

Record of a conversation between Lord Ismay and Jawaharlal Nehru (2 October 1947)

Caption: On 2 October 1947, in a conversation between Lord Ismay, Chief of Staff to the British Viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Prime Minister, Nehru particularly focuses on the consequences of the partition of the British Indian Empire, especially the disturbances in Punjab and Junagadh.

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TOP SECRET

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN LORD I MAY AND PANDIT
NEHRU ON 2ND OCTOBER, 1947

1. Pakistan's representations to HMG in the UK and the other Dominions

Pandit Nehru was inclined to think that since the story had partially leaked, it might be as well if Mr. Attlee published the whole series of telegrams. If Mr. Attlee agreed to this, he might think it right to make the suggestion to the Governments of India and Pakistan, with copies to the other Dominions, and propose the time for simultaneous release.

2. Observers

Mr. Nehru said that Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan had suggested that the Governments of India and Pakistan should ask U.N.O. or the other Dominions to send observers to watch events in the East and West Punjab. He himself (Mr. Nehru) had not definitely rejected this proposal, but thought there was little or no advantage in it. It would take a long time for U.N.O. to collect representatives, and when they arrived, there would be all sorts of difficulties, such as ignorance of the language and of the country; and, at the end of it all, of what precise use would they be? It was true that they could visit refugee camps and columns of refugees, but they would not be able to check up on isolated incidents. Thus, although there might be an impression that they were a sort of impartial tribunal, they could not in fact function as such. The same sort of objections applied to observers from the Dominions.

A possible line of approach that had occurred to him (Mr. Nehru) was to have Indian observers, other than Hindu, Sikh or Moslem. It should not be difficult for each Dominion to select, say, half a dozen men of standing, e.g. with High Court experience, and to set them to work in pairs. He had put this proposal to Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, who had not rejected it, but had suggested that there might be a British observer with each pair. Mr. Nehru doubted the wisdom of this. It was too reminiscent of what had

happened in the Boundary Commission, when Hindu and Moslem judges had disagreed and Sir Cyril Radcliffe had had to give the casting vote.

In conclusion, Mr. Nehru made a very interesting point. He said that, in point of fact, he and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan seldom had any difficulty in reaching agreement as to what should be done to meet any particular problem that arose: but their difficulty lay in getting their decisions implemented. This difficulty would clearly apply to any conclusions that might be reached by observers from UNO or elsewhere.

3. Character of the present troubles

Mr. Nehru gave me a long and most interesting exposition of his views about the present troubles. To the world, the issues seemed to be exclusively communal, but in point of fact there was a definite political objective behind them. He went on to explain that the Congress movement was not unlike the Labour movement in England, i.e. they were quite prepared to non-co-operate or to go on strike, but they were totally opposed to violence. The Moslem movement was a direct contrast. They believed in direct action and violence, and the Moslem national guard was in effect a fascist militia. Now there were certain Hindu organisations which did not agree with the Congress policy, e.g. the Hindu Masabha, the R.S.S. There were also the Sikhs.

The Hindu Masabha had declared the 15th August as a day of mourning. The R.S.S. was composed largely of the lower middle class - not unlike the Nazi movement. Their aim was an exclusively Hindu State: and they were fascist in outlook. They had not, before the present troubles, ever embarked on violence.

The Sikhs as a whole were quite ready to listen to Master Tara Singh when he incited them to violence, but not so when he tried to call them off. There were, in particular, two groups, of terrorists; the first about 2,000 to 3,000 strong were well armed and well organised. Both had recently got completely out of hand and the only hope of calling them off was through their supreme religious authorities.

The troubles which started on 15th August had palyed into the hands

of both the Hindu organisations mentioned above and of the Sikhs; and they had made hay while the sun shone. The troubles in Delhi, for example, had been started by the Sikh organisation joining hands with the R.S. S., and getting the police in their pockets. Had the intelligence system been effective, the movement might have been nipped in the bud, as had a similar movement in the U.P. in early August: but, as it was, things had got completely out of hand.

Mr. Nehru went on to talk about various States. He did not doubt that H.H. of Patiala wished to get complete supremacy of Sikhistan. The Moslems there had been killed in very large numbers. H.H. of Faridkot was a thoroughly bad man. He had expelled all the Moslems from his State and had confiscated their land and made it into Crown property. H.H. of Bharatpur, the only Jat State, and H.H. of Alwar had either killed all the Moslems in their States or just turned them adrift. Both of them were engaged in crushing all organisations within their States. Alwar was a paranoiac.

4. Junagadh

Mr. Nehru said that although Junagadh was legally entitled to accede to Pakistan, the Government of India were not prepared to accept this accession, owing to the geographical complications caused by the fact that the other Kathiawar States and Junagadh were inextricably interlaced. Thus there were Junagadh islands in Indian territory and Indian islands in Junagadh territory. In addition there was the complication of Mongrol and Babariawad, both of whom the Nawab of Junagadh claimed to be his feudatories. The Government of India, after consulting legal opinion, did not accept this claim. Junagadh had put troops into both these states, and the other Kathiawar States had thereupon demanded the protection to which they were entitled from the Government of India.

He (Mr. Nehru) had had a long talk with Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan about this. They had both expressed their determination to settle the matter amicably. Mr. Nehru had suggested that the Junagadh troops should forthwith evacuate Mongrol and Babariawad, and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan had said that he would consider doing so. Mr. Nehru added that the Government of India

proposed to send troops to Porbandar to assure the neighbouring States of their safety. It had originally been their intention to announce the despatch of these troops to Pakistan and to the world at large, but on further consideration he (Mr. Nehru) had decided that, as a first step, he would send a telegram to Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan reminding him of their conversation and asking him to expedite the withdrawal of Junagadh troops from Mangrol and Bahariwad.