

JANUARY, 12 1968

Honourable Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

This is the first occasion on which I am addressing the members of this august Assembly and I therefore take this opportunity of welcoming you all to this first session of the Legislature in the year 1968.

My Council of Ministers have now been in office for a period of over ten months. I recall in this connection the hope expressed by my predecessor when he welcomed you last year that "you and the Council of Ministers will be able to function for the full term of your life and that your legislative and administrative activities will give satisfaction to the people of Kerala."

As Governor, my predecessor was, and I am, interested in the provision of a good, clean and efficient administration in the State for which an essential pre-requisite is the existence of a stable Government. I am happy to note that, despite the differences which undoubtedly exist among them and which are well-known, my Council of Ministers have provided a stable Government to this State for the last ten months, and I sincerely hope that they will continue to give the State a stable and efficient administration.

Like my Council of Ministers here, some other States too have had Governments formed on the basis of coalitions of several parties. The formation of these Governments was the beginning of a new phase in the constitutional-political development of the country. For nearly two decades after independence, both the Centre and the States (with the sole exception of Kerala for a short period) had Governments of the same complexion. After General Elections of 1967, however, this situation underwent a radical metamorphosis. While the Central Government is still functioning under the leadership of the Congress Ministry, non-Congress Governments came into office in many States—most of them based on coalitions of several parties.

This being a new experiment, it has raised several problems. It is recognised on all hands that, unless a satisfactory solution is found for these problems, our system of parliamentary democracy itself may be in grave peril. I hope that our national leaders will give their thought to these problems and find satisfactory solutions for them.

One of the consequences of the emergence of non-Congress Governments has been that the problem of Centre-State relations has been brought into the fore-front more sharply than before. Questions concerning autonomy of the States under our federal set-up, the authority of the Centre and its limits, and so on, are inherent in the federal constitutional set-up established eighteen years ago. They, however, did not come to the fore till 1967, since the Centre and the States were then ruled by the same party (except for a brief period in Kerala). Constitutional problems of Centre-State relations were therefore solved at the party-political level. Today, however, these problems can no more be solved at that level but have to be solved as constitutional problems between Governments in a situation where the party that is ruling at the Centre is in opposition in a particular State and *vice versa*. The use of the Central Government's authority over the States has become an issue of dispute not between political parties but between the Central and the State Governments a fact which has been underlined by some recent developments. It is for the patriotic leaders of our nation to evolve healthy conventions guiding the functioning of the various organs of State and Government under the new political situation that emerged after the fourth General Elections.

I am sorry to note that the main problems facing the people of this State to which my predecessor had drawn your attention last year food, unemployment, the financial and economic relations between the Centre and the States, etc.,—still remain unsolved.

The food problem has, in fact, become even worse during the last several months. As you know, my Government has found it impossible since May last year to maintain the supply of rice ration at the old level of 6 oz. per adult per day. It had to be cut to 3 oz. and that too was maintained with very great difficulty and not regularly.

The reason for this reduced supply through the ration shops is well-known to all. As opposed to the Central supply of 587,361 and 474,334 tonnes for the May-December period of 1965 and 1966 respectively, the supply for the same period in 1967 has been only 310,789 tonnes. The shortage in rice has, of course been partly

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compensated by additional supply of wheat. This, however, has not prevented the open market prices of rice from going up. Never before have rice prices gone to such heights as during the last eight to nine months, precisely because never before have the supplies of rice from outside gone to such levels.

I note with satisfaction that the procurement machinery in the State has registered considerable improvement. For the first time in the history of the State, actual procurement during the first crop of this year not merely reached but surpassed the target set before procurement operations began. In terms of the actual quantity procured, this year's record surpassed last year's by about 25% although the exemption limit was raised from one acre to two acres.

Such achievements in procurement, however, have not led to any improvement in our supplies, since even the best and most effective internal procurement would meet less than a month's requirement for our State. As my predecessor had told you last year, "the resources with which our ration shops and through them the card-holders are supplied have to come from outside the State. The main question therefore is how much and with what degree of regularity can we expect supplies from outside?"

On top of this failure in supplies has now come the decision of the Centre to withdraw the subsidy on whatever is supplied.

It will be recalled that, as early as in December 1966, the Central Government had decided to withdraw the subsidy on coarse rice which then amounted to 11 paise per kilo. The implementation of the decision to withdraw the subsidy however had been left to the elected Government that was to be formed after two months. My Council of Ministers therefore had to consider whether to enforce the decision to withdraw the subsidy and they decided not to withdraw it. While continuing the supply through the ration shops at the old rates, they appealed to the Central Government to reimburse the amount that was being lost by subsidising the same.

The Central Government's decision not to accede to this request has been cutting into the resources for the development of the State. Added to this is the new decision of the Central Government to still further increase the price of rationed food grains by withdrawing all subsidies. This will mean either an approximately—one-third increase in the price of rationed rice, or an annual loss to the State Government running to over Rs. 25 crores. The former will be an unbearable burden to the consuming public, while the latter will strain the State's finances and cut into its developmental programmes.

Just as on the question of food, so also on the question of employment, industrialisation, general economic development and so on, the people of this State have reason to complain that they are not getting their due. More than once and on more than one issue have you adopted motions drawing the attention of the Central Government to the fact that Kerala is being neglected in the matter of allocation of Central Projects.

On top of all these comes the disturbing report that the possibilities of getting even the few projects which had originally been included in the State's 4th Five Year Plan are receding to the background. For, the 4th Five Year Plan which had at one time been formulated has now been virtually given up.

The assurance given by the concerned authorities that the 4th Five Year Plan will not be abandoned but will be begun in April 1969 would not in fact give us the confidence that April 1969 will be the beginning of a major effort to tackle the problem of developing the national economy.

As our Chief Minister stated at the meeting of the National Development Council, the difficulties with which our planning is faced today are not the result purely of two successive years of drought, as is made out. We would be deceiving ourselves if we were to take the complacent attitude that everything will be all right if only we have two years of good monsoons. We are therefore as interested as, if not more than, any other State in seeing that these difficulties are overcome and our planning process reinvigorated with whatever modifications are needed in its methods and policies.

I would now like to refer to some of the most recent developments in the country as a whole, which have a direct bearing on our State.

The first is the bitter conflict that has arisen over the question of official language. Ever since the time when the Constitution of the country was being framed, this question has roused passions. The best minds in the country have seen the necessity of finding solutions satisfactory to the various linguistic groups in the country

The late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's assurance to the non-Hindi speaking people with regard to the continuance of English so long as they want to continue it as an additional link language was a step in the direction of compromise between the Hindi and non-Hindi groups. But, when this assurance of the late Prime Minister was sought to be given the legislative form in the Official Language Bill, certain amendments were adopted which amounted to a violation of the spirit of the compromise and thus created apprehensions in the minds of non-Hindi speaking people.

It is, however, not a question of the wording of the Official Language Act or of the resolution adopted by Parliament. The question, in fact, is the spirit in which our leaders approach the question of official language and medium of instruction in a multi-lingual country like India. The reality is, and has to be recognised, that the language problem in this country cannot be solved by putting one language—whether it is English or Hindi—above the various non-Hindi languages in the country. The complete equality of all the Indian languages among themselves, serious and sincere efforts to so develop them all as to make it possible for their use in administration and in academic work at the highest level; freedom for any citizen in the country to approach the Government through his own language—these are some of the essential pre-requisites for a satisfactory solution to the problem of official language and medium of instruction. The Central Government should therefore provide as much assistance to all other Indian languages as they are now providing to the development of Hindi. It is however unfortunate that, while crores and crores of rupees are spent for the propagation of text books, reference books and so on in Hindi, no corresponding measures are taken for the propagation of such literature in other languages. It is against this background that the efforts at making Hindi the sole link language are leading to hostility among the non-Hindi-speaking people.

People in our State have been relatively free from any hostility either to Hindi or to English. We should however take heed that, if the Hindi enthusiasts adopt the attitude that the other Indian languages should have the same relation to Hindi as they had to English in the pre-freedom days, the people of Kerala too may be forced to take the same anti-Hindi attitude as in some other parts of the country.

I am glad to note in this connection that my Government is taking all practical measures within the limits of our capacity to make adequate preparations for as rapid a transition as possible from English to Malayalam both in administration and in the academic life. This will naturally require some reform in the script, as in the absence of script reform it will be difficult to have such a large number of typewriting, mono and lino printing etc., machines as are required for modern administration and for mass production of modern literature.

While thus paying attention to the problem of transition from English to Malayalam, however, my Government considers it necessary not to weaken but still further improve the study of English. For, it will be impossible for our youth (at least for the next few years) to equip themselves with modern scientific and technological knowledge unless they get adequate familiarity with one of the developed modern languages, and, for historical reasons, English is the best suited for this purpose.

Another development of recent months to which I would like to make a reference is the publication of the Mahajan Commission Report on the borders of Mysore and Kerala on the one hand and of Mysore and Maharashtra on the other. My Ministers feel that, since the States Reorganisation Commission of 1956 had examined the various points connected with the demarcation of boundaries, and since the Government of India had accepted the recommendations of the Commission with some modification, the borders demarcated in 1956 would have remained untouched. In any case, if it was thought that the borders so demarcated were defective, then the Government should have laid down the principles on which any re-demarcation might have to be made. This, however, has not been done. The Commission was asked to go into the whole question of re-examine the boundaries. It was not told whether this job has to be done on the basis of any principles and if so on what. The result is a report in which certain principles are laid down in some places but those very principles are ignored when it comes to actual demarcation of boundaries.

We in Kerala are concerned with the recommendations made by the Commission in relation to Kasargod. The Commission acknowledges the fact that Kasargod as a whole has a Malayalam-speaking majority. Yet it has been recommended that this Malayalam-speaking majority area should go to Mysore because, says the Commission, the Malayalam spoken in this area is different from the Malayalam spoken in the rest of Kerala. The Commission did not make any investigation into the variants of Malayalam spoken in the various parts of Kerala, nor of the variants of Kannada in the various parts of Mysore. My Government is of the view that having had neither the time nor the evidence before it for such an investigation, the Commission should not have recommended that this area should go to Mysore.

I am happy to note that the Central Government are trying to find a consensus on the question of the Mysore-Maharashtra and the Mysore-Kerala borders. I am, however, afraid that, having opened the Pandora's box by reopening the border question, they may find it difficult to undo the undesirable consequences following from the decision to reopen the question.

Still another disturbing development is the recent growth of Shiv Sena in Bombay. Non-Maharashtrians domiciled in Bombay have become the butt of attack by the militant volunteers organised by the Sena. It is good that the Union Home Minister and other Central leaders have expressed their concern over the growth of this organisation. It is, however, regrettable that, despite these pronouncements, the Sena's attacks on the Non-Maharashtrians are continuing. This is a development which is full of dangerous potentialities. Together with the passions roused on the language issue and several other indications of the growth of fissiparous tendencies, this should be sufficient warning that unless immediate steps are taken against such trends, India will cease to be a united country as we understand it.

I have so far referred to some of the most important developments which have an all-India character but are of particular importance to this State. Let me now come to some of the activities of the Council of Ministers and their plans for the next one year. They will, of course, be dealt with in greater detail and more concretely in the speech of the Finance Minister when he presents the budget a month hence. I would however take this opportunity to mention some of the most important among them in their very broad outline.

While dealing with the food problem, I stated that the Central issue is that of the quantum and regularity of supplies from outside. This should underline the importance of increasing food production, so that the extent of deficit can at least be reduced considerably. The Government in the Agricultural Department is therefore working out several schemes for developing agricultural production.

As part of the activities of increasing production as well as to give relief to the landless poor, the Government is paying close attention to the distribution of waste lands as well as to regularise the occupation of such cultivable lands as are not essential for the implementation of any project. Administrative action is being taken to locate the areas where revenue or forest lands can be made available for distribution to the really landless poor, while evicting all those unauthorised occupiers who do not deserve to be given land. Pattas have been given during the last few weeks to 12,000 of those who deserve regularisation of their occupation. It is expected that this process will be further quickened and a much larger number of landless will get the benefit of land distribution.

Further improvement in the land reform laws of the State is also of great importance. It is expected that an amending Bill will be given final shape and introduced in the Legislature during the course of the next few months. In the meanwhile relief has been given to the tenants through the Stay of Evictions Act which you passed into law.

It is also proposed to exempt holdings below 2 acres from land tax.

Some of the agricultural crops and industries based on them are today facing serious problems arising out of the devaluation of the British pound, and following it, of the Ceylon rupee. The competitive position of some of our agricultural and industrial products has been weakened. The cultivators of these crops and those engaged in their processing and trade are thus put to very great difficulties. It is obvious that the Central Government will have to come to the aid of these sections of the people.

I am happy to note that our Industries Department is making a vigorous drive for the expansion of Industries in the State. The Intensive Campaign organised under the auspices of the National Small Industries Corporation roused great enthusiasm and it is expected that entrepreneurs from within the State will come forward to set up a number of new industries. At the same time, efforts are being made to get entrepreneurs from outside the State interested in starting new industries. Institutions like the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation are being strengthened and would take their due place in fostering industrial development.

One of the legislative measures which you will have to consider is a Bill intended to set up a self-acting machinery to investigate into corruption charges which may be levelled against persons holding important positions in the political life of the State. The necessity for this has been under examination throughout the country for quite some time. Our State would be one of the first to put such a law into the statute book.

May I in the end wish you a year of solid work in the service of the people of Kerala.