

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

Volume 26

Reference on Pondicherry

Cable to V K. Krishna Menon¹

My affectionate congratulations to you on achievement at Geneva² which undoubtedly has been greatly helped by your unceasing, unobtrusive and very effective work. This is widely recognised and appreciated in India....

3. I presume you will return to India whenever you feel you have finished your work in Geneva. I would suggest for your consideration your visiting Paris briefly to see Mendes-France, main purpose being to convey my congratulations and your own thanks to him. At the same time, if you think it appropriate, you might express hope on my behalf that question of French settlements in India will be settled satisfactorily soon thus promoting Indo-French goodwill. This would be appropriate gesture after agreement about Indo-China. I do not want you to argue this point or to hustle Mendes-France when he is so very busy. But casual mention of this might bear fruit.

4. For your information, 60 per cent of French establishments in India are already freed of French control.³ Only Pondicherry and Karaikal remain

¹ .New Delhi, 21 July 1954. V.K. Krishna Menon Papers, NMML. Extracts.

² The agreements on Indo-China were signed on 20-21 July 1954.

³ Of the five French settlements in India, Chandernagore had been ceded to India in 1949~ the control of Mahe was transferred to the local liberation movement on 16 July 1954.

with French and even Karaikal might not continue for long.⁴ Position of freed territories is very anomalous and something therefore should be done to solve this problem soon.

5. In case you mention this to Mendes-France I do not want any public mention made of it here or elsewhere....

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The French Proposals⁵

... I have no doubt that the proposal we have received from M. Mendes-France indicates a decision in the mind of the French Government to settle this question of French Establishments in our favour.⁶ All they are anxious about is to do this in a methodical and dignified way, so as to maintain their prestige. We should help them in this and make it easy for them. We have no desire to injure their prestige....

5. It is to be noted that de facto control of the freed areas comes to us immediately. We shall have to think out of what steps to take about these areas. We should not interfere much with their internal organisation. Naturally we shall have to send someone to take charge, and, maybe, some police. Otherwise, the local communes should continue to function.

⁴ Nationalist volunteers began picketing the borders of Karaikal on 5 July, all bus services, with India being suspended and the town being gradually isolated.

⁵ Note to Secretary General, MEA, and Foreign Secretary, 1 August 1954. JN Collection. Extracts. A copy of this note was sent to Kewal Singh, Consul General of India in Pondicherry.

⁶ The French Government accepted the principle of de facto transfer of the Settlements prior to their de jure transfer. The de facto transfer would be carried out after a congress consisting of members of the Representative Assembly and the Municipal Councils approved a draft agreement concerning protection of French cultural and economic interests to be prepared by the GOI and the French Ambassador.

The fact that nearly 60% of the total area has been freed and will be under our control is itself a guarantee about the future, i.e., the decision of the Congress, etc.

6. I have no doubt that the behaviour of the French Administration will improve as soon as it is known that de facto transfer is going to take place. The transfer of the Governor, or whatever he is called,⁷ will also have this effect. Naturally, the people who have been exiled will have to be allowed to come back.

7. It is necessary that on our side we should behave with circumspection and avoid incidents. We should also not cut off essential supplies of any kind which are required by the people.⁸

8. It is difficult at present to explain all this to the pro-merger leaders. We must keep this matter as secret. But they can certainly be told that we have every hope to come to a settlement with the new French Government, and especially with M. Mendes-France. In the circumstances, it is better to avoid any crisis from developing or any unfortunate incidents from taking place. This does not mean that the normal agitation should be wound up....

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Telegram to Kewal Singh⁹

⁷ Andre Menard, the French Commissioner had been called back from Pondicherry.

⁸ Nationalist refugees had been picketing the frontiers of Pondicherry since 28 June 1954 to prevent supplies from India reaching the town.

⁹ New Delhi, 13 August 1954. JN Collection. Extracts. Kewal Singh (1915-1991); Consul General of India in Pondicherry. 1953-54; also see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 21, p. 561.

Your telegram 895 of August 12th.¹⁰

2. I have no doubt that present French Government under Mendes-France is quite sincere in its proposals to us and will abide by them. In fact, as you know, there really is no possibility of French staying on in Pondicherry for long. They know that. They even offered to leave without agreement, but we did not approve of this.'

3. It is obvious that Mendes-France is meeting considerable opposition. This is chiefly in regard to Tunisia though Pondicherry gets tagged on to it. We feel that we should avoid embarrassing Mendes-France as far as possible.¹¹

I think that Mendes-France will win through. Even if he falls, our position ultimately will not be affected and we will be all the stronger. But I do not apprehend fall of his Government.

4. At his desire we are postponing issue of communiqué but, in fact we propose to begin discussing modalities of transfer within few days. Thus there will not really be much ultimate delay¹².

7. Our advice to you is that anything which might lead to undesirable incidents should be avoided. Thus, picketing and stoppage of supplies

¹⁰ Kewal Singh stated that the nationalist parties had agreed to slacken agitation in the hope of early announcement of agreement between India and France, and suggested that "the momentum of the nationalist movement should not be scotched unless we are convinced of the French Government's sincerity."

¹¹ Mendes-France had requested Nehru not to issue any statement about the proposals agreed upon till they had been approved by his Parliament, where he wanted to bring them up in a debate later in the month. He, however, said that he adhered to agreement on the proposals.

¹² Under an agreement between the French and Indian Governments signed in New Delhi on 21 October, the settlements of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam were transferred to de facto Indian sovereignty on 1 November 1954.

should be avoided. But peaceful demonstrations may certainly continue. Stress might well be laid on expectation of peaceful transfer before long. Thus movement should continue, but in a more friendly and peaceful way. Even references to France might be more friendly in view of broad agreement on transfer. In particular, essential supplies should not be stopped.

8. As for August fifteenth, I would advise peaceful demonstration, preferably meeting, and not processions which might lead to conflict. French authorities might be informed that demonstrations will be completely peaceful and therefore should not be interfered with.

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To Morarji Desai¹³

New Delhi
August 1, 1954

My dear Morarji,

While the position in Pondicherry is, I hope, likely to improve soon, I am much concerned with Goa. The petty incidents at Dadra and round about¹⁴ have created a sensation in India, but they really do not amount to much. I have no doubt that the Portuguese will give us a great deal of trouble.

What I am worried about especially is the possible behaviour of some of our own people who talk bravely of marching into Goa. They demand

¹³ JN Collection. Extracts.

¹⁴ On 22 July, about 30 volunteers occupied the village of Dadra, a small enclave inside Bombay State, after a skirmish in which two policemen were killed. The nearby enclave of Nagar-Haveli (185 square miles) was occupied at the end of July by two groups of volunteers, one recruited from the left-wing Goan People's Party and the other from the Azad Goa Dal backed by the Jan Sangh. The Portuguese police carried on intermittent resistance until 11 August, when they retreated to Goa.

government backing; if not now, then later. What might happen is that a group of volunteers march in. They are arrested or beaten or shot down by the Portuguese. This will naturally create an uproar in India and demands will be made on us to take some effective and strong steps. The steps hinted at will be armed action.

I think that any such contingency will be unfortunate and will not ease the situation.

As it is, there are numerous forces working in our favour and gradually other countries are beginning to realise that it is inevitable for the Portuguese possessions to come to India. If and when we settle the Pondicherry question, the effect of this on Goa will be great.

I do not mean at all that we should relax Goa or in any way weaken in our attitude. I think it is quite essential that our policy should be strongly followed outside and inside Goa; that our economic measures should be applied progressively. Now that we have come to a decision about these economic measures, we shall go ahead with them and they are powerful enough to create a very difficult situation in Goa. But this takes some time....

So far as 15th August is concerned, so much has been said about a widespread assault on Goa by volunteers¹⁵, that the Portuguese must be fully prepared to meet it. It is not good tactics even to do something which is expected by the enemy. Therefore, any large-scale assault on Goa on the day appears to be peculiarly inadvisable. I hope you will make this clear to these people....

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

¹⁵ An 'Action Committee' formed by a number of nationalist groups in Mumbai had announced on 15 July that volunteers would carry out a 'march on Goa' on 15 August as the beginning of a satyagraha campaign in the Portuguese settlements.