

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

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Page 379

Issues in Foreign Policy

23 March 1954

I find that there are a number of cut motions also relating to tribal affairs. The House will remember that sometime back there was a tragedy there, not very far from the Tibet border, when a platoon of ours the Assam Rifles, was attacked and ambushed and a number of people were suddenly killed.² That was a kind of thing which sometimes occurred in pre-independence days when the British ruled this country, and they had a way of dealing with them -- a heavy way which involved much destruction of life and property. We were put in a difficulty as to how to deal with this matter, and the immediate reaction was that we must do something quickly to get back the persons who were held as hostages, and, well, to punish the guilty. The place was very difficult to get at. Even after sending troops by air. it was about three weeks march to the exact spot. Anyhow, we decided on adopting not the old way, but avoiding destruction as far as possible and making a friendly-a firm and friendly approach. As a result of this, this matter was settled. I think, in a very happy way. Those who were dead, of course were dead, we could not get them back. We got back the hostages doing very little damage to anybody, and those simple folk who had, in a moment of excitement or whatever it was, misbehaved, realised that we meant well with them. They came, surrendered the arms they had taken and the whole thing was settled in a friendly way. and we are receiving ~ good deal of cooperation there

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² See Selected Works (second series), Vol., 24, pp.307.310.

from these people, and it has become one of our Partly Administered Areas now. I should like to congratulate those in charge of our North East Frontier Agency, who were responsible for this-for the very tactful and wise way in which they handled the situation there.

Sometime ago I made a statement about the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission and our Custodial Force in Korea.³ There is nothing more to be said about it. I promised then to place the reports-the original reports-of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission on the Table of the House. I have not done so, I am sorry, because they have not come out of the press yet. They are very big reports, running into hundreds and hundreds of pages, and the) are taking some time, and I hope that within a week or ten days I shall place those original reports here for members to refer to them if they so wish.

This chapter of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission and Custodial Force is over so far as we are concerned. That, of course, does not mean that the Korean problem is over. It is very much alive. But the only part of that Custodial Force business that is not over in a sense is that we have brought over here 88 prisoners of war, or ex-prisoners of war, who, for the present, are with us. Out of these 88, about 30 have expressed a desire to stay on in India, and there are others who want to go to other countries. For the moment we are holding all these people, in a sense on behalf of the United Nations, but, of course. it is for us to decide whether those 30 or any other who want to stay here should be given facilities to do so or not. Probably, we shall allow them to stay here temporarily. That is to say, we cannot-we do not propose and we cannot in law-make them citizens of India, but if they have nowhere else to go to, we can hardly throw them out either. So, we intend giving them some papers of residence here which can be renewed periodically, -- that is, it is for the Government then to keep

³ See ante, pp. 366-372.

them or not to keep them in future, and to provide, where possible, some occupation for them.

Another matter in which the House is interested is the negotiations that are going on in Peking in regard to Tibet. They have lengthened out rather more than we thought, not because of any inherent difficulty in the problems we are facing, but simply because there are so many details, and each detail takes a long time. I hope that within maybe a few days or maybe a fortnight these discussions might possibly end satisfactorily.⁴

Now, these are the - if I may say so - secondary issues, with which we have been dealing. The major world issues, of course, are not entirely of our seeking or making, and we play a very distant part in them. Nevertheless, it is these world issues that govern the scene, as the House well knows, and in the course of a month or so, there is going to be a conference in Geneva⁵ where some of these big issues, both of Europe and the Far East, are supposed to be discussed. In this Conference, the one further step that has been taken-and it is a good step -- that for the first time, the People's Government of China will be represented there together with certain other great powers. It is far better that governments should face each other and discuss these matters, than to try to do so through other intermediaries, or ignore each other.

During the last two or three years, the absence of the recognition of the Chinese People's Government by some great powers and by the United Nations has brought about such an unrealistic state of affairs that it has been hardly possible to deal with the question directly. As I have often stated, it was not a question of any person or any government liking or disliking any other government, but of recognising facts, as they were. Now it is manifestly something on the verge of absurdity for anyone to say-I have

⁴ See post, pp. 468-69.

⁵ On 26 April 1954.

nothing against that particular gentleman who is supposed to represent China in the United Nations today, he is an able person-that he represents China; it is obviously a little absurd, quite absurd, for he does not. At the most one can say that he represents the Government of Formosa. But to say that this person represents this great country of China is so wide of the mark that any discussion based on that must fail. And that has been our misfortune in world affairs that realities, because they were not liked, have been ignored.

I do not know what is going to happen at Geneva, So far as we are concerned we have no desire whatever to appear at the scene in Geneva, to participate in these conferences. It is only when we feel that we can really do some good, that we wish to undertake any burden, for the rest, we would rather avoid these burdens.

In this House, sometime ago, I mentioned Indo-China. Indo-China has been, for the last six years nearly, a scene of warfare of a kind of civil war aided by other countries.

Now one fact we must remember when we think of Indo-China

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Page 391

Principles of Foreign Policy

24 March 1954

Yesterday some of our friends here raised the subject of our borders, particularly on the Tibet side, what is known as the McMahon Line. I do not know why they had this sudden doubt because the McMahon Line constitutes India's border at the moment on which we have a number of established check posts. And as far as we are concerned it is our border and will continue to be so. There is no dispute with any other country over this, nor

are we about to raise any problem. Therefore it makes no sense for these doubts to be voiced.

My friend Sarmahji has raised an objection in connection with the border question,⁶ that the new step taken by the North East Frontier Agency and the separate cadre created by the officers is not to his liking. I regret that he does not like it. But we have done this after much deliberation and I am convinced that we must follow this path and if necessary, extend it further. What is the basic question? Perhaps the greatest danger is that of the segregation of Assam. I do not want Assam to be segregated. I want that all parts of India should come closer together and coexist in harmony. But the most important thing is to see that the people of Assam progress willingly. The parts which are on the borders have come into the Indian Union somewhat late and to some extent not through the right manner, I mean during British rule. Our freedom movement did not make much of an impact on areas which were remote and difficult of access. We have to co-opt them into the mainstream now. The most important part of it is to make them feel that they are part of India and that their future lies marching forward hand in hand with the rest of the country. Once they are convinced about this, then we can cement relations further. If they feel at the beginning that we are trying to force a relationship down their throats, then it will be counterproductive.

I hear that my colleague the Deputy Minister read out a few lines from an article that I had written for an officer when I had visited the borders a year and a half ago. It had been marked secret,⁷ although there is nothing really

⁶ Debeswar Sarmah. Congress member from Jorhat, Assam said that the setting up of a separate cadre for NEFA virtually meant segregation of the people of this region from plains people and this would be a grievous error as it would prevent Assam from playing her rightful and proper part in development of the region.

⁷ See *Selected Works* (second series), Vol.20, pp.160-172. Anil K. Chanda, the Deputy Minister of External Affairs, on 24 March had read cut some portions of the note written by

secret about it. But since some part of it has been read out, I have advised that the entire article be placed on the Table of the House so that those who are interested can read it. It will be put in the Parliament Library or on the Table of the House so that our proposed plan for dealing with the North East becomes clear. This policy is not to keep Assam segregated. We want it to join the mainstream. At the same time we do not want the people in the North East to feel that anything is being thrust upon them. This is a very delicate problem. It is not something that can be resolved quickly. It will take at least a decade or two to draw the tribes of this region towards us. There is often the question of language. There are many languages in the North East -- very ten or twenty villages speak a different language. Yet we are giving them primary education in their own languages. They learn other languages also. But you must understand where their difficulty lies. A Khasi came to me and said, "It is all very well that you have made arrangements for providing primary education in our own languages. We like it. But it is equally important for us to learn Assamese in its own script." At the moment the dialects in the North East are written in the Roman script, a practice started by the missionaries. He said it was equally important for them to learn Hindi in the Nagari script and to learn English too. So we have to teach four languages and three scripts, which cast quite a heavy burden on the poor students. They are tribals and I think their protest was legitimate. They wanted that they should be allowed to learn Assamese in the Nagari script which would reduce the load somewhat. It seemed quite reasonable to me. But as you know we have to tread carefully in these matters because it could have an adverse effect on the people.

Nehru to explain the Government's attitude to the tribal people.