

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Series II Volume 34

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To K.N. Katju¹

New Delhi

July 28, 1956

My dear Kailas Nath,²

Your letter of the 27th July about our Tibet-China border.

I agree with you that there is no question of relying on another country's friendship in the future and a country should always take adequate precautions. At the same time, I am not at all concerned about the building of airfields, etc., in Tibet. That is the only possible way of developing communications in Tibet.

What I am concerned much more about is the state of the country on our side of the border and, more particularly, the trouble we are having in the Naga area. About this, I am writing separately.

What will happen in ten or twenty years it is difficult to prophesy, but it is certain that scientific and technological advance, which is so rapid today, will change the situation completely. In addition, everything will depend on how far India or China have progressed economically and otherwise. The best defence is economic and industrial growth and consequent prosperity. We have one of the best defences in the world in our north and north-eastern frontier. This defence consists not only of high mountains and difficult terrain on our side but on the other side a very difficult country,

¹ JN Collection

² Defence Minister

probably the most inhospitable in the world. Of course, this does not come in the way of aircraft flying over the Himalayas to India, but this cannot be prevented by any frontier arrangement.

I am not at all sure of what China may do ten or twenty years hence. But to protect ourselves against possible developments, we have to do other things and not try to put up a useless Maginot line. In particular, we have to have peace, quiet and contentment on our side of the border. I am worried more about the Naga trouble from this point of view than about anything that the Chinese may do.

I had intended writing to you separately in answer to your other letter about the Nagas. But there is not much that I wish to say which I have not said already. Making every allowance, I think that what our military have done is not satisfactory, and I see no reason to hush it up even in private.³ I intend speaking about this to General Shrinagesh in a day or two when I meet him.

So far as the major political decision is concerned, I think it will have to be taken. But, meanwhile, there are many minor political decisions which can be taken without too much difficulty. It must always be remembered that if the Nagas are made to feel that they have no other alternative but to fight and die, they will prefer doing so. We must give them a better alternative and seek their cooperation or at least of those who are prepared to cooperate. This has not been done so far either by the Assam Government or by our military.

Yours affectionately,

Jawaharlal

³ This refers to the incident on 4 July. An army soldier accidentally killed N. Haralu, a medical practitioner, on the outskirts of Kohima. See ante, p. 152

(ii) China and Myanmar

1. Chinese Incursions into Myanmar⁴

I agree generally with the note of Joint Secretary, Shri T.N. Kaul, dated 25th August.

2. I think that we must take some action in this matter⁵ with the Chinese Government, both because the Burmese Government have approached us⁶ and in order to protect our own interests, present and future. The question is what action we should take. It is better to proceed informally, though there is not very much difference between a formal note and an informal aide memoire.

3. It will not be enough for our Ambassador⁷ in Peking to have a talk with the Chinese Premier⁸. I think something more precise has to be given to the Chinese Government. This can be in the shape of an aide memoire.

⁴ Note to the Foreign Secretary and the Commonwealth Secretary, M EA, 26 August 1956. JN Collection.

⁵ This refers to the Myanmar-China frontier question in the context of Chinese incursions into Myanmar. On 31 July 1956, *The Nation* (Yangon) reported that 1,500 Chinese soldiers had penetrated up to 60 miles within Myanmar and seized 1,000 sq. miles of territory in Wa state. A few days later, the newspaper reported that the Chinese troops had made their presence felt during the previous few weeks at several points along a 50-mile stretch of the Myanmar-Yunan-Tibet border. Simultaneously, there were reports of the Chinese troops having entered Kachin state at two points. U Ba Swe, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, confirmed at a press conference on 7 August that the Chinese troops had occupied 750 to 1,000 sq. miles of the territory of Myanmar.

⁶ U Ba Swe requested India to intercede on behalf of Myanmar towards the solution of the border problem with China. *The Hindu* reported on 31 August that U Nu, former Prime Minister of Myanmar, had made a personal appeal to Nehru for India's good offices in effecting China's withdrawal from the occupied areas.

⁷ R.K. Nehru.

⁸ Chou En-lai.

4. Such an aide memoire should be prepared. We shall not send it till we have seen the Burmese Ministers who are likely to come here in about a week's time.⁹ But it would be a good thing if this aide memoire was prepared and fully considered by us even before the Burmese Ministers come here. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Cabinet might also discuss this matter. Probably Shri V.K. Krishna Menon will also be returning here before the end of the month. I should like him to study this matter also and see our aide memoire.

5. This aide memoire will require very careful preparation and we shall have to decide what we should say and what we should not say. I think that we should not raise directly the question of the Indian frontier with Tibet or China. But, indirectly, this may well come up in connection with the Macmahon line and also because it is alleged that the Chinese have come across our frontier also somewhere near the Burmese frontier (This has to be verified as soon as possible).

6. I entirely agree that the Colombo Powers should not be brought into the picture, so far as we are concerned. I take it that we shall, however, have to mention that the Burmese Government have discussed this matter with us.

7. I do not think it will be desirable for us to discuss in any detail the Burma China frontier question. We should not enter into a detailed argument about the various parts of that long frontier. But we might well say that a large part of this frontier has been determined and sometimes demarcated previously by treaties, exchanges of notes, etc. We are aware that the People's Government of China have claimed that they are not bound by previous treaties and agreements; but in international usage, no previous treaty or agreement can be denounced or altered unilaterally as other

⁹ A trade delegation led by Sao Hkum Hkio, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Myanmar, arrived in New Delhi on 31 August to finalize a trade agreement with India.

Governments are concerned with it. Also long user and possession, history, tradition, custom and natural geographical features are factors of considerable importance.

8. In any event, no change can be made unilaterally. It appears to be admitted that in July 1955, some Chinese forces took possession of certain areas in Burma. Whatever the argument may be about certain areas between Burma and China not being properly demarcated or being in dispute, any action involving the sending of forces to occupy such areas by one party is itself a unilateral change in the status quo then existing. The Chinese argument that the present status quo should remain,¹⁰ appears to me that the previous unilateral change in the status quo should be allowed to exist and then the matter discussed.

9. Apart from international usage and convention, any such unilateral action would be against both the spirit and the letter of the Panchsheel doctrine to which China, Burma, India and other countries have adhered.

10. Some mention might be made of the apprehensions of some countries in South East Asia which fear Chinese expansion. China is a great and powerful country respected all over South East Asia and elsewhere. At the same time, the mere fact of its great extent and strength gives rise to this misapprehension. Fortunately the friendly relations that have subsisted and have been strengthened during the past two or three years between these various countries and China, have had an effect of lessening these apprehensions. But recent developments on the Burma-China border have evidently increased these apprehensions again. Foreign agencies who do

¹⁰ The People's Daily(Beijing), in a special article on 4 August 1956, denied that the Chinese troops were in Myanmar. It said: "Although China and Burma have different opinions on the undemarcated zone, such differences should be settled through negotiations. Both sides should maintain the status quo and avoid disputes before the question is settled and it is in such a friendly spirit that the Chinese frontier troops have always been stationed there."

not approve of friendship between Burma and China exploit these differences and apprehensions, and other countries in South East Asia are also affected. Thus, not only the friendly relations between Burma and China, but the larger interests of peace in Asia are concerned and every effort should be made not to give any cause for suspicion or apprehension to these countries of South East Asia.

11. With the Burmese Government, we should make it clear that we are greatly interested in this matter, both for their own sake and ours, and we shall take it up in our own and rather informal way with the Chinese Government. But we can only do so with any effect if other countries are not brought into the picture, like the Colombo Powers. More particularly, if it is at all thought by the Chinese Government that the US Government is in any way behind all this objection on the part of Burma or India, the effect would be the reverse of what we desire, in view of the highly strained relations between the US and the People's Government of China. Every question between Burma and China, viewed in relation to the US Government and their views, will assume a different character and will inevitably stiffen the attitude of the Chinese Government and lessen the chances of any satisfactory agreement.

12. I have merely indicated very broadly the line of approach. I suggest that an informal aide memoire to be presented to the Chinese Government on our behalf might be drafted for consideration.

13. Meanwhile, it would be desirable to send copies of these notes to our Ambassador in Peking by bag, so that he may have this full background before him and may be able to deal with it adequately when he receives our aide memoire.