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13. Item 10 of the Agenda: President's Address

Addressing the General Body, the President, *Shri*
Jawaharlal Nehru, said:

"I am very grateful to you that you have run through the business of this meeting with speed and brevity. That is not only a recognition of things but also adaptation to our work. We often recognise things but do not adapt ourselves too well to them. You have been good enough to elect me again as your President and I thank you for it, though I must confess that this honour is singularly ill-deserved, in the sense that, apart from attending the annual meeting, I do not perform any useful function for the Institute. Still, if you think this attendance itself is of some use, I will be glad to agree.

"The question that is naturally filling my mind, and the minds of many amongst you, is how we can deal in its various aspects with the present crisis and emergency which we are facing. Because it is indeed a vital matter for us as to how we function. We have had many difficulties ever since we gained independence—economic difficulties and others. We have faced them and managed to carry on. The present crisis, however, is of a new kind, a novel kind, and we have to adapt ourselves to it and prepare ourselves, whatever the demands may be on us, with extreme rapidity. I am just thinking how this Institute can help in this crisis. This Institute is largely a thinking body; a teaching body too, not directly engaged in executive or other activities. Still, even the thinking part is important. Indeed, it is always important. And, I should like your Executive Council to consider how you can help in our meeting this crisis. Obviously, most of you are not going to don a uniform and become soldiers and go to the front. But, as an Institute dealing with Public Administration, you can help by giving thought to the way the public administration can function in a crisis of this kind. It has to function with speed of course, and it has to relax, or change many of our rules which are time-consuming.

"It is true that war is a bad thing. But, when one's country is attacked, there is no choice left about it: one has to defend, for to submit to it means the death of the soul of a nation. I am sure that India would never do that. We may look forward; we may work for peaceful solutions, but they must be in conformity with our honour and our integrity. What I am suggesting to you and your Executive Council is to think definitely and deliberately of how our

procedures can be expedited and tightened up. In such situations, where one has to meet very difficult and urgent problems and decide quickly, we have to not only think correctly but lay down procedures that are both rapid and effective and as good as we can make them. And, I am sure, if you think of that you will be able to offer suggestions which may be very helpful to Government. Naturally, Government itself is thinking of these things and from time to time, day to day almost you will hear of some new actions or new methods of procedures, etc. being introduced by Government. Only recently, two or three days ago, the President issued an Ordinance—the Defence of India Ordinance, which is a very far-reaching one—normally only issued in war time. We may not be technically at war—we did not declare war, although we have been attacked in a war-like manner and we have to defend ourselves and are defending—the fact of the matter is that in effect we are. For various reasons—I think good ones—we have not made a declaration to that effect, and it is not necessary at the present moment that we should do so. It does not come in our way. So, we do not propose to do so for the present; I do not know about the future.

“War brings all kinds of burdens and problems. It brings an enormous increase of expenditure in war-like activities, which concern many branches of Government. It means a tremendous increase in production not only in weapons of war, not only in our procuring these weapons of war, in addition to our production of them, as much as we can, but also of various other goods, which are connected with war. You can say food is an essential thing, of course, and must be produced. That is our normal desire too—to increase the production of food and food articles. It becomes much stronger and more urgent in a crisis of this kind. Clothing, boots, and I do not know how many things we require, it is a long list, because, it is no longer military operations at the front alone which matter. Each person at the front has to be supported by—I do not know how many—dozens, hundreds of people behind the lines, and it is of the utmost importance that the apparatus of production should function rapidly and smoothly. We have production in our public sector and in the private sector. Both have to be co-ordinated and directed to this one urgent

and vital aim, viz., to produce generally, but specially for anything required for these operations.

“Then the other very important aspect is prices. We should do our utmost to keep the prices low—not allow them to increase. That is no easy matter when we have to indulge in deficit financing. We cannot help it. Therefore, inevitably some methods of control and distribution become necessary. Sometimes people argue as to the desirability of controls; some are for and some are against it. But we have passed that stage of argument in the emergency that we face. We have to have controls—what controls I cannot say now. We have to face this problem of control of important commodities. Usually during war many people slip into wrong paths, taking advantage of the crisis of the nation and leaving the path of integrity. It is particularly necessary that we must see to it that this does not happen, in any small or big way. All these are matters which might well be considered by your Executive Council and suggestions as to what should be done made to the Government as well as to the public. I am sure that will help us all.

“You know of certain proposals made by Government, certain steps taken. Some of you have just been given some prizes, and out of the prizes a part has been given to the National Defence Fund. Then, there is talk about gold being given—it is a very important one—and also there is some talk about some bonds being issued for gold and so on and so forth. I should like to say, in this connection, that in this moment of this great burden that is carried by us, nothing has heartened me and delighted me more than the magnificent response of the nation. It is natural. But I know that the representatives of foreign countries and people in foreign countries have been agreeably surprised at the response in India. Now, that is a basic thing which we must have—the response of the people generally. It is not a case of a few rich men, or even modestly rich men, giving part of their riches, but the poorest are taking part in it. Every morning during the course of the day, I have a stream of people coming to me—little children of 7 or 8 giving the little money they have—maybe a few rupees collected in the course of some months—also workers and others. This is a good sign. The President every day sends me what he has collected—which is

given to him during the course of the day—not only money but gold, jewellery, etc. That is happening all over India. I think that shows—if anybody had doubts—that basically our country and our people are not only sound but full of that vital energy that a living nation should possess in facing a crisis. People seem to forget this and get wrapped up in our petty conflicts based on religion or caste or language or provincialism. Suddenly, we have risen above them; we are rising above them and that is the test, after all, of the people—whether they can rise when the demand is made to them. We have risen and because of that we can speak confidently of the future. I cannot say how long this crisis will last. What I have said and what I felt was that it is not a short one. No one can expect it to end quickly. So we have to be prepared for a long long period and it is a heavy time we shall all have and we shall have to work hard and with grim determination. But I am confident and certain in my mind that, however long this may last, we shall win in the end and triumph. This confidence has been strengthened a hundred- and thousand-fold by the magnificent and splendid response that has come from all the people. Now the question is, as it has often been said, how we can utilise this response and not allow it to fritter away? Also, such a response coming suddenly is one thing, but to keep the spirit and morale of the nation in trim for lengthy periods is a more difficult task. But I am convinced that it will be done and will happen.

“It is often asked: Why did we not prepare ourselves for the ordeal that we have faced? Why did we have to submit to some serious reverses on our frontiers? It is a legitimate question and I do not know if there is any adequate answer for it. But I will submit to you that we have a fine Army—a good Army which has done very well. But the fact of the matter is that we have been conditioned for long time past not to think of war. We may theoretically think of it, we may think of a slight operation here and there but not of a major war and all our thoughts have been directed towards building up the economy of the country—development, Five Year Plans, etc. We spent some money for our Defence Services but in terms of war that is very little and always we held the view that any major diversion to a possible war effort

would have had consequences for our Plans. We talked of peace everywhere and we felt that way and we felt the importance of it too. To us the idea of devoting all our strength and resources to a war effort did not appeal. Because even from the point of view of war that is not carried on by weapons alone, which we would buy or get from abroad, but it can only be carried on by the industrial strength of the nation—the productive capacity. So, even from that point of view, our Five Year Plans are vital whatever other consequences we aimed at. Therefore, we concentrated on that and hoped, possibly it was wishful thinking, that no war of this type would face us.

“We certainly have done a good deal in increasing our Defence production—production of weapons, etc., because you will remember that till we became independent all our Defence Forces were practically controlled and guided by Whitehall, not only that all our policies were laid down in Whitehall and the officers here merely carried out directions. What was more important was that the British Government did not encourage the production of Defence material here. Certain circumstances forced them to do something during the Second World War when they could not get them from England. Even then, there was always a reluctance to produce them here, and we had to rely on Britain for those arms and equipment. That is how we were when we became independent. Ever since then we have tried to build up industry for the production of arms and Defence equipment, and what is very important is that we have built up a fairly strong Defence Science Organisation. There is not merely a question of producing a rifle or something like that; our scientists have to keep abreast of weapons which are much more sophisticated. We cannot produce them ourselves. We have to buy them. Weapons are so terribly expensive that it becomes exceedingly difficult for any country, even the richest country, to keep pace with modern developments. We do not go in for the highly sophisticated things like atomic weapons; nor do we want to go in for them. But even apart from atomic weapons, there are highly sophisticated things which are little beyond our ken; far too expensive, and it would absorb all our resources. However, we have built up a Defence Science Organisation

which is doing well. But, of course, we cannot compare it to the highly militarised and scientifically developed nations. They spend billions of pounds on this thing every year. So, we have made progress in our Defence industries and the progress is a continuous one. Nevertheless, it is not enough to face a big crisis like this, and that is why what we have to do today is not only to increase tremendously our production of Defence requirements but inevitably to obtain them from other friendly countries which are prepared to give them to us, or to help us in this way on such terms as we can afford. What I mean is long terms of payments, etc. And, we shall do it of course, because, if the first need is defence, it has to be met, however heavy the burden may be.

“It is a fact, and I can very well understand the people feeling rather annoyed and asking: Why has this happened? Why are we not fully prepared? That is a justifiable question, although it does not take all considerations into account. Such preparation would have meant not only a full preparation for war, but war against an apparatus of a government which is in this respect one of the strongest in the world. China has not got all the sophisticated weapons, which the Soviet Union or the U.S.A. has. But, it has an army which is bigger than any army in the world, and it has a system of government which has concentrated for the last 12 years of its existence on preparing for war and strengthening its country. We have a different system of government. We do not like the idea of always living in a war atmosphere and preparing for it, and it is very difficult to keep up this war apparatus here except at the cost of everything else. It is one thing that, when one is faced with a crisis, then the people realise it and everybody works for it. Apart from that, it is difficult, and I would say almost undesirable, to work only for war preparation. For that means giving up the idea of economic progress in most other directions. Well, it is easy to be wise after the event. But, I do not really know how we could have done otherwise. In minor matters—yes. But, in major matters, when you think of the major matters involved, you have to think not only of crores, or hundreds of crores, but of thousands of crores, and that is the position we have to meet. But, it is true that we have not in thinking been

conditioned to war. We did not have any personal experience of war except perhaps a little bit in the North East Frontier, and it is not like countries of Europe and partly Asian countries too, where there is hardly a family which has not lost some beloved ones in the course of war, and sometimes lost all, which has trained them and conditioned them. We talk of peace in India, and we not merely talk about it but feel it. Yet, there is something superficial about our talking, because we do not know what war is. We are more peaceful perhaps than most others. But, we have never known the horrors of war and especially the horrors of a coming war—a nuclear war. We usually sign protests against war and for peace and against nuclear warfare. And now we are suddenly thrown into this cauldron. I do not mean to say that we are going to have a nuclear war. I think not. Anyhow, the country which has invaded us does not possess nuclear weapons and even if it did have any explosives, it makes little difference. It takes many long years to develop a thing like that even after some experimental tests have been made. But whatever that may be in so-called conventional forms, we have to face the horrors of war. It is confined to our frontiers and many people have suffered from it, many of our valiant people have died.

“I find that very exaggerated rumours are spread about the number of casualties. Now, my difficulty is that we do not exactly know—we can put limits to it—but we do not exactly know; reports have not come; reports have come of casualties here and there, 20 persons died, 10, 15, 30, 50; but no consolidated report of one or two major actions, and people talk in terms of thousands. I cannot say anything definite. But, I can tell you that, of all the people engaged, even giving the widest latitude to one's thought, the casualties on our side could not be more than 2,000 or 2,500 up till now. Because, many people who were missing are coming back; they have been dispersed; they are gradually trekking back. But even 2,000 is a large number and that is for the first few days. A little more may have fallen. It is said that our brave people will have to face this onslaught of a ruthless enemy. So, we have to do our best in the circumstances and the first thing we have achieved is the tremendous response all over the country, and the morale of the country. The other things are,

which I have hinted at, preparing ourselves rapidly, like processes of Government and other processes, to strengthen ourselves for fighting purposes, to strengthen our economy, to keep prices down so that we prevent profiteering. Profiteering is always bad; it is doubly bad when the crisis of a nation takes a toll of the lives of our brave men.

“We must increase our production. I have received numerous messages from industrial undertakings—Defence and others—giving their assurance that they will work their hardest and that there would be no strikes, etc. That is good. But in accepting their assurance we have to be sure of one thing that we do not exploit that assurance or do not allow others to exploit it. That is important. It would be grossly unfair that we allow that exploitation of our workers in the name of national emergency and allow others to profit by that exploitation. I can tell you that in the Defence industries we are working round the clock, no days excepted and no nights excepted, and we have already increased our production—I forget the exact figure, by four or five times. It has increased so rapidly. These are all hopeful signs. But we have to tighten ourselves up, and be prepared for a long-term trial and testing. In a sense, although it is a terrible thing to contemplate, it has its good points also. It brings us together. It strengthens our nation. We are apt to become too soft, all of us, whether we are politicians or business men. We forget the things that make a nation great, and lose ourselves in petty activities and conflicts.

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“I have not talked to you very much about this Institute of Public Administration except to suggest, which I do again, that I would like you to think about these problems that are affecting our country and make suggestions, both governmental and private, affecting our economy and our procedures of Government. It can hardly tell us how to conduct a war. I don't ask you to do that. But you ought to be able to tell us how to deal with our economy and procedures of Government especially.

“Now to revert to other matters, there is our Five Year Plan which we consider very important. It would be a pity if we had to put an end to that Plan, because putting an end to it means weakening ourselves for the future. Even from the

limited point of view of the present crisis, we cannot put an end to it. Of course, it will have to be adapted—maybe some matters which are not of the first importance may be given up, but by and large in regard to all the important matters in the Five Year Plan we should go ahead. After all, the expenditure involved, the burden of national defence and like matters, is far greater than the whole Five Year Plan put together. As I said, we may have to adapt it, and change it here and there, but basically we hope to continue it. Take another aspect of it—Panchayati Raj, which must continue. These are strengthening elements not weakening things, even though we have to spend some money. Here may I take a suggestion or rather approve of a suggestion already made in your Journal. An awful name has been given to the Panchayati Raj institutions, viz., “Democratic Decentralisation”. But I find a much better name in an article by Dr. Appleby in your Journal—‘Decentralised Democracy’. It is just the reverse and is much better instead of using Democratic Decentralisation. It sounds better and it lays stress on democracy. That is the basic thing. You decentralise it. Not decentralisation at the end and democracy a kind of offshoot of it. So I hope you will encourage the use of that expression. I think Prof. Menon himself is responsible for it. Because I do hope that in our other troubles, such as the burdens that we carry, we will not forget the basic thing, that is, our Five Year Plan, and more especially things that go to make our nation strong. And what would be dangerous in such crisis is for democracy itself becoming a victim. We should take care of it because we attach value to that not only normally but even in crisis. But democracy must be made to function in an effective and speedy way and not in the slow-moving methods to which we are normally accustomed.

“I am very grateful to you for the speedy and efficient way you have conducted your proceedings. I have taken more time than all of you put together and you will notice that. But I thought I might put to you what I had in my mind to ask for consideration.

“Thank you.”

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14. The Meeting was followed by Tea.