia where Shree Chaitanya lived and preached the gospel of universal love. The world today is in dire need of such a message. It is also significant that we have as our President today a man of peace, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who is also a great protagonist of the gospel of peace.

I am conscious of the fact that inspite of our best efforts minister to the comforts and amenities for the leaders and brother delegates who have assembled here to participate in the deliberations of this august assembly, we may have failed to give you all the comforts that you need and to provide amenities to every individual. I am also conscious of my own failings and shortcomings for which I crave your forbearance.

This Plenary Session of the Indian National Congress, as you are well aware, is being held in Bengal after a lapse of 26 years. The 1928 Session was held in Calcutta under the Presidentship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. Today we are meeting under the distinguished Presidentship of the great son of the great father. The mantle of a great father has fallen on his worthy son to guide the destinies of this country during the most critical period of our national life, and we extend to him our respectful greetings, love and loyalty.

As we meet here today, our minds naturally turn to the Father of the Nation to whose memory we pay our reverence and homage. The lamp is no more visible to us, but I am confident that its light will continue to shine for all times to dispel darkness and dismay, frustration and despair in every part of the globe. It is our rare fortune that there lived with us and amongst us a human personality through whose words not only the down-trodden masses of India but the whole of oppressed humanity found expression, who

shone as a beaconlight of hope to the perplexed and oppressed masses of the world; who stood as a lighthouse on the firm rock of faith in the midst of trouble-tossed sea of sorrows that man has created for man. Bengal owes a special debt to him. When dark and fearful passions had almost engulfed her, when all human values were drowned in a sea of blood and human life was no longer safe in the hands of communalists and hooligans, in those days of dire sorrow and calamity in Bengal, Gandhiji made it his mission to re-establish sanity and human values and undertook his historic pilgrimage to Noakhali. Age could not prevent him; difficulties did not deter him; dangers could not stop him; he went about on foot, preaching the gospel of love, truth and fraternity and restored peace in Bengal. We offer our respectful homage to the memory of this great son of India.

There have been vast changes in this province since 1928. Many of our leaders and comrades who were living then are no more in our midst. I recall with a deep sense of sorrow the recent loss of one of the greatest fighters of India's freedom, the revered Bipin Bihari Ganguli—our Bipinda—who died just on the eve of this Congress Session. We shall be failing in our duty if we do not pay our respects to the memory of the departed great men and patriots who led the nation's struggle for freedom against foreign imperialism and contributed towards the building up of a sovereign democratic republic in India. We have thrown off all shackles of foreign domination; no

power in the world can interfere in the administration of India, which is now completely in the hands of the representatives of the people elected on adult suffrage. We have our Democratic Constitution based on adult franchise, and we have successfully gone through the greatest electoral experience in the world, the biggest ever in history.

Now we have before us the task of building up of the country. Mighty enterprises, some of them the biggest in Asia, are taking shape under the Five Year Plan. In foreign affairs, India now occupies her rightful place in the comity of nations. Our leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has placed India in the map of the world, and her counsels are being sought for and listened to with increasing and respectful interest in the international realm.

It is not for me to recount the part played by Bengal both in the renaissance movement and in the struggle for national freedom. Bengal had the signal honour of having the first President of the Indian National Congress in the person of W. C. Bonerjee. Ever since the day of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bengal produced such illustrious sons as Ramkrishna, Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra of 'Vande mataram' fame, Keshab Chandra Sen, Rabindranath, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Sri Aurobindo, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Deshabandhu, J. M. Sengupta and Netaji Subhas Chandra.

It is our misfortune that we can no longer welcome you to a whole Bengal as hitherto. We welcome you

in a truncated State, just one-third of its former dimensions. The fair province of ours had to pay heavily for the sake of India's freedom, and suffer partition for the sake of independence. Thus while we became participants in the joys of freedom along with the rest of India, we had also to experience the bitterest sorrows of vivisection like our brave brothers of the Punjab. But our problems are different from those of the Punjab. In the Punjab with the entire Muslim population living in East Punjab, migrating to West Punjab, the Hindu population who came from West Punjab, got the benefit of land, vocation and other economic holdings of the persons who left. In Bengal the picture is of a different nature.

West Bengal is sometimes styled as a 'problem province'. You know we have many problems. Migration of 2½ million of Hindus from East Bengal and heavy movements of people from both sides have taken place and some are still taking place. But we have still with us 4½ million of our Muslim brethren who form 1/6th of the population of West Bengal. They are happy to live with us and work amongst us. While we are proud of this phase in our national life, the refugee problem still remains very acute. The influx of 2½ million of refugee brothers and sisters from Eastern Pakistan has created problems of serious magnitude. The question of their rehabilitation in a truncated State with a density of population exceeding 830 per square mile is indeed a very complex one, and is not easy of solution. West Bengal consists of three disjointed blocks, and the only

communication between them lies either through Pakistan or through another State under the Indian Union. It is, therefore, deemed essential that there should be some kind of link connecting these disjointed blocks in the interests of national growth, social contact and industrial development. The persistent voice raised by the people of West Bengal for that link is not for any territorial expansion but for a living space which may serve as a communicating link between the three disjointed blocks and may also provide an opportunity for the rehabilitation of the large number of uprooted refugees from across the border. We need today the sympathy and co-operation of you all for the solution of our manifold and complicated economic and social problems.

It is gratifying to note that due to the efforts of the West Bengal Government and the encouraging co-operation of the public in general, there has not been any serious communal trouble or disaster since 1950. Communal harmony is obtaining both in rural and in urban areas.

We hear some times that life and property in Calcutta are in danger. About a million frustrated and uprooted humanity are living within a 10 mile radius of the city of Calcutta. They have come to India, leaving their hearths and homes with high hopes of building new houses, having new vocations, and dreaming of new visions about the future of their sons and daughters. We have, so far, been able to rehabilitate the bulk of the refugees in the districts of Nadia, Jalpaiguri, Malda and West Dinajpur

and in other places with the help of the Government and co-operation of the public in general. But there are thousands of refugees round about Calcutta whose feeling of frustration is persistent. They left their home to seek security and to have an opportunity of starting a new life. They are feeling desolate now and despondent about their future. We know that the Government of India and the West Bengal Government are using all their resources for the rehabilitation of this uprooted humanity. But I want to stress here with all the emphasis I can command, that only on a happy solution of this refugee problem can this "problem" province progress.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope and trust that the leaders and delegates who have congregated here will lead the country from the morass of dismay and frustration to a successful haven by forging a bold and planned programme for the economic regeneration of the common man under the inspiring guidance of our revered President.

I welcome you once again from the depth of my heart.
