

Letter from the Maharaja Hari Singh to Sardar Patel

Threatening to withdraw accession due to India's inability to protect Kashmir against Pakistan, apprehending India's reference of Kashmir to UNO might go in favour of Pakistan

THE PALACE JAMMU TAWI
31 January 1948

MY DEAR SARDAR PATEL,

Since your departure from Jammu I have been watching developments of events here and outside. News from New York (has) been very depressing. Several thoughts have been turning round my mind and I have decided to lay them before you for sympathetic consideration and friendly advice. I do not wish to take any step except with your agreement.

The military situation as you know has been quite depressing since the arrival of Indian troops. Except the first gains in the Kashmir Valley there has been a debit balance throughout so far as achievements are concerned. The Indian troops armed in the Valley on 27 October. At that time we were in possession of about 3/4th of Poonch and the whole of Mirpur district. We had by then lost only small bits of Poonch and Muzaffarabad district. After the recapture of Baramulla and Uri; there has been a standstill. Two months have passed and the Indian troops are still at Uri. They attempted a venture to the town of Poonch and though they reached it was at great cost and the road was eventually lost. In the Poonch Jagir which was held by the State troops inch by inch we had to withdraw and eventually lost the whole of the Jagir except the town itself where about 40,000 people are besieged along with 4 battalions (3 State and 1 Indian). The situation is by no means satisfactory. I may mention that in the August disturbances with two battalions of the State troops we cleared the whole of the Poonch Jagir, peace was restored, the whole of the revenue was realised and the Administration was functioning normally. It was only in the second week of October that trouble again began in Poonch and our troops resisted it till about the end of December. But as no help was given they had eventually to fall back on Poonch town. If the Indian troops had ventured forward along with the State troops in Poonch, there would have been no difficulty in clearing that area of the raiders. I feel that the Indian military advisers take an exaggerated view about the difficulty of fighting in Poonch. I know some of that area myself and as a soldier can say that it is not difficult to clear Poonch of the raiders in the course of a fortnight or so if a strong

military venture (with modern weapons and equipment) is undertaken, but they would have to act mercilessly and not leniently.

In Mirpur district at the time when the Indian forces arrived we were still holding Mangla and our territory along the Jhelum Canal bank, but during the last two months we have lost Mangla, Alebeg, Gurdwara and the town of Mirpur, the town of Bhimber and the villages of Deva and Battala, the town of Rajouri and the whole of the area adjoining Chhamb and Noshera. Jhangar, a key-place both for Mirpur and Kotli, was lost after a defeat. These defeats have been a heavy blow to us and have also undermined the prestige of the Indian forces, Not a single town has so far been recovered by the Indian troops. The people judge an army from results and not from propaganda carried on about it. On the Kathua-Sialkot border attacks have intensified. Every day there is one raid or another. A number of villages have been burnt, people have been looted, women abducted and there have been killings also. The result is that all the border villages have been vacated and we have about 70,000 to 80,000 refugees in the city of Jammu. Crops, houses and valuables have been lost. Most of the people are also now vacating Jammu and its suburbs and are going to East Punjab. The situation, therefore, is worsening everyday.

The name of the Indian Army is getting into the mud in spite of its brilliant record. I was a member of the War Cabinet. I travelled in war zones during the Great War. The name of the Indian Army was at its highest pitch and it pains me to see that the name of that Army has become a topic of every tongue during these days and it is daily losing prestige. Some people think that it is not the fault of the Army but the fault of the policy that is being followed; others feel that it is the fault of the commanders who are quite new to the job. People who would have had to wait for 10 to 15 years have become generals and have been put in charge of operations. Opinions differ, but the fact is that the name of the Army is in the mud. Sardar Baldev Singh was here for a day. He has heard from our politicians, members of the public and from me and my Prime Minister all that everyone had to say. He told me secretly that he had ordered certain actions to be taken. I told him that a mere order is nothing unless it is implemented. When you kindly spent two days with us here a number of decisions were taken and you gave instructions in certain matters. Since your departure nothing has been done and as I have said, we had more serious attacks. The effort on the part of Pakistan is gaining ground every day. Their morale owing to success is going up. They loot property, they take away cattle and women and when they go back to Pakistan they incite people and tell them how much loot and what benefits there are to raid our territory. On the other hand our morale is rapidly going down. So far as the people are concerned they are thoroughly demoralised and they

start fleeing as soon as there is even a rumour of a raid. Even people living at distant places start fleeing when they see a fire five or six miles from their villages. So far as the Indian forces are concerned they do not leave their apportioned places to meet the raiders. There are no mobile columns to meet them. The work is left to a few Home Guards or to a platoon or so of very tired State forces. How can it be possible for them to engage 500 or 1000 raiders? Last time, you ordered guerillas to come into the State and take over this work. As far as I know no guerillas have arrived so far. Some Home Guards have been raised, but they have to look after their homes and they live in those very localities. Moreover, they are mostly not trained and cannot be expected to meet trained people. The work has mainly to be done by the Army and supplemented by the Home Guards and by organised guerillas.

In the situation, therefore, my position as Ruler has become very anomalous and one of great perplexity. People in the State continue sending me telegrams and asking for help. Our civil administration is now in the hands of the National Conference and military operations in the hands of the Indian Union. I have no voice or power either on the civil or the military side. The State forces are under the Indian Army Commander. The result, therefore, is that I have just to watch the terrible situation in a helpless manner, to look on at the abduction of women, killing and loss of my people without power to give them any redress whatsoever. People continue to approach me every day and still think that it lies in my power to give them relief and redress. You will realise that my position is getting most awkward every day, so long as the military situation is adverse to us and refugees continue pouring into the city and daily raids from Pakistan keep on coming without any reply from us.

Apart from the military situation the reference to the UNO and the proceedings that are hanging fire there are causing great uncertainty and perplexity not only to me but to every Hindu and Sikh in the State as well as to those who belong to the National Conference. The feeling is strongly gaining ground that the UN Security Council will take an adverse decision and that the State will eventually have to accede to Pakistan as a result of what the Security Council will decide. The Hindus and Sikhs have therefore started going away from the State as they anticipate that their fate as a result of the UNO decision will be the same as what happened in West Punjab and therefore it is much better to clear out of the State before that eventuality arises. The National Conference leaders also feel that they may eventually be let down by accepting the decision of the Security Council and that would be disastrous for them. My position in this matter is also precarious. You know I definitely acceded to the Indian Union with the idea that

the Union will not let us down and the State would remain acceded to the Union and my position and that of my dynasty would remain secure. It was for this reason that I accepted the advice of the Indian Union in the matter of internal administration. If we have to go to Pakistan it was wholly unnecessary to accede to India or to mould the internal administration according to the desire of the Indian Union. I feel that the internal administration or the question of accession is wholly foreign to the jurisdiction of the Security Council. The Indian Union only referred a limited question to the Security Council, but the whole issue has been enlarged and not only the matter of aggression by one Dominion over the other is being considered by the Security Council but internal questions of the formation of Interim Government and the matter of accession have all been taken notice of by them. It was a wrong step in going on the limited issue to the Security Council and then agreeing to the enlargement of the agenda before that Council. As soon as the Council enlarged the agenda the Indian Union should have withdrawn the reference and ended the matter.

In the situation described above a feeling comes to my mind as to the possible steps that I may take to make, so far as I am concerned, a clean breast of the situation. Sometimes I feel that I should withdraw the accession that I have made to the Indian Union. The Union only provisionally accepted the accession and if the Union cannot recover back our territory and is going eventually to agree to the decision of the Security Council which may result in handing us over to Pakistan then there is no point in sticking to the accession of the State to the Indian Union. For the time being it may be possible to have better terms from Pakistan, but that is immaterial because eventually it would mean an end of the dynasty and end of the Hindus and Sikhs in the State: There is an alternative possible for me and that is to withdraw the accession and that may kill the reference to the UNO because the Indian Union will have no right to continue the proceedings before the Council if the accession is withdrawn. The result may be a return to the position the State held before the accession. The difficulty in that situation, however, will be that the Indian troops cannot be maintained in the State except as volunteers to help the State. I am prepared to take over command of my own forces along with the forces of the Indian Army as volunteers to help the State. I am prepared to lead my Army personally and to command, if the Indian Union agrees, also their troops. It would certainly hearten my people and the troops. I know my country much better than any of your generals will know it even during the next several months or years and I am prepared to take the venture boldly rather than merely keep on sitting here doing nothing. It is for you to consider whether the Indian Union will accept this in both the

situations, whether after the withdrawal of the accession or even if the accession continues. I am tired of my present life and it is much better to die fighting than watch helplessly the heartbreaking misery of my people. So far as the internal political situation is concerned I have left the matter entirely to you personally. I am prepared to be a constitutional Ruler of the State and when a new constitution is framed I am quite willing to give responsible Government, but I am not prepared to go beyond the Mysore model because I am not satisfied that the leaders of the National Conference are for the time being very fit administrators or command the confidence of the Hindus and Sikhs and even of a large section of the Muslims. I must therefore keep certain reserved powers of which you are already aware and I must have a Dewan of my free choice as a member of the Cabinet and possibly as President.

Another alternative that strikes me is that if I can do nothing I should leave the State (short of Abdication) and reside outside so that people do not think that I can do anything for them. For their grievances they can hold the civil administration responsible or the Indian forces who are in charge of the defence of the State. The responsibility will then clearly be either of the Indian Union or of the Administration of Sheikh Abdullah. If there is any criticism those responsible can have it and the responsibility for the suffering of the people will not be mine. Of course, I well anticipate that as people started saying when I left Kashmir only on Mr. Menon's advice that I had run away from Srinagar they will say that I have left them in their hour of misery, but it is no use remaining in a position where one can do nothing merely to avoid criticism. Of course, if I go out of the State I will have to take the public into confidence and tell them the reasons why I am going out. The third alternative in the situation that has arisen is that the Indian Dominion discharges its duty on the military side effectively and makes an all-out effort to stop the raids from Pakistan and to drive out of the State not only the raiders but also all rebels. This can only be done if the Dominion really fights. It has avoided fighting so far. 'Iino or three courageous battles will more or less end this situation, and if it is delayed there is bound to be a catastrophe. Pakistan is more organised against Kashmir than the Indian Dominion, and as soon as snow melts it will start attacking Kashmir on all sides and the province of Ladakh will also come into the hands of the enemy and the Valley and the whole border will be raided and even double the number of troops at present in Jammu and Kashmir will not be able to save the situation. What should have been done and achieved a month before can still be achieved during the next month, but if matters are delayed and if owing to the UNO reference and the attitude of compromise the situation remains at a standstill it would become terribly grave after

the expiry of a month. Therefore, unless the Indian Union makes up its mind to fight fully and effectively, I may have to decide upon the two alternatives mentioned above.

I have mentioned all that I have been thinking about to you and this may be treated as a secret and private letter. The object of writing this is to place all my feelings, right or wrong, foolish or wise, before you so that you may be in full possession of the situation and may be able to advise me properly. I am sending this letter by hand of a special messenger and I hope you will kindly send me an early reply so that I may be well guided in this hour of crisis and distress.

With kindest regards and best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
HARI SINGH

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel,
New Delhi.

Source: Sardar Patel's Correspondence