

Women's Conference Demand For Rights

LADY RAMA RAU ON TASK AHEAD

From Our Own Correspondent

AKOLA, December 28: The open session of the 19th All-India Women's Conference commenced here today under the presidency of Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau. Among those who attended the Conference were the Rani of Sangli, Dr. Malinibai Sukhtankar, Mrs. Ammu Swaminathan, member of the Constituent Assembly, Miss Kapila Khandwala, Mrs. Mitham Lam, Sheriff of Bombay, Dr. Mrs. Bose, Mrs. B. Shiva Rao, Mrs. Grace Lankester, Miss Dorothea Lankester, Mrs. Hilda Seligman, Lady Pares and Miss Mary Sweeney, the last five being special visitors from abroad. Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and the Princess of Berar are expected to arrive today by air.

The five-day programme of the Conference commenced yesterday with the inauguration of the Swadeshi Exhibition by Rani Laxmibai Rajwade Gwalior. Rani Laxmibai, in her speech, stressed the need for reviving the Indian cottage industries and stepping-up industrialisation in the country.

The Standing Committee of the Conference met yesterday under the presidency of Mrs. Hansa Mehta, and discussed a number of resolutions, one of which endorses the Indian Women's charter of rights.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The All-India Women's Conference demands social security, health insurance, education and vocational training as the foundation for national reconstruction-objectives which can best be achieved by the creation of a new portfolio with a good proportion of women to administer the department and safeguard the interests of women and children, said Lady Rama Rau in her presidential address.

In her opinion, the next few years would be a testing time for the organisation's branches. Her advice as the President of the A.-I.W.C. therefore was that each branch should plan intelligently for the area it could reach.

"Let each branch for the next year take up one practical piece of work and concentrate on it, devote money, time, energy, thought and experimentation to it, so that it might evolve as a pilot scheme to be multiplied a thousandfold by the authorities when governments, municipalities or local boards have recognised its value," she added.



Lady Rama Rau

Lady Rama Rau said that in the 20 years of its existence, the sum total of the achievement of the A.-I.W.C. was that it had been able to organise women on an all-India basis—no mean achievement, considering the size of the country and the percentage of illiteracy among women. Two-hundred centres had been created and had attracted 30,000 women to it as members.

FRANCHISE RIGHTS

During these years they had maintained connections with international women's organisations. They had prepared a charter of women's rights, for presentation to the Constituent Assembly, in which they had claimed equality with men with reference to franchise and economic, social and political opportunities in public life. But they realised that they had not been able to touch the fringe of the colossal tasks that lay ahead.

They were dissatisfied that their progress had not been more rapid and more far-reaching, that they had not been able to awaken women in every town of India, that they had not been able to reach out into every village of India. All they had achieved was to dispel the belief from the minds of their men that their Conferences were glorified tea parties.

Their Conference, the premier women's organisation in India, should take the fullest advantage of the general awakening around it. Expert planning committees had produced, and were producing, comprehensive schemes whereby, in the shortest possible time, the greatest good could be effected, and the country raised from the status of a backward country to that of the more forward countries of the world.

Planning for health, education and social security, undertaken by the provincial authorities would necessarily take time to be translated into practical work, added Lady Rama Rau. The whole complicated machinery would have to be fitted to the requirements of the country. It would be the function of the authorities to produce the wealth to organise the distribution, to guarantee a minimum living wage and provide the amenities essential to civilised human life, to overhaul the laws, and dispense justice for men and women. But while this gigantic task was being organised, their branches would have unique opportunities of helping the new governments, and organising the work the A.-I.W.C. had been doing in a much more direct and constructive manner.

COMMUNAL RIOTS

Mrs. Radhadevi Goenka, Chairwoman, Reception Committee, welcoming the delegates to "this historic land of Vidharbha, which was the birthplace of Rukmini and Damayanti of Yore," hoped that the session would strengthen women's movement in the province. She said communal strife in East Bengal, Bihar and other parts of the country shamed everyone and brought before the mind the main question of protection of womanhood. Women of the country looked to the conference for a lead in that respect.

Messages wishing the conference success were received from Madam

Sun Yat Sen of China, Mrs. Begtrup of Copenhagen, Miss Agatha Harrison and President, Palestine Arab Women's League, Pandit Nehru, Maharani Sethu Parwatibai, Travancore, Lady Pethick-Lawrence, Mrs. Kripalani and Pandit Lady Nilkanth Amrit Kar, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Lady Maharaj Singh and others.

The Princess of Berar, who arrived by plane in the morning, addressing the conference wished it success and said that she warmly associated with the spirit of the women of India.

A donation of Rs 5,000 from the Princess of Berar and of Rs 1,000 from the Rani of Sangli for the conference work was announced amidst cheers.

Foreign visitors, Mrs. Lancaster, Lady Pares, Mrs. Bucky Seligram, tendered greetings of the women of their countries to the conference.