

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

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In the Lok Sabha: Indians in Tibet¹

Mr. Speaker: I have received another adjournment motion from Shri Vajpayee which reads:

"This grave situation arising out of the hostile attitude of the Chinese Communists towards Indians as evidenced from the warning contained in a recent note to the Indian Consul-General in Lhasa and also the virtual house arrest order served on Indians residing in Tibet under the pretext of a safety warning to keep within doors."

May I know whether the hon. Prime Minister is willing to make any statement?

Shri Vajpayee: May I make any [sic] submission first? News emanating from Tibet is very disturbing. It has been reported that the Indians in Tibet have been asked not to leave their homes without permission, which means that they are virtually under house arrest. They are not even free to go to the Indian Consul-General, where a police picket is still there. And any Indian who goes to the Indian Consul-General is being cross-examined by the police. In addition to that, it has been reported that the Chinese authorities have asked our Consul-General to advise the Indians not to visit Tibet even on pilgrimage. Are we to understand that the national uprising in Tibet has still not been crushed and there is no peace, even the peace of the grave, and so new restrictions have been imposed on Indians? I want that the situation should be clarified so that our friendly relations with China may not still further be impaired.

¹ 24 August 1959, Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. xxxm, cols 4073-4077

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru):
The hon. Member has said many things just now for which I do not know what support and evidence he has. So far as this motion for adjournment is concerned, I have read it two or three times without being able to understand exactly what the hon. Member means by it. It says:

"The grave situation arising out of the hostile attitude of the Chinese Communists towards Indians as evidenced from the warning contained in a recent note..."

I take it that the note referred to is the one issued about intending pilgrims. I do not know why that should be taken to mean a hostile attitude to anybody. It may mean, as he himself has hinted, that conditions in certain parts of Tibet are so insecure that pilgrims are not safe. I shall read out the exact message that we received in regard to this matter.

The Chinese Foreign Bureau in Lhasa conveyed to our Consul-General there the following message. I am giving it as received. The English is not sometimes very clear.

"In view of that, at present the PLA ..." that is, the Chinese Army...

Shri C.D. Pande (Naini Tal): People's Liberation Army to liberate Tibet.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: People's Liberation Army.

"In view of that, at present the PLA are launching a punitive expedition towards, a tiny minority of remnant rebels at Ari area, the Consul-General would be kind to tell the Indian pilgrims that for the sake of safety it is better for them not to come for pilgrimage or come as fewer as possible this year. If they insist to come the responsibility of safety should be borne by themselves."

Now, the meaning is quite clear that they are carrying on expeditionary or other hostile activities there and conditions are not safe for people and for

pilgrims and they warn pilgrims that they should not come or, if they come, they should come as few as possible at their own risk.

It is true that under the terms of our agreement with China, pilgrims are allowed free access,² but where conditions become bad internally, whoever may be responsible for it, we can hardly go on saying that we will go and you will be responsible for it. Technically it may be true. Anyhow, this indicates that conditions are not normal there and that some kind of conflicts are proceeding.

Shri Vajpayee: May I know the date on which that note was received?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I should imagine - I do not know - about two or three days ago or just in the last few days. It is quite recent. I am not sure of the date but I saw it, I think, about two days ago, probably.

As for the reference to Indians being kept within doors, I am not aware of that at all or of any order to the effect that Indians should keep within their houses.

Shri Naushir Bharncha³ (East Khandesh): It has appeared in the papers.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I am sorry that I am not aware of that fact in spite of what the papers say. In other words, what the papers say, so far as I am concerned, is not correct. I cannot guarantee everything, but we are likely to have more correct information of the international conditions in Tibet. After all, we do get messages from our Consulates and Trade Agents. I cannot say about what happens in the interior, somewhere there is no Consulate or

² Under the Agreement of 29 April 1954

³ Naushir Cursetji Bharucha, Independent, Lok Sabha MP from East Khandesh, Bombay

Trade Agent, but we have not received any such information from our Consulate or Trade Agents.

What has happened is that sometimes, when the disturbance took place in the cities there,⁴ for a few days or maybe, two or three weeks, people were not encouraged to go out from certain areas in the cities, in Lhasa from the Consulate area to other areas. They were not allowed and movement in these areas was restricted. But that was at that time. So far as I know, no such house arrest business is taking place and movement is not restricted except outside the city area, that is, probably some kind of a permit is required to go outside the city areas or outside a certain major part of the city to certain other part of the city, like at Yatung.

So, I do not think that this motion of adjournment...

Shri Hem Barua: May I know whether it is a fact that all attempts made by our Ambassador in Peking to meet Mr. Chou En-lai to discuss the position of Indians in Tibet have so far not succeeded? If it is so, what is the information with the hon. Prime Minister about it?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Mr. Chou En-lai is the Prime Minister of China. Most Prime Ministers normally do not discuss these matters with foreign Ambassadors. It is the Foreign Ministers who discuss these matters. I may discuss them in my capacity as Foreign Minister. Prime Ministers are not easily accessible. They are more accessible in India than in most other countries.

Shri Hem Barua: Did our Ambassador make certain attempts to discuss the matter there? That is what I wanted to know.

⁴ In March 1959

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: There is no question of our Ambassador discussing it with anybody. Our Ambassador, at our instance, handed certain memoranda and notes to the Chinese Government and we expect from them formal replies. There is no question of having a casual conversation with our Ambassador.

Shri Vajpayee: May I know if it is a fact that the Police is still posted in front of the office of the Indian Consul-General in Lhasa and the Indians who go there are being interrogated by the Police?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Yes, Sir. I am not quite sure exactly what the position now is, but there were some sentries posted in front of the Consulate-General, who checked people without permits trying to come in. In particular, the report we got was that some of those Ladakhi Muslims, who wanted to come to consult our Consulate-General, were stopped from coming.

[Translation begins:

Bhakt Darshan (Garhwal): Opposing this adjournment motion I wish to know from the Prime Minister with your permission that whether the Indian Government has accepted the advice given by the Chinese Government to Indian pilgrims to come in as small numbers as possible, and whether impediments are being put up before the Indian pilgrims going there?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: There is no sense in accepting or not accepting it. We have informed the Uttar Pradesh Government that this message has come from there and pilgrims should be informed that there is danger in going there. Still, if some pilgrims wish to go, no one will stop them.

[Translation ends]

Mr. Speaker: In view of the statement of the hon. Prime Minister, I do not think it is necessary for me to give my consent to this motion for adjournment.