

Speech

By the Hon'ble Mr. Nasirullah Beg,

Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court

Delivered on November 26, 1966 on the Occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the Centenary Exhibition

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen-

This exhibition places before you interesting items displaying the milestones and disclosing the progress made during a hundred years of administration of justice by a High Court which came into existence in Uttar Pradesh by the grant of the Letters Patent of Queen Victoria in March, 1866. These Letters Patent of the High Court, granted to erect and establish for the North-Western Provinces of the Presidency of Fort William. ... a High Court of Judicature are displayed in a glass case which confronts you as you enter the first of the two Exhibition halls. The Letters Patent are flanked on one side by the portrait of Queen Victoria and on the other by that of Sir Walter Morgan, the first Chief Justice of this High Court. On top of the glass case displaying the Letters Patent will be found the portraits of the first two Presidents of the Republic of India. Between them is set the photograph of the present Chief Justice of India. Mr. K. Subbarao, who is the highest authority for all of us who belong to the judicial world. You will also find, on the top of the case displaying the Letters Patent, photographs of the buildings occupied by this Court in what may be described as its infancy.

The portrait of the first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, reminds us of the impressive occasion in 1954, when he came to this Court to open the new extensions which includes what is the Chief Justice's Court room to-day. In this Court room, perhaps the largest in the whole world, President Rajendra Prasad addressed the members of the Bench and the Bar of Allahabad. The portrait of the President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, is also there to remind us of the inauguration of the historic Centenary Celebrations now in progress. These celebrations mark the close of a very glorious chapter in the history of this Court and, we fervently hope, the beginning of perhaps another even more glorious one.

Studded inside the glass cases of the central stand, which confronts you as you enter the exhibition, are the photographs of Chief Justices and of all the present and a number of past Judges of the Allahabad High Court. Here, you can see them and they can see themselves as members of a priestly brotherhood which has acquired an extremely high reputation for learning, for legal acumen, and for probity. These solid qualities can be read from their faces by the discerning.

Confronting the central stand is a set of portraits of the Administrative Judges of this Court beginning with Justices Oldfield and Tyrrel followed by the picturesque Sir George Knox, with a flowing silvery beard and all the others who have occupied that important position up to its present holder-Mr. Justice Jagdish Sahai. Underneath the portraits of the Administrative Judges are found lined up files relating to important events in the life of this Court.

As you proceed towards the left in this hall, you will find a collection of messages of goodwill from the President, from the Prime Minister of India, from the present and former Chief Justices of India from the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, from the former Home Minister, from the present Union and State Law Ministers, from the present Foreign Minister who was then the Education Minister, and from the Attorney-General of India, for the success of our Centenary Celebrations and wishing well to this Court in future.

As you proceed further towards the left, your eyes meet the faces of the organisers of the Centenary Celebrations including the Senior most Judge of this Court, brother Oak' who, as the Convener of the Reception Committee, spared no pains to make the Centenary Celebrations a success. You also see the photograph of brother Katju, the energetic Secretary, who has displayed an extraordinary organizing capacity which lies behind the success of our Centenary Celebrations. And you see there, our brother, Gyanendra Kumar, who has exercised such judicious care and devoted so much of his precious time, thought and attention to the bringing out of all the publications relating to the Centenary Celebrations, without which the significance of these celebrations could not be properly brought out duly impressed upon our minds or preserved for the future.

Behind the central stand are displayed the paintings and of the giants of the Allahabad Bar in the past. They as the poet said:

"The grand old masters, the bards sublime, whose distant footsteps echo through the corridors of time."

In the centre of this section is the painting of a very beloved figure, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, a Barrister enrolled in this Court, who became one of the principal architects of the Constitution to which we all owe allegiance and a statesman of great renown in the world. On one side of his painting you will find a group photograph of members of the Bar Library, consisting of the Barristers practising in this Court in 1917. It shows the youthful Jawahar Lal standing in the last row next to Nawab Sir Muhammad Yusuf who afterwards became a Minister in the State. Here, you will also find a painting showing Pandit Moti Lal Nehru as he photographs are, as appeared when he went to England to argue the Lakhna Raj case. This portrait was unveiled at the Bar Association during the Moti Lal Nehru Centenary Celebrations in 1955. You then find a large painting of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in the Privy Councillor's dress. And, you now see a very life-like painting of the late Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the great educationist, who was an Advocate of this court. If you look carefully at the group photographs, you will be able to make out such eminent members of the Bench and Bar, as Sir Shah Mohammad Sulaiman, Sir Iqbal Ahmad, Mr. B. Malik, Mr. Gopalji Mehrotra, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr. K. N. Katju, Mr. Gopal Swarup Pathak, Dr. N. P. Asthana and Mr. Kanhaiya Lal Misra. You may find some difficulty in making out some of them because of the difference in their looks in these photographs of the past. Most of them,

though not all, look youthful as compared with the present. Eminent European members of the Bar, as Sir Charles Ross Alston and O' Conor, may also be seen here. Mr. P. N. Saprú, Mr. R.N. Gurtu, who subsequently became Judges of this Court, and Mr. M. A. Ansari who rose to the office of Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court, and our brother S. S. Dhavan, as they appear when they were still struggling juniors at the Bar, will also be found here.

Among the older group photographs is a very interesting photograph of the Judges of the High Court of the North-Western Provinces in 1889, (as this Court was then called), where Mr. Justice B. Banerji stands in the centre with Sir John Edge and Sir John Knox sitting in front of him. All the Judges are in the traditional robes of the King's Judges with ermine and are putting on their wigs. It brings back memories of the spacious Victorian days of horse-drawn buggies, when Judges were fanned with huge fans made of palm tree leaves while they sat in Court dispensing justice.

You will also find here photographs of historic occasions, such as the laying of the foundation stone of the present High Court building on 18th March, 1911, by Chief Justice Sir John Stanley, and the solemn but gorgeous procession led by Lord Chelmsford and Chief Justice Sir Henry Richards on 27th November, 1916, when the new building was opened. You will also find, in this room, photographs of the members of the staff who have worked very hard to make the Centenary Celebrations a success, to whom the thanks of all of us are due.

The second room contains the photographs of the Chief Judges and Judges of the Avadh Chief Court and some Judicial Commissioners. It also contains some very old documents beginning with a parwana issued on 29th June, 1789. Here, you will see orders and decrees written mostly in highly Persianised language of the 18th and 19th centuries. Here, you will also find examples of old judgments which used to be written in hand in those days. You will also see old Court Fee Stamp paper as well as Grants by the by-gone Maharajas and firmans of the Moghul Emperors. All these collections, revealing what was interesting and picturesque in the history of this Court, enable us to get an idea of the great changes which have taken place in the life of the Court. We still maintain a continuity and very distinct links with the past. The exhibition reminds us that the past of this Court was very glorious and should inspire us to strive incessantly not only to preserve but to enhance the glory of what was achieved by our predecessors.

I request His Lordship, the Chief Justice of India, to perform the opening ceremony of this exhibition. It is only proper "that he should do so, as we look to him to indicate to us the extent to which we should be guided by the past and also to give expression to our dreams for the future. He acts as our chief guide and pilot not only with regard to what is valuable in our past but also in order to open up new avenues of thought and action which will lead us further towards the goals set forth before us by our magnificent Constitution.

ⁱ He became the Chief Justice of this Court on June 4, 1967-Ed.