

## **Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru**

*Series II, Volume 2*

### **Wavell's Record of Interview with Nehru**

We then had some talk on the Inter-Asian Conference, which apparently holds its first meeting on the 22nd. The public meetings are to be held in the Purana Qila. There seemed been some trouble, by the Arabs protesting against any Jews coming from Palestine, and China protesting against Tibet being separately represented. I gather that Chatham House, the corresponding American Institute of International Affairs, Australia, and New Zealand, will be represented by observers.

### **Members of Parliament and Foreign Delegations**

Therefore what they say and do in a foreign country is important for us. It may commit us to an undertaking which we are not prepared to undertake. It may help us a great deal; it may come in our way-what they say and do there. In almost every one of our neighbouring countries today, Afghanistan, Tibet, Burma, Malaya, Siam, Iran or Iraq, special problems arise. We deal with them from day to day. We shall deal with them even more in the future. Many problems are what are called secret problems, dealt with rather secretly. It is quite conceivable that non-official members, perhaps not acquainted with the nature of the particular problem, may say or do something which might create difficulties in the future. Therefore, even in such missions it is desirable that some expert should be associated for handling those problems. But otherwise the mission might well be almost completely non-official carrying the goodwill of this country and this Legislature to other countries.

## **Chinese attitude to the Asian Conference<sup>1</sup>**

Your telegram to Mrs. Naidu dated 10th March<sup>2</sup>. Unable to understand Chinese attitude to Asian Conference when Conference Organisers have fully explained the position which in no way injurious to Chinese interests. Non-official cultural conference cannot be expected to consider political niceties. We are unable to say whom Tibetans represent till they come. Conference organisers do not wish to do anything which might offend Chinese susceptibilities or raise any question of status but desire to avoid saying anything regarding Tibetans which may involve controversy. Probably best to call them representatives. We cannot officially or otherwise give directions to Asian Conference.

Conference secretariat issuing following statement. "Asian Relations Conference beginning 23rd March. The Conference will deal mainly with cultural, economic and like subjects, the object being to encourage closer cooperation between Asian countries. It will not deal with internal politics of any country. Invitations have been issued to various organisations and public bodies in Asia interested in world affairs and Asian cultural, economic and like relations. Certain Governments have also been invited to send some observers as also some organisations in Europe, America and Australia. A large number of acceptances have been received and it is expected that a

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<sup>1</sup> Telegram to KPS Menon, 14 March 1947, Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, File No. 10(9)-NEF/47, p 7/c, National Archives of India.

<sup>2</sup> KPS Menon had stated that the Chinese insisted that the question of Tibet's political status should not be allowed to be discussed at the Asian Relations Conference and that the Tibetan representatives should be included in the list of Chinese representatives and treated as cultural representatives. He also wanted a statement to be issued about organisation invited and seating arrangements.

distinguished and representative gathering will attend. The delegations will be seated in alphabetical order".

### **A United Asia for World Peace**

Friends and fellow Asians:

What has brought you here, men and women of Asia? Why have you come from the various countries of this mother continent of ours and gathered together in the ancient city of Delhi? Some of us, greatly daring, sent you invitation. And yet it was not merely that call from us but some deeper urge that brought you here.

We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history. Standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavour, we can look back on our long past and look forward to the future that is taking shape before our eyes. Asia after a long period of quiescence, has suddenly become important again in the world affairs. If we view the millennia of history, this continent of Asia, with Egypt has been so intimately connected in cultural fellowship, has played a mighty role in the evolution of humanity. It was here that civilization began and man started on his unending adventure of life. Here the mind of man searched unceasingly for truth and the spirit of man shone out like a beacon which lightened up the whole world.

This dynamic Asia from which great streams of culture flowed in all directions gradually became static and unchanging. Other peoples and other continents came to the force and with their new dynamism spread out and took possession of great parts of the world. This mighty continent became just a field for the rival imperialisms of Europe, and Europe became the centre of history and progress in human affairs.

A change is coming over the scene now and Asia is again finding herself. We live in a tremendous age of transition and already the next stage takes shape when Asia takes her rightful place with the other continent. It is at this great moment that we meet here it is the pride and privilege of the people of India to welcome their fellow Asians from other countries to confer with them about the present and the future and to lay the foundations of our mutual progress, well-being and friendship.

The idea of having an Asian Conference is now new and many have thought of it. It is indeed surprising that it should not have been held many years earlier, yet perhaps the time was not ripe for it and any attempt to do so would have been superficial and not in tune with world events. It so happened what we in India convened this Conference, but the idea of such a Conference arose simultaneously in many minds and many countries of Asia. There was a widespread urge and an awareness that the time had come for us, peoples of Asia, to meet together, to hold together and to advance together. It was not only a vague desire but a compulsion of events that forced us, all of us, to think along these lines. Because of this the invitation we, in India, sent out brought an answering echo and a magnificent response from every country of Asia.

We welcome you delegates and representatives from China, that great country to which Asia owes so much and from which so much is expected; from Egypt and the Arab countries of Western Asia, inheritors of a proud culture which spread far and wide and influenced India greatly; from Iran whose contacts with India go back to the dawn of history; from Indonesia and Indo-China whose history is intertwined with India's culture, and where recently battle of freedom has continued, a reminder to us that freedom must be won and cannot come as a gift; from Turkey that has been rejuvenated by the genius

of a great leader; from Korea and Mongolia, Siam, Malaya and the Philippines; from the Soviet Republics of Asia which have advanced so rapidly in our generation and which have so many lessons to teach us; and from our neighbours Afghanistan, Tibet, Nepal, Burma and Ceylon to whom we look especially for cooperation and close and friendly intercourse. Asia is very well represented at this Conference, and if one or two countries have been unable to send representatives, this was due to no lack of desire on their part of ours but circumstances beyond our control came in the way. We welcome also observers from Australia and New Zealand because we have many problems in common, especially in the Pacific and in the South-East region of Asia, and we have to cooperate together to find solutions.

As we meet here today, that long past of Asia rises up before us, the troubles of recent years fade away, and a thousand memories revive. But I shall not speak to you of these past ages with their glories and triumphs and failures, nor of more recent times which have oppressed us so much and which still pursue us in some measure. During the past two hundred years we have seen the growth of Western imperialisms and the reduction of large parts of Asia to colonial or semi-colonial status. Much has happened during these years, but perhaps one of the notable consequences of the European domination of Asia has been the isolation of the countries of Asia from one another. India always had contacts and intercourse with her neighbour countries in the north-west, the north-east, the east and the south-east. With the coming of British rule in India, these contacts were broken off and India was almost completely isolated from the rest of Asia. The old land routes almost ceased to function and our chief window to the outer world locked out on the sea route which led to England. A similar process affected other countries of Asia also. Their common economy was bound up with some European imperialism or

other; even culturally they looked towards Europe and not to their own friends and neighbours from whom they had derived so much.

Today this isolation is breaking down because of many reasons, political and otherwise. The old imperialisms are fading away. The land routes have revived and air travel suddenly brings us very near to each other. This Conference itself is significant as an expression of that deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination. As that domination goes, the walls that surrounded us fall down and we look at each other again and meet as old friends long parted.

In this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour. It is fitting that India should play her part in this new phase of Asian development. Apart from the fact that India herself is emerging into freedom and independence, she is the natural centre and focal point of the many forces at work in Asia. Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of Western and Northern and Eastern and South-East Asia. Because of this, the history of India is a long history of her relations with the other countries of Asia. Streams of culture have come to India from the West and East and been absorbed in India, producing the rich and variegated culture which is India today. At the same time, streams of culture have flowed from India to distant parts of Asia. If you would know India you have to go to Afghanistan and Western Asia, to Central Asia, to China and Japan and to the countries of South-East Asia. There you will find magnificent evidence of the vitality of India's culture which spread out and influenced vast numbers of people.

There came a great cultural stream from Iran to India in remote antiquity. And then that constant intercourse between India and the Far East notably China. In later years South-East Asia witnessed an amazing efflorescence of Indian art and culture. The mighty stream which started from Arabia and developed as a mixed Irano-Arabic culture poured into India. All these came to us and influenced us, and yet so great was the powerful impress of India's own mind and culture that it could accept them without being itself swept away or overwhelmed. Nevertheless we all changed in the process and in India today all of us are mixed products of these various influences. An Indian, wherever he may go in Asia, feels a sense of Kinship with the land he visits and the people he meets.

I do not wish to speak to you of the past but rather of the present. We meet here not to discuss our past history and contacts but to forge links for the future. And may I say here that this Conference, and the idea underlying it, is in no way aggressive any other continent or country? Ever since the news of this Conference went abroad, some people in Europe and America have viewed it with doubt imagining that this was some kind of a pan-Asian movement directed against Europe or America. We have no designs against any body. Ours is a great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world. For too long we of Asia have been petitioners in Western courts and chancelleries. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own feet and cooperate with all others who are prepared to cooperate with us. We do not intend to be the playthings of others. In this crisis in world history Asia will necessarily play a vital role. The countries of Asia can no longer be used as pawns by others; they are bound to have their own policies in world affairs. Europe and America have contributed very greatly to human progress and for what we must yield them praise and honour, and learn from them many

lessons they have to teach. But the West has also driven us into wars and conflicts without number and even now, the day after a terrible war, there is talk of further wars in the atomic age that is upon us. In this atomic age Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed, there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part. There is today conflict in many countries and all of us in Asia are full of our own problems. Nevertheless, the whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful, and the emergence of Asia in world Affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace.

Peace can only come when nations are free and also when human beings everywhere have freedom and security and opportunity. Peace and freedom, therefore, have to be considered both in their political and economic aspects. The countries of Asia, we must remember, are very backward and the standards of life are appallingly low. These economic problems demand urgent solution or else crisis and disaster might overwhelm us. We have, therefore, to think in terms of the common man and fashion our political, social and economic structure so that the burdens that have crushed him may be removed, and he may have full opportunity for growth.

We have arrived at a stage in human affairs when the ideal of 'one world' and some kind of a world federation seems to be essential, though there are many dangers and obstacles in the way. We should work for that ideal world group. We, therefore, support the United Nations structure which is painfully emerging from its infancy. But in order to have 'one world' we must also, in Asia, think of the countries of Asia cooperating together for that larger ideal.

This conference, in a small measure, represents this bringing together of the countries of Asia. Whatever it may achieve the mere fact of its taking place is itself of historic significance. Indeed, this occasion is unique in history, for never before has such a gathering met together



at any place. So even in meeting greater things will come. When the history of our present times is written, this event may well stand out as a landmark which divides the past of Asia from the future and because we are participating in this making of history, something of the greatness of historical events comes to us all.

This conference will split up into committees and group to discuss various problems which are of common concern to all of us. We shall not discuss the internal politics because they act and react on each other, but we may not discuss them at this stage, for if we do so, we may lose ourselves the purpose for which we have met. I hope that out of this Conference some permanent Asian institute for the study of common problems and to bring about close relations will emerge; also perhaps a school of Asian studies; further that we might be able to organise interchange of visits and exchanges of students and professors so that we might know each other better. There is much else we can do but I shall not venture to enumerate all these subjects, for it is for you to discuss them and arrive at some decision.

We seek no narrow nationalism. Nationalism has a place in each country and should be fostered, but it must not be allowed to become aggressive and come in the way of international development. Asia stretches her hand out in friendship of Europe and America as well as to our suffering brethren in Africa. We of Asia have a special responsibility to the people of Africa. We must help them to take their rightful place in the human family. The freedom that we envisage is not to be confined to this nation or that or to a particular people, but must spread out over the whole human race. That universal human freedom also cannot be based on the supremacy of any particular class. It must be the freedom of the common man everywhere and full opportunities for him to develop.

We think today of the great architects of Asian freedom-Sun Yat-sen, Zaghlul Pasha, Ataturk Kemal Pasha and others, whose labours have borne fruit. We think also of that great figure whose labours and whose inspiration have brought India to the threshold of her independence-Mahatma Gandhi. We miss him at this Conference and I yet hope that he may visit us before our labours end. He is engrossed in the service of the common man in India, and even this Conference could not drag him away from it.

All over Asia we are passing through trials and tribulations. In India also you will see conflict and trouble. Let us not be disheartened by this; this is inevitable in an age of mighty transition. We find a new vitality and powerful creative impulses in all the peoples of Asia. The masses are awake and they demand their heritage. Strong winds are blowing all over Asia. Let us not be afraid them but rather welcome them, for only with their help can we build the new Asia of our dreams. Let us have faith in these great forces and the dream which is taking shape. Above all, let us have faith in the human spirit which Asia has symbolised for these long ages past.