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Letter, Jawaharlal Nehru to All Provincial Premiers

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Summary:

Nehru briefs the Provincial Premiers about internal and external developments. Nehru highlights the situation in China and states that the communists could soon take power in the whole of China. He speculates how this will affect other regions.

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Secret.

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New Delhi, 1st April, 1949.

My dear premier,

My last letter to you was sent on the 9th March, later than usual. I have skipped a fortnight and have now come back to the beginning of the month.

2. While we are naturally concerned with our domestic problems, developments in the international field are becoming more and more important for us. The whole situation in Eastern and South Eastern Asia is in a state of flux.

3. The issue of India and the Commonwealth has also to be faced squarely in the near future and, as you must know, I am going to London to attend the Dominion Prime Ministers' Conference which begins on the 21st April. The position in Burma has deteriorated and there appears to be no clear way of dealing with it or of our giving any help to ensure stability. The Indonesian question drags on its weary course in the Security Council and elsewhere. So does the Kashmir issue before the United Nations Commission.

4. From a world point of view, probably the most important event is the success of the Communist armies in China. Undoubtedly this is affecting, and will affect more and more in the future, not only the entire position in Asia but in the world. For us in India it is of the utmost importance.

5. It is clear that there is no force left in China which can effectively check the advance of the Communist armies. Those armies are sitting now on the banks of the Yangtze and can advance just whom they like. The Nationalist Government has been in a process of disintegration and are really in no position to insist on anything. Terms of peace therefore are practically terms of surrender. At the most some minor points here and there might be safeguarded. It is to the advantage of the Communists in China to get some legal settlement through a peace treaty. But whether this advantage is outweighed in their eyes by other factors or not is not clear.

6. In any event, what is likely to happen is a consolidation of the Communist regime in about two-thirds of China and the advance of the Communist forces towards the South. Within a few months they should occupy the whole of China. It is possible that a splinter government might be formed in Canton, to oppose the Communists. But this is hardly likely to achieve anything. We may take it therefore that the whole of China will be under the control of the Chinese Communists within a few months.

7. The question then arises as to whether the revolutionary urge to advance will be satisfied and whether the new Communist dominated Government will be chiefly occupied in dealing with internal problems, or whether that urge will continue somewhat and affect the situation in Tibet, Indo-China and Siam. To some extent these neighbouring countries are bound to be affected. Tibet is a difficult country for any outside force to enter. But the internal economy of Tibet is very primitive. On the one hand they are religious heads, the Lamas who are also the feudal chiefs: on the other hand there are the people who are more or less serfs. Such a situation always has a certain explosive character unless economic changes take place. The success of Communism in China may apply as a spark to this explosive situation in Tibet. This may not take place suddenly or quickly, but the general tendency would be there.

8. In Sinkiang Province of China, Soviet influence is already considerable and the Soviets have obtained a privileged position by treaty with the Nationalist China. Sinkiang touches upon the Kashmir frontier and Afghanistan.

9. In Indo-China, the French Government has totally failed to defeat the Vietnam forces. VietNam represents a nationalist movement with fairly strong Communist leanings. The Chinese Communists will no doubt fully sympathise with it. The French, having failed during the past two or three years, are certainly not likely to make good now and the victory of Chinese Communism will make their position much worse. There can be little doubt that the French will have to withdraw from Indo-China and some kind of a Government will be established there which should be friendly to Communist China.

10. In Siam, there has been continuous manoeuvring at the top and palace revolutions. Behind this however there are deeper causes of unrest and the present

Government can hardly be called stable. Events in China will no doubt encourage the anti-Government people in Siam, both nationalist and Communist, and it is quite possible that the Government may fall and give place to another which represents radical elements and Communists. It must be remembered that in Siam agrarian conditions are bad and the Government has largely represented big landlord elements. It is easy therefore for a movement against them to be built up.

11. In Burma, as I have said above, the situation is even worse than it was and there appears no hope of the return of security and stability. There is no obvious possibility of another Government which can control the situation effectively. At the Same time the present Government is hardly in a position to do so. Therefore conflict continues and economic conditions go from bad to worse. Again, in Burma as elsewhere, the victory of the Chinese Communists and their approach to the Burmese border will make a difference

12. The policy of some of the Western Powers has been generally to support the more conservative governments in South-East Asia. This policy has failed. In Ghina even big scale support by the U.S.A, has not succeeded in making any difference. Indeed, psychologically speaking, it has been a definite disadvantage. People in China have felt that the Chinese Government was becoming a stooge of foreign powers and have turned away from it. It may be said that the victory of the Communists in China is due less to their inherent strength than to the disintegration of the Nationalist Government and its exceeding unpopularity with all classes of people. It could not learn the lesson in time and so it is passing into history.

13. To a much smaller extent, that policy is failing in other parts of South-East Asia. It is becoming impossible for conservative, landlord and like elements to control the situation in any country even with foreign help. Foreign help discredits them even more in the eyes of their people.

14. The result of all this would appear to be that Communist dominated governments are likely to be formed over a great part of Control, Eastern and South-East Asia, and that it is a very large part of the earth's surface. It is again a problem how far those Governments will be actuated by nationalist considerations, will their function like Yugoslavia, that is to say, will their policy generally, though Communist, be governed by nationalist considerations also or will this policy be entirely subordinated to Soviet policy? In any event, probably in foreign affairs they will support the Soviet policy. They may not go the whole hog in case of war.

15. All this poses numerous problems to us in India. Directly we are not likely to be affected by those changes and there is no great fear of large scale infiltration across our frontiers or like trouble. I feel the apprehension about actual trouble on our frontiers is exaggerated, though of course we should be on our guard against it. The real difference will be two fold:

- (i) continuous tension,
- (ii) the raising of Communist morale in India.

That morale is relatively low at the present moment. The communists in India have, even from the Communist point of view, adopted a very wrong course. They have gone in for terrorist activities and sabotage and raised a volume of feeling against them in India. It is manifest that they cannot succeed by these methods in making much difference to the Indian scene, though they can create trouble. They have isolated themselves. Even at this terrorist policy some prominent Communists are said to have left the party or been purged. All this shows that the Communist leadership in India has overbalanced itself by its successive violence and wrong tactics and their morale at present is not high. Events in China and elsewhere however bolster up this morale to some extent and economic conditions help.

16. This leads us to a consideration of the general economic position in these countries of Asia. Undoubtedly the success of the communists has been due to primitive types of agrarian economy and the only way to deal with such a situation is to make rapid changes in this agrarian economy. These changes can be either towards peasant proprietorship or to some socialised system in land. Which of these courses is more suitable would depend on each individual country. If there is no peasant proprietorship and the masses of agriculturists are in the nature of serfs, then the change-over to socialist economy might be more rapid.

17. The Western Powers are gradually coming to realise that their policy in regard to Asian countries has not been a happy one. Their support of reactionary regimes has not helped those regimes to continue and has merely made those powers more unpopular in Asia. They are now thinking hard as to what they should do to change this policy. Probably it is too late for them to do anything very effective in this matter, before the changes they fear come about.

18. In Indonesia, the conflict of two policies is very evident. On the one hand the Western Powers are anxious to win the goodwill of nationalism in Indonesia, and that moans the Indonesian Republic, for the alternative means their losing such little influence as they possess in Asia. On the other hand, their European commitments induce them to build up a West European front, Atlantic Pact, etc., which include the Netherlands Government. It includes, in other words, certain colonial powers like the Netherlands and France, and it becomes the interest of the Western Group to build up the strength of these colonial powers. To some extent this can be done by the exploitation of colonial territories by those colonial powers. The Congo, for instance, is a preserve of Belgium, and is a very rich preserve, containing probably the largest deposits of Uranium minerals which are so necessary for atomic energy. Thus, from the point of view of consolidating their position in Western Europe, some powers have to go slowly in regard to the Netherlands and do not wish to weaken the Netherlands; from the point of view of their position in Asia, they wish to support the Indonesian Republic. There is this inherent conflict and hence their vacillating policy.

19. The fact is that in the larger world context, it is far more important, even from their point of view, to support nationalist and progressive elements in Asia and more particularly not to encourage any colonial exploitation in Asia. This will count for far more in the end than in smaller gains in Western Europe.

20. For India, all these developments and possibilities pose new questions or old questions in a new garb. We cannot associate ourselves in any way with a policy in favour of colonial exploitation. This, not only because it would be opposed to all that we have stood for, but also because in the present context it would be a most unwise and harmful policy, and is destined to fail. Hence our very special interest in Indonesia. Also we have to realise that economic reform is essential in order to meet the new situation. We in India, or some of us, are apt to think in rather static terms, not realising that big changes are afoot and that we shall be affected by them. Most of our people are mostly concerned with the next elections which may take place about the end of 1950 or perhaps early in 1951. No doubt these elections may well take place, but much will happen before they take place. It is better for us to think of all this that is happening now and will happen in the course of the next year or two, than to lose ourselves in thoughts of the election. Ultimately India's strength and stability will depend upon her economic position and to the extent that we improve the standard of the masses. That is the vital issue before us.

21. There is undoubtedly a great deal of activity going on all over India, both in the Centre and in the Provinces, to develop our resources and innumerable schemes are in various stages of development. I have no doubt that our progress is going to be fairly rapid in the future. Nevertheless I have a feeling that there is a certain lack of coordination in these various efforts and what is necessary is more planning. I hope that in the months to come we shall give intensive thought to this business of planning.

22. The question of India's place in the Commonwealth, which is coming up for discussion soon in London, must be viewed in this larger context of Asian and world developments. I think that the policy we adopted six months or more ago was a right policy and we should hold on to it. This policy was to retain our complete independence as a Republic in regard to internal and external affairs, and at the same time to associate ourselves with the Commonwealth for purposes of consultation and cooperation. There is a desire on all sides for some way out to be found for this to take place. But certain difficulties have arisen. It may be that we shall get over them or the matter may be left undecided for some more time. There are undoubtedly considerable advantages for us to remain in the Commonwealth, while maintaining our complete independence. But there are disadvantages for us to become tied up or committed to any policies which may come in our way, in the future and which may be opposed to our general approach. We want to be friendly

and cooperative with the nations of the West but not at the cost of hostility to others. We feel that such a position will enable us, not only to serve our own interests but those of Asia and of world peace much more effectively. If India can even to an email extent in averting a world war, she will have done a great service to the world.

23. Generally speaking, our relations with Pakistan are better. But incidents continue to happen which come in the way of real understanding. The East Bengal Government has started a vendetta against the Gandhi Ashram in Noakhali and arrested some of the workers left there by Gandhi ji. They have made wild charges against them, which we cannot bring ourselves to believe. We cannot say much about Pakistani nationals but we have a right to speak up for Indian nationals who have been working there. We have asked for a full enquiry into the allegations made.

24. In the Frontier Province conditions appear to worsen. You may have seen the statement I made regarding the Frontier Province Communique about the Red Shirts and India helping them. It was after considerable thought that I made that statement, as I was afraid that my saying anything about the Red Shirts might lead to further suffering for them and more misunderstanding all round. But, having kept myself in check for over a year, I felt the time had come when I should say something. We have had no dealings with the Red shirts since the Partition, but we have undoubtedly felt deeply for them and for their brave leaders who were our comrades-in-arms for so many years in the struggle for India's freedom.

25. The relations of Pakistan with Afghanistan have deteriorated very greatly. The chief dispute between them is in regard to the tribal areas. A statement on behalf of Pakistan that the Tribal Areas were integral parts of Pakistan has led to vigorous protests from Afghanistan. There has apparently been bombing of these areas by the Pakistan Air Force. Our relations with Afghanistan are good.

26. We have summoned some of our Ambassadors abroad to confer with us. Sardar Panikkar, our Ambassador in Nanking, is here. Our High Commissioner in London has also just arrived and our Ambassador in Moscow, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, is due here soon. From here she will go to her new post in Washington. Shri Dhirajlal Dosai, Our Minister at Berne in Switzerland, has also paid a visit to us to discuss various matters. There has been a great deal of speculation about these visits as well as about other matters. There is really nothing to speculate about and it is not India's way to carry on secret diplomacy. We cannot shout out everything from the housetops, but no essential stop is taken or can be taken behind the backs of the people. It is of great help to confer with our Ambassadors to understand a vast changing situation. A nation's foreign policy is based on certain principles and objectives, but is at the same time very largely influenced by day-to-day happenings. Otherwise it becomes purely academic and unreal.

27. You will have noticed that our Industry and Supply Ministry has introduced legislation in the central control of certain industries. We feel that this is necessary from the point of view planning and coordination and the proper use of our resources. I propose to make a statement in Parliament soon on the subject of participation of foreign capital in India. Even before knowing what this is, some newspapers have started shouting against it. It amazes me how irresponsibly some of our newspapers have started shouting against it. It amazes me how irresponsible some of our newspapers function. This statement on foreign capital will be in line with the policy we have frequently declared. We wish to encourage foreign capital in India, subject always to the vital consideration of our not creating any vested interests here which might come in our way, and subject always to the primary consideration of advancing India's interests.

28. It has also been decided to appoint a Fiscal Commission.

29. I have a feeling, and I think it is justified by various events, that the industrial situation in India is on the mend and that the psychology of the country in this matter is definitely favourable now. I think we shall go ahead fairly fast, provided we do not fritter our energies over minor matters and petty conflicts. We are playing for high stakes in this country and the world and we dare not do so in a small and petty way.

30. The food situation requires constant care and I am glad to notice a fixed determination all round to make India self-sufficient in regard to food in the course of the next two years. Indeed we have no choice about this for if we do not do so and

war or other calamities supervene, then we face disaster. Again I would remind you that we must concentrate

(i) on procurement,

(ii) on intensive cultivation so as to increase the yield per acre, and

(iii) schemes which yield rapid results.

31. I feel that, in some provinces at least, enough has not been done in regard to procurement and local conditions are considered more important than all-India ones. I trust that every province will realise that in this matter it is only all-India considerations that must prevail and that there must be uniformity in procedure and practice all over India. I would like to congratulate Bombay Province on their procurement.

32. We have invited Lord Boyd Orr, who used to be the Chairman of the F.A.O. to visit India soon to advise us about our food problems. He is a great expert and enthusiastic about helping India in this matter. We may also get some other experts from abroad. But essentially the responsibility is ours and what is necessary is for us to throw all our energy into this business. This means not only governmental energy but Congress energy. We can change the whole atmosphere of the country if we could concentrate on these constructive activities.

33. In regard to relief and rehabilitation, and more especially the latter, it seems to me that we should think in terms of setting up some autonomous boards in each province to deal with problems of rehabilitation. These boards should be small and should consist of experts. The work should be taken out of the day-to-day activities of Government and dealt with as a non-political activity on an expert level. Such boards could be given larger financial powers so that they can exercise their initiative. Of course they would be under the supervision and control of the Governments to whom they will report from time to time. Provinces must remember that the Centre's resources are limited and it is quite impossible for us, even with the best will in the world, to supply unlimited funds.

34. I would like to draw your attention to one more point. There has been a tendency, even among Congressmen and our friends, to talk a great deal about the corruption and incompetence of Governments. Well, I have little doubt that there is corruption, and there is incompetence and there is wastage. We are trying hard to combat all these and I think we are succeeding, though slowly. It seems to me however that this business of condemnation is very much overdone. I think we can compare favourably with most countries. Continuous condemnation actually with most countries. Continuous condemnation actually leads to a feeling of lethargy and produces the very atmosphere in which corruption etc., flourish. There is a tendency to repeat every rumour without any attempt to verify it and so all kinds of vague and unjustified allegations float about from person to person. No responsible individual should allow himself to be a party to this kind of thing which is highly injurious to the nation. Let us by all means fight every evil, but let us also recognise that all is not evil and there is plenty of good and that in fact we are progressing pretty well. I do believe this and have reasons for doing so. Condemnation of our services is also not only unjustified but unwise. We should take action against malefactors but not condemn whole groups. We have inherited this from the past, but in the present context it has little place and only demoralises the services, from whom we expect good work.

Yours sincerely, (Sd).

Jawaharlal .Nehru

To all Provincial Premiers.