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THE INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS 1947—DELHI

THE 34th Annual Session of this oldest scientific organisation marks a significant and memorable landmark in the history of the progress of science in India; it is the first and the most representative of the National assembly of scientists to be held after the formation of the Interim National Government. A singularly inspiring feature of this Congress is the fact that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Vice-President of the Interim Government, who, to quote his own modest words, "represents something of the new India that is rising around us", inaugurated the Session and presided over its deliberations. Pandit Nehru, it will be recalled, was invited to preside over the thirtieth session of the Indian Science Congress in 1943 which was planned to be held at Lucknow. For reasons too well known to need any repetition, Pandit Nehru could not preside over the 1943 Session of the Congress.

To quote Professor D. N. Wadia, "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's contributions to science in India have not been in the limelight, but they have been leavening influence in the organisation and working of the National Planning Committee which since 1939 is engaged in the great task of co-ordinating applied science

with productive industry in every field—industrial, educational, cultural and organisational."

Among the other distinguishing features of the Congress were the Delegations of notable foreign scientists who actively participated in the proceedings of the session. The British Delegation representing a "cross-section of British scientific life" was led by Sir Charles Darwin, the Director of the National Physical Laboratory; the Russian Delegation was headed by Professor M. Volgin, the Vice-President of the Soviet Academy of Science. Eminent men of science representing the United States, Canada and France, were also present at this historic session.

Pandit Nehru established a refreshingly new tradition by commencing his Presidential Address in the language of the land, which was later rounded off in English for the benefit of the visiting scientists. He expressed the hope that now, when India was on the verge of independence and science was coming of age, it would solve the problems of the new India by rapid, planned development on all sectors and try to make her more and more scientific-minded.

Pandit Nehru said, "Surely science was not

merely an individual's search for truth. It was something infinitely more than that if it worked for the community".

Pandit Nehru put forth an impassioned plea for a new orientation of scientific research in this country and emphasised the need for a much more broadbased effort to tap and harness the country's scientific talent in the service of four hundred millions who are faced with the struggle of securing the absolute wants of life. He said:

"For a hungry man truth has little meaning. He wants food. For a hungry man, God has no meaning. He wants food. India is a hungry, starving country, and to talk of truth, God and even many of the fine things of life to millions who are starving is a mockery. We have to find food for them, clothing, housing, education, health—all the absolute necessities of life that every man should possess. When we have done that, we can philosophise and think of God. So science must think in terms of four hundred million peoples in India. Obviously, you can only think in those terms and work along those lines on the wider scale of co-ordinated planning."

The Science Congress, he said, should devote itself to this imperative task and not wait merely for the Government to take action. He wished to discourage among the scientists a reliance on what the Government may or may not do. He, however, recognised the legitimate right of scientists to expect certain initiatives from the Government. Speaking just as one Member of the present Government of India—partly for his colleagues but largely for himself—Pandit Nehru said, "We are intensely interested in the scientific development of India and we shall do everything in our power to encourage scientific research. We should like to tap all the latent scientific talent in the country and to give it opportunity for growth and service to the humanity."

The voice of a united India spoke when Pandit Nehru referred to the heralding of the Atomic age with the enactment of the horrible tragedy of Hiroshima. He would pledge to extend his whole-hearted co-operation to the promotion of all aspects of scientific endeavour in every part of the globe, in so far as it advanced the cause of peace, prosperity and happiness for all mankind. "But in giving that undertaking and pledge," declared Pandit Nehru, "I want to make it perfectly clear that we will not co-operate in the ways of war."

"What the future will bring I do not know. I can neither foretell the future nor have I

any authority to bind my country down to what it may or may not do in future, but in these days so soon after the last war, when people again think of wars and when scientists are yoked into work in preparation for future wars, I think it is desirable and necessary that men and women of science should also think about the way they are often misused and exploited for base ends. I should make it clear that they do not want to be so exploited."

"Science has its destructive side and a constructive and creative side. Both have gone on side by side and both still go on. No one knows which ultimately will triumph. Hiroshima became a symbol of this conflict and in spite of all the decisions of the Atomic Energy Commission of U.N.O.—and we welcome those decisions of course, in so far as they go—that doubt remains in one's mind as to where we are speeding. On the other hand, apart from the atomic bomb aspect of it, obviously we are on the threshold of a new age, in the sense of enormous power resources being put at the disposal of the humanity and the community. Will this new age change—and I think it will change—enormously the whole structure of society? My mind goes back to the time when gun-powder burst upon the world. Gun-powder at any rate pushed the Middle Ages away completely and fairly rapidly and in course of time brought or helped to bring about a new political and economic structure. Of course, there were many forces at work; nevertheless, gun-powder did produce that powerful effect on society, and ultimately out of that feudal order gradually a new capitalist order developed. Now I wonder whether this so-called atom bomb is not also the herald of a new age, of a new structure of society which has to be established in order to fit in with present conditions. I myself am convinced that there is going to be no very great progress either in science or in other ways unless certain fundamental changes take place in the social structure."

Concluding his address, Pandit Nehru said that however engrossed in politics he was, he had always thought or tried to think in terms of a scientific solution for all problems of India. He firmly believed that the only right approach to the world's problems and to India's National problems was the approach of science. He hoped that this historic session of the Indian Science Congress, which had met at a time which is in India's history a very significant time, will prove also very significant in the development of science in India.