

# ADDRESS

by **Chief Guest Sri B. B. Ghosh,**

*Chairman, CMDA.*

I feel gratefully honoured at being asked to address at this All India Conference on Engineering Materials and Equipment organised by the Association of Engineers. I hesitate, however, to address this galaxy of engineers, scientists, industrialists and others who know much more in this matter. I am told that this conference will deal particularly with the requirements of engineering materials and equipment for urban development works and I am expected to speak as Chairman of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority which has been charged with the responsibility of developing the Calcutta metropolitan area. I shall, therefore, speak of the problems of Calcutta as I see them.

There is not much point in my referring to Calcutta as it was, its great tradition, its unique character and its supremacy in many respects over any other city in India. What we are concerned with is about Calcutta as it is now. Those of us who have seen Calcutta as it was are pained to see the present conditions. There are many reasons for this deterioration. No other State in India has had to face two partitions. The first partition of Bengal in 1905 which gave a great shock to Bengal was nothing compared to the second

partition in 1947. In the first partition both the parts of Bengal were still parts of India and under the control of the same central government. There were no barriers to movement, there was no migration of people and there was no economic distress in either part of Bengal. It was nevertheless a shock to the spirit of Bengal and the reaction was deep and widespread. The determination to shake off foreign rule and to become independent owed its origin to this shock given by the British rulers to the spirit of Bengal. Even though, under pressure, the British rulers decided later to re-unite the two parts of Bengal, they gave another shock to Bengal by transferring the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi. Though the British wanted to reduce the importance of Calcutta by transferring the capital to Delhi, Calcutta's pre-eminence as a centre of commerce and industry continued unabated. On the whole it can be said that the shocks which the British wanted to administer to Bengal produced effects reverse to what the British desired. Bengal could not, however, forget what was attempted by the British and the freedom struggle continued. Bengal produced many great men who urged people to unite and fight to shake off the

foreign domination. In this process Bengal was enriched in many ways:

The second partition of Bengal in 1947 which was the price paid to achieve freedom of India from foreign rule was a very different thing. It dealt a mortal blow not only to the spirit of Bengal but also to its body. One can only shed tears for the people who have migrated and are still migrating to West Bengal, leaving their dear hearth and home in East Bengal where their ancestors lived for centuries. These uprooted men have tried to settle somewhere, wherever they could find any place or wherever they were taken. A large number of people flocked to Calcutta and areas round about in the hope of finding employment and some means of livelihood. Due to the continuous influx of such people, Calcutta burst at the seams and the line of demarcation of the Calcutta Corporation area was defaced and Calcutta extended all round so much so that it is now difficult to say where Calcutta ends. The civic amenities which were designed to cater for a fraction of the present population proved totally inadequate and no serious effort was made in time to expand these facilities to cope with the new demands. Water supply, drainage, sewerage, roads, everything seemed inadequate. Calcutta was overwhelmed as a result. A far-sighted Chief Minister, Dr. B. C. Roy, decided to set up a planning organisation to plan for the improvement of the entire Calcutta metropolitan area covering about 500 sq. miles. This planning organisation has produced many plans covering traffic and transportation, water supply, drainage and sewerage, housing and so on but very little could be done so far to implement

the schemes due to paucity of resources. There is acute shortage of water supply, drainage and sewerage system is totally inadequate and insufficient, there is piling of garbage on the road sides, chaotic traffic jams, insufficient transport system, poor recreational facilities, large number of slums with about one million people living in them, thousands of people living on the pavements, markets all over encroaching on roads—these are some of the physical problems of the Calcutta metropolitan area now. To add to these problems, the industrial climate was seriously disturbed during the last couple of years, many industries closed down and some became very sick. All these increased the number of unemployed people. This is how Calcutta has come to the present state of affairs.

I have painted to you a very gloomy and discouraging picture but I am convinced that the conditions are still remediable. Calcutta can and will be saved. The success and rapidity of recovery will however depend on the extent to which people in different sectors co-operate and make sincere efforts. The industrialists, for example, have to play their part. If instead of running away and condemning the conditions here they show greater determination to continue and expand their industrial and commercial activities in this State, they will do a great service to West Bengal and our recovery would be speedier. Similarly, if all municipal bodies and people living in the Calcutta metropolitan area would co-operate with the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority whose only task and only desire is to improve the conditions of living in the entire metropolitan area, we will all

be able to improve conditions much faster and much better. I expect that all the municipal bodies will be convinced of this soon when they see how the CMDA is trying to help everyone. The CMDA's sole desire is to improve the conditions as fast as possible.

I have already mentioned that the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation of the Government of West Bengal had produced a lot of plans but very few of them could be implemented due to paucity of funds. The CMPO was often criticised for merely planning and not doing anything but this was unfair because the CMPO was not made responsible for executing the plans and above all no funds were provided to execute most of these works. The political scene in this State was also not conducive to efforts in this direction. Probably it can be said that the confused political picture was another indication of the desparate situation in Calcutta where every facet of life was adversely affected. After the President's Rule was introduced in this State in March this year and we took office in April, we felt that it was of the highest importance to deal with the problems of Calcutta if we were to restore peace, if we were to remove the sense of frustration prevailing and if we were to improve the industrial climate. We quickly collected all the schemes which the CMPO had prepared and in consultation with all concerned we prepared a comprehensive list of projects which could be undertaken immediately or in the very near future.

Considering the scale of efforts in this direction in the past, this is quite a large programme and very great efforts would be needed by engineers, administrators and others

to implement the programme even as it is. There will be many material problems and need for special equipment to carry out these works expeditiously and satisfactorily. I hope this conference will devote its attention to the aspect of speed.

The CMDA has been entrusted with the responsibility of financing and co-ordinating all the efforts for implementation of the Metropolitan development programme. It is proposed to use to the maximum extent possible the existing agencies i.e. municipal bodies, Improvement Trusts, Government Departments and other organisations like CMWSA. We depend, therefore, very greatly on these agencies to execute the programme expeditiously. The Engineers of all these organisations have a great part to play. In fact, it is a challenge to them. Now that funds are being made available, they can no longer say that it is due to shortage of money that they are not able to do anything. Now they have been promised all the money required and they should rise to the occasion and fulfil this programme with maximum possible speed. The condition of Calcutta is such that no delay can be tolerated. People are anxious to know what is happening. The news that we have taken up a Rs. 150-crore programme to improve the living conditions in Calcutta in all directions has raised great hopes and people will be disappointed if we are not able to show results soon. I would plead with all the Engineers that they should co-operate and ensure very speedy implementation of the programme.

Both the financing and co-ordinating functions of the CMDA will be complex operations.

The most important role however of the CMDA would be the co-ordination in the actual execution of the works by the different agencies. Considering that the CMDA will have to deal with two Corporations, 33 municipalities and almost an equal number of non-municipal urban areas and the fact that many of the works extend over the jurisdiction of different authorities, the co-ordination will not be an easy task, but no one can deny that there would be constant need for co-ordination in such a situation.

The technical resources of the different authorities and agencies vary widely and the CMDA will have to assist those who are in need of assistance in executing the projects quickly. Since it would be responsible for financing, the CMDA will have to be responsible for proper financial control over the expenditure. This will involve a certain measure of technical control or supervision. The CMDA will have to assist in procuring scarce materials and in supplying technical information for guidance of the executing agencies. The engineers who have actual experience of works will appreciate readily the responsibility all these will involve.

The programme is large and it has to be dealt with very quickly. The CMDA has, therefore, decided to set up some thing like a task force to undertake direct bustee improvement programme, although some of the bustees have been allotted to the Calcutta Corporation who were keen on undertaking works in these bustees. The organisation and methods of work envisaged will give a new type of experience to engineers and also to social workers who will be associated with these works.

Several voluntary organisations interested in working for the improvement of bustees have offered their services and we have welcomed them.

We have invited all the municipalities to put up their proposals and we have already sanctioned a few schemes received from certain municipalities. While Calcutta on the eastern bank of the Hooghly attracts everybody's attention, Howrah on the other side which has many small industries is in very much worse condition. We have decided to give our particular attention to Howrah. We are anxious to make both Howrah and Calcutta clean and modern cities.

While we have undertaken this programme to improve the living conditions in the entire metropolitan area and to provide the infra-structure for further development, we have constantly in mind the problem of unemployment which, according to most people, is the basic cause of the present troubles in this city and its environs. As the programme gets under way, more and more people will, I am sure, find employment. Employment will be not only directly under the CMDA but also and probably more so under the executing agencies and under the contractors who would do the actual works. If all the executing bodies are energetic and are able to step up the rate of execution we shall be able to take on more works and find more employment. I would request youngmen to take whatever work is offered. I would like all the manual work to be done by the people of this State.

I have so far talked about Cmda's plan, its method of working and so on but

this is a conference on engineering materials and equipment required for such urban development works which the Cmda has undertaken. This is a matter for expert examination by those who are professionally competent in this field. What I would like to see as the Chairman of the CMDA is that this conference finds ways and means of translating the programme into action at a high speed by suggesting alternatives to scarce materials, by suggesting suitable equipment where necessary and also by suggesting ways and means of effecting economy in the use of materials. Even though a layman in these matters, I would take the liberty of mentioning some points here for your consideration. We are anxious to ensure that during every monsoon roads do not crack up and money that is spent in repairing the roads is not washed away. How do we do this? Most of the road repair or even new road construction is done manually here but should we use more machines and if so, what types of machines would be suitable considering their availability and costs? Similarly, is there any quicker method of laying pipes underground to carry drainage water or sewerage? We often see the spectacle of a road being dug up to put pipes in and left in that condition for a year or two, causing enormous difficulties to traffic and to the people living on the two sides of the roads. Again, what are

the best types of vehicles for clearance of garbage, that is, for loading garbage into the vehicles at one end and unloading it at the other end. Must garbage clearance continue to be as dirty a task as at present? It would be a great boon to the men who do this type of work if their work could be made less unwelcome. What is the best method of garbage disposal? I have not mentioned about housing. I do not know whether you will discuss this problem. If you do, will you consider what kind of housing we could develop for the pavement dwellers and for the slum dwellers? What kind of technique could we adopt to construct houses at a much faster rate? What economy in materials could be achieved? There are many more things which you will certainly consider and I have made only a few suggestions for your consideration. I hope at the end of the conference we will have concrete suggestions which we can study and try to follow.

I must thank you for the patience with which you have listened to me. I would conclude by expressing the hope that this conference will be a milestone in the path of our progress for metropolitan urban development.

Vote of thanks, on behalf of the Organisers was offered by Shri T. K. Basu.