

**Letter from Colonel E.W. Fletcher, Consul General of Great
Britain in Pondicherry to Major Atta-ul-Rahman, Under
Secretary to the Government of India, Department of External
Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, New Delhi**

D.O. No. 176-II/14.

British Consulate General,
Pondicherry, 17th August 1947.

Secret

My dear Rahman,

Will you please refer to my Secret D.O. No. 175-II/14 dated the 14th August 1947.

2. I enclose a translation of an official précis of Baron's speech on the 15th August 1947 to the heads of departments and leading notables and leaders of political parties. It will be observed that the French Government pledge themselves to respect the wishes of the people on two conditions: - that the Union of India has a constitution and is fully sovereign.

3. At a reception at the Consulate in the evening, when over a hundred people were present, including the Governor, French heads of departments, leading political leaders and leading members of the British and Indian communities, I made a short speech proposing the toast of the happiness and prosperity of the Union of India and Pakistan and their peoples and their continued friendship with Britain. In this speech I quoted an extract from His Excellency Lord

Mountbatten's speech at Karachi on the 14th August in which he referred to "two new Sovereign States" becoming members of the Commonwealth. I explained that the Commonwealth was an association of free sovereign states linked together by common interests with the Crown as a symbol. I said that each member State was completely independent and sovereign, free to make its own treaties, not bound declare was should Britain do so, and free to frame its own fiscal and economic policies etc. And, I added, most important of all was the fact that each member State was at any moment completely free to leave the Commonwealth, if it wishes. This, I said, was complete independence. I expressed regret that India should now be divided but hoped that, before long, the two parts would come together. Finally I said that, as frequent pronouncements had shown, the goal of British policy had always been India's complete autonomy. Difference between the British and Indians had been about the rate of progress towards that goal. Perhaps some had doubted the sincerity of British intentions. If so I thought that today no one would doubt any longer.

4. I purposely made the reference to sovereignty in view of Baron's remarks to me and his reference to sovereignty in his speech, and in order to remove any misapprehension Barons's remarks might have created. In my opinion, as I have stated before, the French are playing for time and have not lost hope of remaining in French India. Why else should they spend so much money on a territory which has only a sentimental value for them? Their attitude is, I think, governed by fear of doing anything here which may have repercussions in their other colonies, where, from all accounts, there is considerable agitation, and by a desire to retain a foot-hold for use should India suffer from

internal troubles, as Baron seems to think it may. It is too early to say what the reactions are, but I gather that only union with India will satisfy people and that they will not be put off by quibblings about constitution and sovereignty. The Archbishop of Pondicherry remarked to me that he wished France was capable of making a gesture similar to the British one. Monsieur Raboul, who accompanied Baron to Paris and is an intelligent and sensible young man, told me that the French India should join the Union of India, but that unfortunately the other departments including the Colonial Ministry, did not. Several French officials have remarked to me on the absurdity of trying to hang on in French India. The French are a proud race and the average Frenchman would rather that his country left in a dignified manner than be compelled to go. I understand that the 'loges' will be retroceded(six) on the 1st September. The graciousness of the gesture is somewhat impaired by the fact that the French are really giving back something over which their claims to sovereignty have never been recognized.

5. August 16th was marked by many private celebrations.

The French Government flew the flags of the Union of India and Pakistan on public buildings and government House was illuminated. We managed to put a good display of flags on the Consulate and to have it well illuminated. My efforts in this direction were much aided by the Electrical Engineer of the French Public Works Department, who is a subject of the Union of India on contract with the French, and who entered whole-heartedly into the arrangements. The Ashram also kindly provided flour and bread for the refreshments, as there is a famine of these commodities here, and refused payment. I have written to thank them and to say that gift was a gift to the Union of

India. There were many flags of the Union of India in the town. In the morning small processions carrying Union flags were numerous and in the evening there was a very large procession organized jointly by the Congress and Communist parties. The demonstrators, who included a number of women, sang patriotic songs and shouted slogans in honour of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders of the Indian Union. There were also slogans and banners calling on French Imperialism to leave and also some shouts of "White man, et out". I have heard rumours of a clash between the Socialists and some passers-by and that some of the Ashram buildings were stoned. It is said that one of the inmates of the Ashram had died as a result of injured inflicted by a stone, but these reports have yet to be confirmed.

Yours sincerely,
Sd/- (Fletcher)

Major Atta-r-Rahman,
Under Secretary to the Government of India,
Department of External Affairs and Commonwealth
Relations, New Delhi.