

Press Conference¹

ANY CHINESE EMISSARY FREE TO SEE DALAI LAMA NEHRU REGRETS PANCHEN LAMA'S STATEMENT HOPES FOR RETURN OF TIBETAN LEADER

MUSSOORIE, April 24. Prime Minister Nehru said at a press conference here today that "if any emissary comes to see the Dalai Lama, it will be open for the Dalai Lama to see him."

Pandit Nehru expressed the hope that conditions would be created for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet.

As for the Panchen Lama's charge against so called expansionist Indian elements, Pandit Nehru said: "No, I cannot answer this question now. Obviously, I do not agree with that statement. I find from the report from Peking that they are so much influenced by the past history of Tibet. There was no doubt that the then British Government did act in that way in Tibet."

He said what the Panchen Lama had said was "in a state of high excitement". Pandit Nehru said that what the Panchen Lama had stated about the Dalai Lama two days ago "does not do justice to India or China or Tibet or even to the Panchen Lama himself."

The Prime Minister said that he would welcome the Panchen Lama to come to India and meet the Dalai Lama or anyone else he liked. "We will, of course, treat him with every courtesy, he or anyone else the Chinese Ambassador or any Chinese emissary, could see the Dalai Lama."

Expressing the hope that conditions would be created for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, Pandit Nehru said that this as well as other matters

¹ Mussoorie, 24 April 1959. From *The National Herald*, 25 April 1959.

should not be subjects of heated exchanges and debate and had to be considered quietly with a view to avoiding the situation getting worse. Asked whether in the face of official and non-official comments from Peking he was optimistic about a peaceful solution of the Tibetan problem, Pandit Nehru said: "Well of course, however long it may take-it may not be quick one always tries for that".

Asked if he had taken up the matter diplomatically with Peking Pandit Nehru said: "No, except of course, for the first time when the Dalai Lama entered and asked for asylum, we informed them."

A foreign correspondent asked whether the statement of the Dalai Lama that he was not under duress and the fact that he was surrounded by barbed wire, sentries and guards were not irreconcilable, Pandit Nehru said: "you are mixing up the two things. It is patently not so. He has come here on his own. For security and other purposes we have to make certain arrangements. It is quite a different matter."

Pandit Nehru said: "I do not know how the situation will develop, whether the large number of people who are with him will continue to be with him: but, if I may say so, if any emissary comes to see him, it will be open for the Dalai Lama to see him."

Describing the Dalai Lama as a "big traveller", Pandit Nehru said the Dalai Lama's journey had been quite unusual and he needed rest and freedom from constant worry. "The Dalai Lama came here in 1956 and stayed for some months which resulted in some personal contact. To us he is not a vague mystical figure. "

Replying to question about the possibility of interviewing members of the Dalai Lama, entourage, Pandit Nehru said: "We do not wish to muzzle him but we are expected to keep in view the difficulties of the situation. After all the Dalai Lama is more interested in the return of peaceful conditions in

Tibet and solution of the crisis there. I hope we will return to Tibet, but cannot say how long it will take."

Pandit Nehru said that "Indian interest in Tibet is historical, sentimental and religious but not essentially political. That interest is warranted by common bonds of religion and culture. This feeling can be noticed all over the country."

A correspondent suggested that the meeting of the Prime Minister and the Dalai Lama was unprecedented in diplomatic history.

Pandit Nehru said: "Naturally. The Dalai Lama came here three years ago and spent several months and some personal contacts arose so that he is not to us a vague and mystical figure. He is a human being whom we know. I would not have rushed up to see him if I had not this engagement." (travel agents meeting).²

The Prime Minister, answering another question said that it was obvious that reports from India about the Dalai Lama's statement had "upset and irritated" the Chinese.³

² See item 66, pp. 336-338

³ According to a PTI report: "Prime Minister Nehru said that there was no question of any joint statement or separate statement being issued after his meeting with the Dalai Lama. 'Whatever statement is to be made will be made in the normal course,' he added. The Dalai Lama, Pandit Nehru said at press conference, had come after a tremendous journey and required rest and freedom from the consequent worry. Pandit Nehru said that he had come to Mussoorie in fulfillment of an old engagement, not realising that 'I will have to meet a big traveller'."