

November 1950

Dispatches from Delhi, Gangtok and Lhasa

(Source: JN Collection, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)

November 2

The Political Officer recommends the immediate sanction by telegram of a grant for the Mission in Lhasa of "rupees 3,500 (half of 7000) for evacuation of women and children from Lhasa Mission in case this becomes necessary." It shows the seriousness of the situation.

The same day, *The Hindu* announces 'Dalai Lama May Leave Tibet'.

The Madras-based newspaper writes: "Perhaps as a precautionary measure the Regent of the Dalai Lama is understood to have sounded the Government of India whether the Dalai Lama would be welcome in India if he decided under certain circumstances to leave Tibet. The Regent is understood to have been given an indication that the Government of India would not stand in the way of facilities being provided to the Dalai Lama to stay in India."

It notes the treaty between Nepal and Tibet in which "the former was under an obligation to provide military assistance to Tibet if the latter was attacked by any 'Raja'."

When Tibet approached Nepal for help, the latter expressed "its inability to intervene, presumably, on the ground that threat of the kind now surrounding Tibet was never envisaged when the treaty between the two countries was under discussion."

November 3

Delhi complains that since October 29, no news has been received from Lhasa: "We have had NO news from you for the last five days. Your telegram dated 27th October was greatly appreciated by us. We would like to be similarly kept informed of developments in Tibet and Lhasa's reactions thereto."

Delhi clearly starts to understand the seriousness of the situation.

News from Lhasa arrived a bit later in the day.

Delhi immediately cables Gangtok and Lhasa: "It is for the Tibetan Government to decide whether they should instruct their delegation to proceed to Peking or to appeal to the UN. Sinha will doubtless let us know their decision as soon as it has been taken. In case Tibet decides to appeal to the UN we shall support their appeal on the broad grounds that the problem should have been settled by peaceful negotiations and NOT by resort to force."

Sinha is informed that the text of the Indian Notes to the Chinese Government have been released to the press.

November 4

The Indian Mission in Lhasa tells Delhi that: "Tibetan Government were frankly incredulous of daily change in Government of India's policy though they received Government of India's advice with unconcealed JOY, after overcoming initial hesitation."

Sinha daily meets the officials of the Foreign Bureau in Lhasa. During these long sessions, he conveys the implications of Delhi's advice in the new circumstances: "All through discussions they gave vent to fears raised earlier. In particular they were visibly alarmed by the suggestion that they may send an appeal direct to U.N. which, they argued, would only hasten their 'deliverance'."

Sinha's own advice is that in the fast developing situation "when resistance by force would be of normal value I see NO alternative to an appeal to U.N." After discussing the issue of the appeal for several days with Sinha, the Tibetan Government finally agreed to send appeal to the U.N. and repeat it to all Buddhist Countries in South East Asia. Sinha adds: "Orders have already been sent to Tibetan Mission NOT to proceed to China."

As far as the military situation is concerned, the IFS officer admits that it is obscure: "The Chinese troops in Chamdo are regrouping for final assault on Lhasa. Lhalu Shape¹ last reported that he was withdrawing from Pemba Go towards Lhariguo² to avoid being outflanked by body of Chinese troops sent by Northern route to cut off his retreat."

Not only the PLA is advancing via the Northern route, but some Chinese troops are coming from Xinjiang: "A Tibetan frontier guard is reported to have encountered a well armed Chinese patrol in the neighbourhood of Rudok in Western Tibet."

Sinha reports to his bosses in Delhi: "Tibetans anticipate general offensive from all possible routes to PULVERIZE Tibetan resistance and to intercept Dalai Lama's flight to India."

It is in these circumstances that the Regent and the Kashag have sent an appeal requesting the Government of India to send "a special plane to fly His Holiness to India. I have pointed out difficulties and risk involved in such an undertaking and I believe they will NOT press for it."

The most important news: the Regent has decided to hand over power to Dalai Lama at a special Assembly to be convened by November 7: "An announcement to this effect will be made simultaneously from Lhasa and Kalimpong."

¹ Former Governor of Kham.

² Lhari Dzong or Jiali Xian

Sinha has been requested by the Tibetan Government to convey their "faith and utter reliance on Government of India in this crisis."

However everybody does not agree in Lhasa. The Government is facing "considerable opposition from DISSIDENT elements in Lhasa who might on eve of His Holiness' departure raise a storm in the city and INDULGE in loot and murder."

Apart some of the regiments of the Tibetan Army, it is not clear who are the 'dissidents' Sinha referring to: probably the most conservative elements of the Great Monasteries around the Tibetan capital.

In the meantime, the Kashag follows 'with anxiety and interest' the exchange of Notes between Government of India and Chinese Government. There is certainly a feeling of impuissance for the leaders of the Land of Snows. Sinha adds: "Exodus from Lhasa has already begun. Recent rumours of a revolution in Lhasa were widely current. Monks of three large monasteries near Lhasa along with soldiers of Trapchi Regiment who are opposed to the Dalai Lama's flight to India had planned to seize His Holiness. The coup however did NOT come off."

Sinha's conclusion is that Tibetan Government's morale which has never very high, but now the high officials are in panic. The Indian official is expecting people to flee from impending disaster.

In the afternoon, the answer to a telegram sent two days earlier to Gangtok comes: " You should assist the evacuation of women and children who wish to leave Lhasa if this becomes really necessary. Financial sanction will follow."

November 8

Using his information The PO is Gangtok warns: "if Dalai Lama gives any notice at all of his flight from Lhasa, he will give a false date so as to avoid

interception by monks who wish him to remain in Lhasa or by Tashilhunpo party.”

Further, he will of course travel incognito: “some Cabinet Ministers have been instructed to be in readiness to flee with him but that others will be left at Lhasa. Names of those who are to come and those who will remain are not known.”

This is quite extraordinary considering that no plane has ever flown to Lhasa. In the meantime, Shakabpa’s Mission has now received the instructions not to proceed to China and remain at Kalimpong: “Their representative who is now in Gangtok is awaiting an urgent telegram which may contain either text of appeal to United Nations or information regarding Dalai Lama’s plans.”

Dayal mentions the suspicion amongst Tibetan officials in Lhasa. For example Rimshi Pangda Tshang, the Tibetan Trade Agent in Yatung, who resides at Kalimpong as well as Lhasa for his business “is now detained at Lhasa as a sort of hostage for the good conduct of his brothers Rapga and Topgye. These two live in Kham and are said to have had a large number of followers under arms but there is no precise information as to their present whereabouts or activities.”

The disunity of the Tibetans at this important juncture of their history is tragic. Can we imagine, what would have happened if Traders like the Pangda Tshang had formed a united front with Lhasa against the Chinese.

November 10

Dayal cables Delhi as well as the Indian Mission in Lhasa and Indian Trade Agent in Gyantse³. Some press reports apparently stated that the Communists will soon ask Government of India to withdraw Trade Agent’s military escorts from Tibet.

³ Maj S.M. Krishnatry

It reminds Delhi that the Trade Agencies were established under Article V of 1904 Convention.⁴ "Escorts have been located in Tibet since then with full knowledge of the Chinese. Article VII of 1908 withdrawn on Chinese establishing effective police measures at trade Marts and on trade routes but this never happened. Government of India's right to maintain these escorts was formally acknowledged by Tibet in Article III of 1914 Convention."

But who is interested in legality during these tragic days.

Harishwar Dayal nevertheless explains: "Position of escorts is thus closely linked with that of the Trade Agencies themselves and their presence in Tibet is NOT a new thing but is in accordance with custom and with existing agreement. They are there solely for protective duties and have never been used for any purpose detrimental to interest of Tibet or of any other Power." The Political Officer still believes that the Chinese will continue as before once they reach Lhasa. He writes: "Moreover it would be inappropriate for Chinese to insist on their withdrawal and for us to accede to such a demand at this moment when Chinese more or less have created the possibility of disorder in Tibet. Obviously Chinese can NOT guarantee protection in this area at any rate in the period of confusion which is likely to precede the establishment of effective control by them I suggest these points be borne in mind when Chinese Government's communication is received."

All the Indian rights would be battered four years later. By that time, the PLA were be solidly settled in Tibet.

The Political Officer notes that in its last note to Beijing, Delhi omitted to mention our Trade Agency at Gartok: "Although we have found it convenient to treat this as a seasonal post without permanent headquarters and Trade

⁴ Article V says: "Escorts have been located in Tibet since then with full knowledge of the Chinese. Article VII of 1908 withdrawn on Chinese establishing effective police measures at trade Marts and on trade routes but this never happened. Government of India's right to maintain these escorts was formally acknowledged by Tibet in Article III of 1914 Convention."

Agent is already back in Indian territory on completion of this year's tour, it should not repeat not be overlooked that we have precisely the same right to locate a post at Gartok as at Gyantse and Yatung."

The entire trade with Ladakh, Himachal and Uttar Pradesh was the coordinated by the Trade Agent in Gartok who also facilitated the pilgrimage to Kailash/Mansarovar.

November 10

The Ministry answers the Political Officer's communication of the previous day; he has no information "about visit to Lhasa of a Nepalese official but we are making enquiries from Kathmandu."

In another cable also addressed to the PO, and repeated in Lhasa and Gyantse, Delhi "generally agrees with your views and would leave it to you to issue such instructions to Indian Mission and Trade Agencies as you consider proper."

It was about evacuation of the Agencies.

Later in the day, the PO writes to Delhi about the protection of the Indian Mission in Lhasa. Dayal mentions a telegram sent by the Military authorities to the Commanding Officer of the Escort in Gyantse instructing him to proceed "atone to Lhasa with six soldiers in civilian disguise."

Dayal explains that the move would result in complications if Indian soldiers are found by invaders at Lhasa. The Escort's original objective is only to protect the Trade Agents brigands, therefore the Mission itself could muster resources for its defence: "Mission has two rifles and a few pistols and revolvers. Very great care will have to be taken to ensure identity of military personnel is not repeat not disclosed and that departure of Officer Commanding from Gyantse does not repeat not attract notice."

Dayal continues: "Party will presumably have to depend on Tibetan authorities for transport. They must in any case be accompanied on the

journey by an intelligent Tibetan-knowing clerk from Gyantse. Trade Gyantse should arrange this and signal details of arrangements made to me and to Foreign [the Ministry] and Lhasa.”

Another cable is sent from Lhasa, this time about the possibility for a plane to land in Lhasa: “Average height of Lhasa plains is 12 thousand feet but planes coming from India will have to come over higher altitudes of about 17 thousand/18 thousand feet.”

Sinha explains that the Tibetan Government will “gladly construct run way under Aufschnaiter’s supervision⁵. Grateful for details regarding length of proposed run way. As it will be an emergency run way Tibetan Government propose to use mud and stones for its construction but will be good for a few landings.”

The Head of the Mission mentions the idea to destroy the landing ground immediately after it has served its purpose.

Delhi is also informed that the extraordinary session of the National Assembly convened on November 7 and 8 has approved of the transfer of power to the Dalai [Lama] who will shortly be installed at a ceremony. The Young Tibetan leader is then 15 year old.

Sinha adds that he will write is if there is anything important, but as there are NO newspapers in Tibet, “it would NOT be safe to give credence to bazaar GOSSIP.”

November 11

The Indian Mission conveys to Delhi and Gangtok that it would be grateful “if immediate orders are issued to Gyantse escort NOT to send party to Lhasa

⁵ Peter Aufschnaiter (2 November 1899 – 12 October 1973) was an Austrian mountaineer, agricultural scientist, geographer, and cartographer. He escaped from a PoW’s camp in India and lived seven years in Tibet with his fellow climber Austrian Heinrich Harrer. He took care of civil engineering while in Tibet.

for our protection till Tibetan Government's approval has been obtained. If party must come to Lhasa they should come with some arms and ammunition and not repeat not with medical stores."

Earlier on November 5, Sinha had suggested that he could get the services of 3 or 4 trained soldiers from the Gyantse escort: "It would be difficult for us to put up more than that number. Moreover the Escort should at all times be under the direction of the officer in charge of Mission."

Sinha also notes that as the situation in Lhasa has considerably improved, it would be inadvisable to alarm Tibetan Government by bringing in a party of 6 or 7 soldiers led by Captain Mithare. The latter is too well known to deceive Tibetans under any disguise: "In any event we shall require their services only when the Dalai [Lama] and his Government leave Lhasa."

Presumably, Sinha still thinks to evacuate the Tibetan leader by air.

Sinha concludes that the Escort in Gyantse may be alerted to be ready to send a party of 3 or 4 men under Mithare at short notice.

The PO takes up another subject: the deterioration in situation in Tibet may have affect the safety of mail service to Gyantse: "It would not repeat not be practicable to post military escort personnel at all the staging posts to accompany mail riders and in my opinion best course would be to arm the mail riders if escort at Gyantse and Yatung can provide weapons."

Dayal requests S.M. Krishnatry, the Trade Agent in Gyantse to "ascertain and report whether escort can spare arms for this purpose if Government of India agree to my suggestion."

He reminds Delhi that the service runs twice a week in each direction; four to six rifles would probably be sufficient: "I assume mail riders like most other Tibetans can handle firearms."

However, if the situation gets worst, "mail service between Gyantse and Lhasa would presumably cease." Dayal says that at present it is run by the

Tibetan Government "and I do not repeat not think Mission could run a private service in dangerous conditions."

In the meantime, many foreign correspondents 'smell' the scoop of the century. Dayal is informed by Delhi that Steele of the *New York Herald Tribune* and James Burke of *Life Magazine* are keen to visit Sikkim for a week after November 17 and the US Embassy in Delhi has vouched for them: "if you have NO objection please issue passes for entering Sikkim and deliver them to the Indian Officer for Tibetan affairs at Kalimpong".

The same day an answer to a telegram sent three days earlier informs Delhi that the appeal of the Tibetan Government had been sent from Kalimpong by Tibetan Delegation.

The P.O. in Sikkim is asked to pass on message to Yapsisekusho⁶. There are apparently doubts whether or not the Tibetan Government has sent orders to their Agent in Kalimpong to transmit the message to the United Nations. Delhi says: "We have not heard the name Yapsisekusho before and wonder if it has been distorted in transmission."

The Chinese propaganda asserted that the Nepalese were ready to send troops in Lhasa. Sinha denies the information: "Tibetan Government also have NO knowledge of a Nepalese Officer visiting Lhasa with Military escort." November 11 was a busy day for the ciphering officers. Lhasa conveys to Delhi that in view of the relative improvement in situation "I have decided to leave choice of evacuating women and children to members of Mission. Pemba Tsering⁷ has sent his wife down today to Gangtok. She left along with Tsaniag's family. Other members of Mission do NOT seem to be keen on

⁶ Yabshi Se Kusho or Phuntsok Tashi Takla, the Dalai Lama's brother-in-law and Commander of the Bodyguard Regiment

⁷ Pemba Tsering would later serve as Indian Trade Agent in Gyantse. He will passed away during the floods of July 1954.

parting with their families and being of semi Tibetan origin they are NOT as alarmed about the situation as others.

The situation even if not as critical as a few days earlier when no information trickled from the front in Kham, remained serious. Dayal tells Lhasa "We seem to have had no repeat no definite information about Chinese advance on Lhasa [since November 4]. CANNOT Tibetan Government give more precise information about position at Nagchuka, Iharigo and Giamda? Peking Radio claimed capture of Giamda some days ago."

News has apparently reached Lhasa that some of the young recruits of Robert Ford, manning the wireless station in Chamdo had been arrested along with their British boss. Dayal writes: "I suggest Chinese be asked immediately to furnish particulars of captured Indian nationals and to report on their welfare and arrange their early release. These persons were recruited directly by Tibetan Government without our intervention, as civilian wireless operators."

November 12

The PO in Sikkim says that he has been informed by the Tibetan Trade Representative that Tibetan Government and Dalai Lama "are sending some of their valuables to India for safety. These will arrive in separate consignments most probably via Nathula and Gangtok and will be consigned to Tibetan Trade Representatives in Kalimpong."

A list of the 'valuables' will be provided for each consignment. Dayal's request: "Grateful if Customs Authorities instructed urgently to allow these consignments to enter India without repeat without being submitted to usual examination and controls."

The boxes were consigned to the Tibet Trade Representative; the PO tells Delhi that "a concession would in any event be appropriate in view of their representative status. To avoid publicity orders to local authorities may

simply be to the effect that cases addressed to these officials be admitted without examination and it need not repeat not be stated that consignments consist of Tibetan Government's valuables."

Dayal is obviously keen to do a favour to Lhasa who felt let know by India for the appeal to the UN and the defence of Tibetan independence in general.

Delhi is further informed that all the boxes will bear the Tibetan Government's seal. Dayal even offers to send a letter from his office to facilitate the operation.

Sinha has been told in Lhasa that the Tibetan Government had summoned Yapshi Sekusho from Kalimpong to Gangtok to fetch the appeal which has been cabled from Kalimpong by Shakabpa: "Tibetan Government sent instructions for action on the appeal in their own code and requested us to send appeal in I.W.C. The appeal had to be in English and could NOT be sent in their own code."

Phuntsok Tashi has travelled with the appeal to Kalimpong; however Dayal says: "we are certain that instructions have been sent for its immediate dispatch to United Nations. They have also been asked to make copies of the appeal for dispatch by registered post to certain Ambassadors in New Delhi and Government of India."

Later that day, Sinha complains to Delhi and Gangtok about the length of the telegrams: "I must reiterate that it is unfair to send long telegrams with about 20 corrupt groups in each when I have no repeat no Cypher Assistant."

The Head of the Mission explains that his predecessor's original plan was to withdraw Mission to Gyantse "if and when the present regime collapsed or appeared in immediate danger of collapsing, for instance when officials

began to drift away. I am quoting his words from notes handed over to you during your visit to Lhasa.⁸"

He then reiterates the position of the Mission which has two rifles "but none who can use them." All Revolvers and pistols in the Mission have been presented to Tibetan officials. I admit I do NOT understand how a handful of Office Assistants is expected to resist the attacks of an armed mob. There is NO indication in office files here. That there was any intention of resisting brigands with such resources as Mission could muster."

The rain of cables continues' Delhi informs Lhasa and Gyantse that "Officer Commanding Escort Gyantse is being instructed not repeat not to proceed to Lhasa. Every care should of course be taken to ensure that identity of military personnel proceeding to Lhasa is not disclosed."

November 13

The situation becomes more complicated with a new front opening in Western Tibet. Dayal telegraphs: "Trade Agent Gartok reports according information received from the Garpon Western Tibet, Chinese troops from Sinkiang appeared at Garcye about 250 miles North East of Gartok [during] third week of October. Garpon Marlampa who was on his way to India for medical treatment has been recalled to his post and Dzongpon of Tsaparang ordered to take measures for Changthang." Dayal adds that the place mentioned may be Gakchi on west bank of Aru Tso⁹ which is on a route leading to Khotan. This seems to be north of the present National Highway 219¹⁰.

The PO mentions the report of the B.B.C. correspondent in Delhi. On November 11, the latter suggested that the Government of India was

⁸ Dayal visited Lhasa in September 1949

⁹ Longitude 82° 15' East, latitude 33° 50' North

¹⁰ Also known today as the Aksin Chin Road

“reconciled to complete occupation of Tibet by China and did NOT apprehend any real danger to India.”

Dayal explains that this information: “might cast doubts on sincerity of our protests to China and cause serious misunderstanding of our position in China and Tibet as well as elsewhere. I suggest therefore that nothing be said even informally to give the impression that we are NOT seriously concerned.”

The PO adds that according Chungking: “Chinese have again announced that they do not repeat not propose to upset Tibetan Government and way of life. If this were true there would be NO reason whatever for them to launch an invasion. History suggests that having established domination over Tibet they will begin to exercise pressure on our border territories.”

But Delhi and specially Nehru was not ready to accept this argument. The report of the B.B.C. will unfortunately turn prophetic and it was a matter of days for Delhi to fully reconcile with the invasion.

South Block has a question for Lhasa. According to press reports emanating from Kalimpong and quoting the Chinese radio, “an agreement had been reached between China and Tibet resulting in issue of cease-fire order.”

Delhi asks: “Have you any information about this reported agreement?”

Later, the cable of November 11 about the mail-riders is answered: “Arming mail-riders may invite attacks on them instead of warding them off.

However, we leave this matter to your discretion as you are best judge of local conditions.”

This is left at this.

Later, Delhi replies to an urgent telegram from Lhasa; it appears that on the suggestion of Robert Trumbull¹¹, an American airman Lassiter visited the

¹¹ Robert Trumbull reported for the New York Times. He was in Karachi on the day Pakistan became independent in 1947 -- and in New Delhi that night to watch India become

ministry and asked for permission to fly a plane to Lhasa to evacuate Dalai Lama and his party. He said that Trumbull had been asked by Shakabpa to make this flight: "The American airman, who has great experience of high altitude flying had NO doubt of his ability to land at Lhasa and take off. He thinks making of elaborate runway is unnecessary. Clearing a strip one mile long and 150 feet wide would be enough. This strip should be in the direction of the prevailing wind and its boundaries marked by lime. Maximum load to be carried in one trip is lbs. 3,500. The airman is willing to run a shuttle service if required."

The New York Times was obviously interested by the scoop. Delhi however is cautious: "Before permitting plane to undertake this flight we would require confirmation from Lhasa that the Dalai Lama has decided to leave Tibet and shall be grateful for any further comments you may wish to offer."

November 14

The Ministry in Delhi inquires again with Lhasa and Gangtok about some reports originating from Kalimpong saying that a settlement has been offered by the Chinese and accepted by the Tibetan National Assembly. China would have the responsibility for defence, external relations and communications of Tibet and will station "a token Chinese forces at Lhasa." Delhi asks Sinha to verify the truth in the report.

Later, Dayal tells Delhi that he has been informed by the Brigade Headquarters that they would not repeat not be happy about sending a few individual soldiers to Lhasa as they fear a party smaller than a platoon might NOT be able to defend itself if attacked on the road. According to the Army: "A small number of soldiers separated from their unit might be more of a liability than an asset in an emergency. Escort troops are Maharattas and

independent. He went on to report on rioting in Punjab, war in Kashmir and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

would be conspicuous even in disguise. If soldiers are to go to Lhasa at all costs they should go openly with Tibetan Govt's agreement as a Mission guard and invaders should be informed of their presence when the time comes. Even a small party of troops would have to be accompanied on the journey by an official who knows Tibetan."

The PO in Gangtok suggest that an alternative could be, if possible, for the Escort to lend some rifles to the Mission and "to send them to Lhasa with a chaprasi or two and a clerk from Gyantse. Mission staff and MENIALS could then provide protection against local bad characters." The PO adds that Sinha can give number of weapons already available with Mission.

The same day, Lhasa answers queries sent three days earlier by Delhi about the situation on the front: "Chinese may claim to have taken GIAMDA but as long as GIAMDA is still in Tibetan hands, the latter merely ignore such extravagant claims." Sinha adds that the Tibetans not willing to manufacture tales to suit expectations in certain quarters.

He however notes that the system of communications is deplorable in Tibet: "Officials at advance outposts are NOT known for their veracity and little information trickles in."

One remembers that when Robert Ford had offered Ngabo Shape to install a wireless set in Riwoche on the front, the Governor had said that it was not necessary.

But for Sinha, there are obvious indications that Chinese have slowed down, if NOT totally abandoned, their advance on Lhasa: "It is hard to account for this when the road to Lhasa was open, partisans had made the task easier and Tibetan resistance had become a negligible factor. Lhalu Shape the only Tibetan Commander between the Chinese and Lhasa had NO more than 500 regulars and about 1500 irregular troops with him. It almost seemed at one time as if he was leading the Chinese to Lhasa, retreating as he did before every rumour of Chinese advance. He has now reached Lhariguo."

Then the Head of Mission in Lhasa asks a crucial question: "Why did the Chinese halt?" He tries to answer: "Was it remorse at slaying a powerless foe or pressure of international opinion against a step so brutally offensive?" He then continues "Whatever it might have been, Chinese alarm and preoccupation in Korea which borders on industrial Manchuria must have caused them to divert attention temporarily from Tibet. But that is NO assurance that Tibet will be left to go her own way in future."

The truth was simpler, Mao, the strategist had decided to go to Lhasa in two stages. The first winter would be spent in Chamdo and once the Tibetans would have accepted their own 'liberation' the PLA will proceed to the Tibetan capital.

Sumul Sinha tries to convey the Tibetans' feelings: "[They] justifiably feel disconcerted every time Government of India refer to Chinese suzerainty over Tibet and accept it as GOSPEL truth, even when there has NOT been any traces of that suzerainty in Tibet for 30 years. Does suzerainty never die, and if it does how long does it take? Should however immortality be an attribute of suzerainty then Nepal ought NOT to be a passive spectator of events in Tibet."

Delhi is told that Lhasa has decided to send a Delegation to U.N. to plead their case. It consists of Dzasa Surkhang, Dzasa Ngawang Gyaltsen and Trungyik Chhenpo Chhombay Thupten.¹² Sinha reports that "We have got the Tibetan Government moving at last. It is a desperate bid on their part to rescue Tibet, or what is left of it, from the Communist avalanche."

Sinha analyses the appeal to the U.N.: "They have a good case but much would depend on its presentation. In any event a great deal would depend on the unqualified support of the Government of India. Last there be any misapprehensions I should like to reassure Government of India that there is

¹² Sinha gave reference in the 'Who's Who in Tibet' kept by the Indian Mission with a short bio of the Tibetan officials.

NO attempt on the part of Tibetans to vilify the Chinese. They leave it to the Chinese to bring opprobrium on themselves by their conduct. Chinese are aggressive, patronizing and have NOTHING but contempt for Tibetans. Even in this war they have NOT failed to give evidence of these traits."

This could have not pleased Nehru, who did not like to be 'lectured' by junior officers.

But Sinha adds: "Government of India are No doubt aware that Chinese have all along pursued an adventurous policy on this frontier and that Mongolian people have over-flowed on Indian side of the barrier. Perhaps hereafter Government of India may be more alert and less submissive."

Delhi is informed that the Dalai Lama will formally be invested with full powers on November 17 at a ceremony in the Potala Palace: "Tibetan Government have requested us to inform Government of India of the coming event."

More strange, the Head of the Mission tells Delhi that the work on the runway has begun: "They have chosen a field which is little over a square mile for this purpose. Lhasa Radio expects to give directions to the planes by radio." Sinha requests Delhi to send more precise details about the runway.

November 15

The Indian Mission answers some of the queries from Delhi.

First, there is absolutely NO basis in the report from Kalimpong that the Tibetans have reached a cease-fire agreement with China.

Then, the Tibetan Government has NO direct contacts with Chinese Government. It notes that "Sining¹³ Mission headed by Taktser Rimpochhe¹⁴

¹³ Xining in Qinghai province.

¹⁴ Takser Rinpoche is the Dalai Lama's elder brother and Abbot of Kumbum monastery near Xining. He is on his way to Lhasa.

has NOT been allowed to enter Nagchuka.¹⁵ They have been stopped at a place 3 days journey from Nagchuka and Dzongpon¹⁶ of Nagchuka who has gone out to meet them will report on the purpose of their Mission.”

It shows that Nagchuka was still under Lhasa’s control in November 1950. Sinha also report that a Tibetan N.C.O.¹⁷ has given a full account of the fall of Chamdo: “As Chinese armies converged in force on CHAMDO on 17th October. Ngapho [Ngabo] Shape decided to pull out with his troops from an indefensible position. He took the road to Enta but on receiving information that Enta had fallen he retreated towards Chamdo and took shelter in Trukho Gompa for night. Next morning he found himself besieged by Chinese troops approaching from Riwoche and Chamdo and had to surrender with his entire force of 3,000 men unconditionally.”

The narration of the surrender continues: “The men were shepherded from the monastery to an open space and made to parade before Chinese Army. Tibetan soldiers were thereupon paid five Chinese dollars each and told to return to their homes. Women and children belonging to the soldiers were paid at the rate of three dollars each. Their ponies and arms were confiscated. A group photograph of the prisoners was taken with Robert Ford standing in front of the men. He is reported to have been pulled out of the ranks and beaten, boxed and shaken and made to appear to be in front of the ranks as if he was leading the army.”

¹⁵ At that time, Nagchuka (now Nagchu) was the border of the Tibet administrated by Lhasa.

¹⁶ District Commissioner.

¹⁷ Non-Commission Officer.



The N.C.O. narrative continues: "Chinese Commander then addressed the prisoners of war saying that Tibet and China were friends but foreign intriguers had brought them into conflict. Ngapho Shape also spoke to the men saying that they had accepted defeat and must obey their conquerors. He however believed negotiations between the two Governments would come to a successful end. That marked the end of war in Kham."

According to the information sent by Sinha to Delhi, the Chinese troops in that sector were reported to be between 8,000 and 10,000 men: "They were mostly armed with rifles but some had light automatic weapons. NO artillery was used. Chinese officers wore fur-lined coats but the men were in padded uniforms. Chinese have sent captured arms and ponies to Jyekundo."

To conclude, Sinha says that the Tibetan Government fears that Robert Ford would NOT get a good treatment in the hands of his captors.

He was to stay 5 years in captivity; he recounted his ordeal in his book

Captured in Tibet.

Regarding the agreement supposedly signed between Lhasa and Beijing, Sinha says: "Report is entirely false. Grateful if such rumours are NOT allowed to spread."

The same day, Dayal remarks to Sinha that Richardson had revised his views about withdrawal to Gyantse when the Government of India expressed the wish to retain Mission in Lhasa as long as possible: "Rifles were sent to Lhasa at his instance for use by Mission chaprasis etc. and when he was in Gangtok recently he confirmed that he had intended to organize defence against bad characters with Mission's resources."

Richardson, who had the first Head of the Indian Mission after Independence relinquished his post in August 1950. He had apparently discussed an emergency situation with Dayal in Gangtok on his way back to India and Scotland.

Dayal adds that Pemba [Tsering] and Chakravarti, the radio operator recently obtained pistols "and I believe you have one. Chakravarti has had war service and I understand that Kazi Tashi¹⁸ also can handle weapons ," he tells Sinha who is assured that everybody is equally concerned about Mission's safety: "If after consulting your staff you are satisfied that adequate arrangements CANNOT be made locally, a way will NO doubt be found to overcome the obvious objections to sending soldiers from Gyantse." This shows the gravity of the situation.

Later, Gangtok takes up with Delhi the issue of the American aircraft flying from Indian base and comments that "[it] might lend colour to allegations that we are partners in an American plot and likely to expose our officials in Tibet to subsequent ill-treatment by Chinese. If flight has to take place Tibetan Government should at least first ask Government of India formally for permission to use Indian airfield so as to let it appear that initiative came from them."

¹⁸ A Sikkimese staff.

We have seen that Chinese propaganda was banking on the 'imperialist' card, to have sent a US aircraft with a US pilot and a US journalist, would have given credence to the Communist thesis.

November 16

For the first time, news have started coming from the Governor of Assam in Shillong. In a cable addressed to the ministry, the Advisor to the Governor has said that "signals information received from Walong¹⁹ that 60 Chinese soldiers have captured Drowa Gompa slightly north-east of Rima²⁰ along with two Tibetan officials who had gone there from Rima."

The Indian Mission in Lhasa is requested to send a telegram whether the Tibetan Government has any information about this area.

The PO in Gangtok has just met Shakabpa and his colleagues. The Tibetan official asked him "whether I had any information about Trumbull's offer of a plane for Dalai Lama's evacuation from Lhasa."

After Dayal told the Tibetans what he knew, Shakabpa asserted that at short notice a plane carrying only 6 passengers could fly out Lhasa: "Moreover since this person is only a newspaper correspondent they regarded him as a man of no repeat no standing, they had therefore advised Tibetan Government against accepting this offer and had told them that if they wanted a plane they should ask Government of India to send one."

Shakabpa, a fine diplomat had probably realized the political implications of *The New York Times* correspondent flying to Lhasa.

Shakabpa expressed the great gratitude for Government of India's recent statements and said that Tibetan Government had told them nothing of any agreement with Chinese reports of which seem to have emanated from Peking.

¹⁹ In the Lohit Valley, in today's Anjaw District of Arunachal Pradesh.

²⁰ Rima is the border post north of Kibithu, also in the Lohit Valley.

The Tibetans then asked whether Delhi could prevent the circulation of alarming reports, like the one of Natarajan, correspondent of the *Press Trust of India* in Kalimpong.

Malicious news emanating from Kalimpong have already mentioned in the correspondence: "This person has circulated false reports about overthrow of Tibetan Government occupation of Lhasa by Chinese forces etc. Such reports create panic and directly assist the invaders. They also bring the News Agency into disrepute."

Dayal suggest to Delhi that PTI should be asked either to remove Natarajan from Kalimpong or to insist on his verifying his information and not repeat not reporting as true information which he picks up in the bazaar or from Peking Radio."

November 17

The protection of the Mission in Lhasa comes again in the correspondence: "[It] has caused enough confusion and Government wish further debate on it to cease." The logical decision that Indian should be primarily guided by Sinha's advice as the Mission is under his responsibility.

The ministry adds: "Government will NOT send platoon or any large body of troops in uniform. They have, after consulting military authorities, decided to send four or six soldiers, armed but in plain clothes, which is number asks for them. Tibetan Government should be informed in advance and their agreement obtained. Question of sending military officer or anyone else to replace Sinha does NOT arise."

Further, in case of further danger to the Mission: "All Top Secret papers and other secret papers should be destroyed by burning. In order to maintain communications, the ciphers should not repeat not be destroyed; we are prepared for the eventuality of their falling in undesirable hands."

Despite the news that the Chinese seem to have stopped their advance, the situation remains tense in the Tibetan capital and the lack of staff is a serious issue, "We have not repeat not sufficient wireless operators to keep link open for 24 hours. However Army are shortly posting one of their operators here to maintain a link with Darjeeling etc."

New arrangements could then be done: "After he arrives Gangtok station can come on the air in the evening and on closed days. But since all messages exchanged between Delhi, Gangtok and Lhasa are common same time should be fixed for both Gangtok and Lhasa and I suggest 7 p.m. for log check up. On closed days usual schedules would be preferable to times suggested by you but on Sundays only morning schedule may be kept except in emergency."

When one goes through all these communications, one realizes how concise and to the points are the large majority of the telegrams. It is not the case of the Embassy in Beijing which during the same time sends pages and pages of semi-philosophical reports, lecturing on the greatness of the Chinese revolution and the closeness of the Chinese and Indian cultures.

The instructions for the PO and the Head of the Mission are: "Since Delhi will be open for 24 hours I presume that Gangtok and Lhasa can pass messages at any hour in case of grave emergency. Gangtok can change frequency at night but would find it difficult to work on less than 8 m cs. Please communicate night frequency for use in exceptional circumstances only."

Later during the Political Officer reports to Delhi that an aircraft has been seen flying towards Natula [Nathula pass near Chumbi Valley] at 11 this morning: "Have you any information of this flight? If it was unauthorized flight over Tibet persons responsible should be dealt with severely."

November 18

The Trade Agent in Gyantse answers the Mission's telegram of November 11 received on November 17): "I presume necessary orders to O.C. Escort are being issued through military authorities if, at some time, escort of 3 or 4 men are required at Lhasa."

The lack of proper communication is evident, probably due to the shortage of personal, but also the delay of transmission and the prevalent confusion. Let us not forget that on the previous day, the Dalai Lama has been enthroned as the temporal leader of Tibet.

Sinha writes: "Messages of felicitations on the occasion of the assumption of power by the Dalai Lama have been conveyed to His Holiness. I attended the investiture ceremony at 5 A.M. on 17th November."

Then Sinha branches on another topic, he had discussed with the members of Tibetan Delegation to U.N. who visited him on the previous day: "They are leaving Lhasa in four days. Tibetan Government are anxious to obtain services of an experienced Legal Adviser who has genuine interest in the cause of Tibet to assist members of Delegation. I have advised their Delegation to approach Government of India for help in finding out suitable person."

Regarding a suggestion of the Political Officer about the postal services, Sinha says: "I consider it inappropriate to discuss position of our Trade Posts and escorts in Tibet with Chinese at this stage." He explains the rationale of views: "it would be of doubtful value to salvage our Trade Posts if Tibet herself is lost to China. Nor would Chinese conquest of Tibet bring beneficial results to China should Indian opinion be alienated by crude Chinese methods and India decides to shut her doors on Tibet. Chinese would find it irksome to hold impoverished Tibet whose only outlet would be through remote Chinese posts which are already under sort of blockade."

Sinha could not guess the speed with which the Communists would link the Roof of the World to the mainland; but by the end of 1954, the Qinghai-Tibet highway and the Sichuan-Tibet highway would be opened.

Sinha continues and here he was right: "In any event Chinese will employ familiar tactics against Indian Posts which would reduce them to impotency. In my view our efforts should be bent on rescuing Tibet and if we fail we cannot continue to accord China same favourable treatment we gave Tibet as we shall then be inviting International Communism to establish itself on our weakly held Frontier States."

He adds one of the sentences which irked Nehru so much: "Grateful if Government of India do not bargain with Chinese for these Posts. This will NOT weaken presumption that our Treaty position remains unaltered."

Answering a telegram of November 13, Dayal is nervous that if after the slow-down of the Chinese forces, Lhasa returns to its picnics: "Tibetan sources of information are NOT distinguished for their speed or accuracy, and it is to be hoped that Tibetan Government will NOT lapse into a state of complacency over the slowing down of the Chinese advance on Lhasa, which is likely to be only temporary."

Neither Gangtok nor Lhasa understand why Mao has decided to spend the winter in Chamdo in order to regroup and give the final assault on Old Tibet. Dayal writes: "It is difficult to speculate as to reasons for this suspension [of military operations]. I should however discount the suggestion that remorse is among them, since if the Chinese were kindly disposed they need NOT have launched their invasion on the eve of Tibetan delegation's departure for Peking."

There is no doubt that remorse was an unknown sentiment in the Communists psyche.

The PO further reasons out: "In one of Chinese Government's replies to Government of India's recent representations shows that they resent our

interference in Tibetan affairs, as previous Chinese Governments have done." But rightly Dayal argues that India is China's friend: "their folly in forfeiting the sympathy which India has so far extended to them is obvious and it is possible that they might still have some regard for Indian opinion. If that is so, it is reasonable to speculate whether the invasion might NOT have been averted, or at any rate postponed till after the breakdown of negotiations, if a hint had been dropped in time. The PO quotes the words of the President's Address to Parliament, "India must necessarily concern herself with what happens in Tibet and hopes that the autonomy of this peaceful country will be maintained."

The reality was simple than this, Mao needed Tibet to stabilize the Communist empire. The colour was announced on January 1 and the plan was just implemented.

Dayal continues to think of different possible reasons for the Chinese to slow down their advance, but it probably more to satisfy Delhi's understanding (or misunderstanding) of the situation. Reasons are listed, some of them not very convincing:

(1) Chinese Government may be awaiting result of Taktser Rimpoche's mission

(2) Chinese may wish first to establish themselves firmly in regions in the rear of their advance forces by operations such as capture of Drowa Gompa. These operations will bring them to Assam border.

(3) Chinese never accepted the de facto border between 'Outer' and 'Inner' Tibet which was laid down in 1914 and has since existed with minor modifications.

Dayal suggests: "They may wish to show that they are merely vindicating what they regard as the true frontier, though this suggestion is weakened by appearance of their forces on banks of Aru Tso, and by their uncompromising statement that Tibet is an integral part of China."

And finally the Chinese may be hoping that disappearance of the Regent, "which had been expected for some time, might bring to the forefront new Tibetan personalities who might be prepared to negotiate a settlement agreeable to them. Regent was much hated by certain factions consisting of persons who had suffered at his hands on allegations of intrigue with the Chinese and of adherents of the late Reting Regent whom he imprisoned in 1947 and who died in captivity."

All these were mere speculation except for point 2 which was part of the plans of the 'liberation' campaign.

November 21

The Political Officer in Gangtok analyses for Delhi the implications of the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese. While the main actors in Delhi were not ready to listen, a few officers foresaw the consequences for India.

Harishwar Dayal writes: "Occupation by China of the whole of Tibet or of portions of Tibetan territory bordering India, Nepal and Bhutan, or establishment of a Chinese-inspired regime at Lhasa, will create a variety of problems which are doubt engaging Government of India's attention."

Unfortunately, Delhi's attention was more engaged in the Korean conflict and most of the cables/communications of the crucial months refer to the role that India can play on the Korean peninsula and very little thought is the 'liberation' of Tibet.

Dayal however has given his views in writing for the posterity: "As Government of India are aware, Tibetans have in the recent past asserted a claim to Ladakh, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Bhutan and portions of Assam Tribal Areas; large sections of the India-Tibet border in the western Himalaya are undefined and there have been border disputes between the Tibetans and Kashmir and Tehri Garhwal. The Chinese have a claim to suzerainty over Nepal and disputes with Burma over the northern frontier of Burma. India's

own frontier with Burma in this area is in part undemarcated and in part undefined."

These considerations were far from Delhi's preoccupation: the Revolution in China is the best thing which could happen to the Middle Kingdom and in any case 'China is a friend', believes many.

The Political Officer²¹ however writes: "We must therefore be prepared for the aggressive assertion of a variety of claims, either directly by the Chinese or through Chinese-sponsored Governments in Tibet and elsewhere. Indeed it was already rumoured, at a time when it seemed doubtful whether Tibet could expect any assistance from India in the preservation of her autonomy, that some Tibetans felt that their country's best course would be to come to a settlement with the Chinese and then with Chinese assistance make various territorial demands on India."

It would happen a few months later with Tawang area, when some Tibetan officials will approach the Chinese to get back Tawang for Tibet.

The sharp analysis continues: "Border disputes and intrigue necessitated negotiation of Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 and fixation of McMahon [McMahon] line as northern boundary of Assam Tribal Areas in 1914. When they occupied Lhasa in 1910 Chinese simultaneously exerted pressure on Bhutan; this move was defeated by the staunchness of the Maharaja of Bhutan and by negotiation of the 1910 Treaty between Great Britain and Bhutan which virtually gave Government of India control over Bhutan's external relations."

Dayal comments that the situation is further complicated by the present disturbed conditions in Nepal.²²

The study of the implication of the invasion continues: "Government of India are reported already to have warned the Chinese against violation of Indian

²¹ Who could have been selected as Indian Ambassador to China.

²² Dayal would later serve as Ambassador in Nepal, where he died in a mountain accident.

frontiers in operations against Tibet. They are also understood to have accepted the view that any threat to border territories namely Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan must be resisted if necessary with force. In view of the manifest dangers of the situation and of the lessons of history it will probably soon be necessary to warn the Chinese against interference in these territories as well."

The brilliant note also touches upon the military preparedness, but once again 'why to prepare to war when a friend is next door', would say Delhi, but for Dayal: "At the same time a state of military preparedness is also evidently desirable. Military authorities are NO doubt considering measures for strengthening border establishments both for maintenance of internal security where this is likely to be threatened and for security against external dangers. In so doing they must take account of problems of communication and transport. On this border National Highway No.31-A, which has been heavily damaged by natural calamities this year, is of vital importance and it is essential that it should be maintained in motorable condition throughout its length. Improvement and maintenance of important internal roads in Sikkim is also of great importance. National Highway ends in Gangtok and the frontiers as well as important areas inside Sikkim can be reached only by pack transport."

This note was written two weeks after the prophetic letter of Sardar Patel to Jawaharlal Nehru. It is thinkable that the Sardar requested the man on the spot to give his opinion on the situation in the Himalaya and the possible outcome of the Chinese presence on the other side of the range.

Dayal notes: "Strategic roads in Northern Sikkim are at present in poor condition because funds have NOT been forthcoming for the extensive repairs required to keep them open for pack transport in all seasons. It is necessary that these roads be put in order without delay. Work on them should begin at once because it can only be carried out in the dry months of

the winter season.”

The question of transportation will be taken up a few weeks later by the Border Defence Committee of Maj Gen Himmatsinghji. The report from Dayal probably helped them a great deal: “I understand that NO Animal Transport Companies are located in this region and unless transport arrangements are made in advance movement might be seriously hampered in an emergency. Local and Tibetan animals are most suitable for local conditions. Best course would be for military authorities to establish without delay an ‘irregular’, transport corps by requisitioning pack animals through local agencies. Animals could be kept under supervision, in the care of the muleteers themselves who could be paid for their maintenance and assisted when necessary in procurement of feeding-stuffs. This arrangement would be cheaper than immediate purchase of a large number of animals.”

To conclude, the PO brings back a letter sent from Lhasa on June 15, 1949 by Hugh Richardson, the Head of the Indian Mission: “it was suggested that we might consider occupation of the Chumbi Valley up to Phari in an extreme emergency. This suggestion was NOT favoured by Government of India at the time. It was however proposed as a purely defensive measure and with NO aggressive intention. An attack on Sikkim or Bhutan would call for defensive military operations by the Government of India. In such a situation occupation of the Chumbi Valley might be a vital factor in defence. In former times it formed part of the territories of the rulers of Sikkim from whom it was wrested by the Tibetans by force. It is now a thin wedge between Sikkim and Bhutan and through it lie important routes to both these territories. Control of this region means control of both Jelep La and Nathu La routes between Sikkim and Tibet as well as of the easiest routes into Western Bhutan both from our side and from Tibetan side. It is a trough with high mountains to both east and west and thus offers good defensive possibilities. I would therefore suggest that possibility of occupying the

Chumbi Valley be included in any defensive military plans though this step would NOT of course be taken unless we became involved in military operations in defence of our borders.”

Delhi was certainly not in a mood to think of ‘defensive’ plans.

Once again, one can imagine the difference it would have made for India if Dayal had been, as presented, the Indian Ambassador in China.

On the same day, the PO answers a telegram of November 19: “There is NO question of bargaining with Chinese regarding our establishments in Tibet existence of which has already been brought to their notice in Government of India’s note of October 31.”

Dayal uses strong words: “our Trade Agencies etc. are in Tibet by right and NOT as interlopers. Government of India have already expressed a wish to retain these posts and it is clearly desirable to do so long as circumstances permit.”

He further points out: “The obvious point that we could NOT extend to a Communist-dominated Tibet the concessions hitherto enjoyed by Tibetans has already been repeatedly stated.”

November 22

Lhasa sends the latest news to Delhi and Gangtok about the Western front: “A Tibetan reconnaissance party sent out from Rudok encountered party of 22 mounted Chinese troops at Tingung probably on South East bank of Dyap Tso on 4th November. They were on their way to Shigatse. Tibetan patrol was escorted to main Chinese camp two days march from TINGUNG.

Number of Chinese in camp was around 100.”

Probably to lower further the low morale of the Tibetans, the Chinese Commander asked the Tibetan patrol to convey the following message to Lhasa:

- Tibet should terminate her relations with U.K. and seek friendly relations with China.
- Chinese Government have elaborate plans to establish educational facilities in Tibet taking sympathetic view of Tibetan religion.
- Tibet should forthwith cease purchasing armaments from other countries and rely on Chinese to build up munitions factories in Tibet.
- Under Chinese supervision Tibet would prosper by making full uses of her waste lands. Tibet according to them is undeveloped and has great possibilities.
- They warned the Tibetans that if the Dalai Lama did NOT stop flirting with Anglo American bloc the main Chinese army of ten thousand men – encamped 15 days march from Tingung at Kongchen Nyatri would proceed with the conquest of Tibet.

This message shows the weakness of the Tibetan State which could not stop 100 soldiers and how the propaganda machines of Communist China had started working.

Dayal's message also says that the villagers in the neighbourhood of Rudok have also reported movement of batches of Chinese troops and the Dzungpon at Rudok has suggested that Tibetan radio station be removed from Rudok to Tsaparang.

On the eastern front, Delhi is informed that the Tibetans have retaken Lhodzong from local insurgents.

Who are the 'local insurgents' is not clear: probably, local militia sympathetic to the Chinese.

Maj S.M. Krishnatry, the Indian Trade Agent in Gyantse, a close friend of the Political Officer in Gangtok, tells the Ministry that he fully endorse Delhi's contention that "our right to maintain Escort should NOT be surrendered. If

we stand by 1914 Convention it may NOT be found worth while making a reference to Article VII of 1908 Regulations regarding Chinese establishing effective Police measures. Such Police measures could NOT be effective and Chinese could always find some excuse in native intransigence or non-cooperation to make things unpleasant for us."

The Escort will be one of the first casualties of Delhi accommodative policies vis-a-vis Beijing. Krishnatry however remarks: "As such maintenance of Escort should be closely linked with maintenance of our posts in Lhasa and Gyantse withdrawal of which may prove severely detrimental to our influence in Tibet and result in a virtual blackout beyond our frontier. Hypothetical to Chinese assuming full sovereign rights in Tibet it would be even more in the interest of mutual friendship to maintain these posts and insistence on withdrawing them or their Escort should leave Chinese intentions subject to grave doubts."

It was not to be. The Escort will be officially withdrawn after the Panchsheel Agreement of April 1954.

In another cable addressed to the Political Officer, Gyantse comes back to the idea to 'arm' the Mission in Lhasa and the postal staff: "Best plan would be to arm mail riders. In my opinion however two pistol revolvers would suffice each to be given to mail rider from either side and relayed along with the mail. Riders can carry them well concealed in their commodious long coats (bakus) and may be warned NOT to be trigger happy. Rifles would be too conspicuous and may attract trouble. Escort can neither spare arms nor are in a position to do so without orders from Military authorities."

As we have seen, Krishnatry served in the Maratha Light Infantry, before becoming the Indian Trade Agent.

November 23

Most of the copies of these cables,²³ communications or exchanges are marked for the Prime Minister's Office.

When the plan to send a plane to fetch the Dalai Lama from Lhasa came up, Nehru chose to intervene; he writes: "This business of sending an aircraft to Lhasa becomes more and more complicated and mysterious. Telegrams are sent from various places about it, enquires are made, but we have not considered it yet. We seem to have gone pretty far in giving certain assurances. I think that before anything further is done, this should be considered fully. We might even consult the Foreign Affairs Committee tomorrow."

According to him, there are two aspects of this question,

(1) the technical one and

(2) the political.

Nehru says: "In spite of Air Vice-Marshal Mukerjee's assurance, I do not see how an air journey across a strange and inhospitable land, crossing the Himalayas and trying to land on some improvised field, can be anything but adventurous and risky. To ask the Tibetans to prepare an air strip is not likely to help much, as they know nothing about it. Our sending an aircraft means definitely taking the risk of losing it."

²³ A diplomatic cable, also known as a diplomatic telegram or embassy cable, is the term given to a confidential text message exchanged between a diplomatic mission, like an embassy or a consulate, and the foreign ministry of its parent country.

According to Wikipedia: "The term cable derives from the time when the medium for such communications was international submarine communications cables. The term cablegram is also sometimes used. Due to the importance and sensitive nature of the subject matter, diplomatic cables are protected by the most elaborate security precautions to prevent unfettered access by the public and unauthorised interception by foreign governments. They are always encrypted, frequently by unbreakable one time pad ciphers using key material distributed using diplomatic couriers."

The cables under study are marked 'Top Secret' and uses OTP ciphers.

Then the political aspect should be considered, he adds, before concluding: "I do not know who the American pilot is, who has been consulted."

The same day, the Foreign Secretary, K.P.S. Menon writes to Dayal and Sinha. Delhi is unhappy with their suggestions. We have seen elsewhere the rest of the lecture.

November 25

In Delhi, the bosses are at a loss: "It is widely reported in Peking that top level discussions are proceeding in Chamdo between representatives of Lhasa administration and Chinese military authorities there. Our Ambassador states that there are indications that a peaceful arrangement will soon be reached and that token Army units will be permitted to enter Lhasa and political changes effected peacefully."

Delhi asks the Mission in Lhasa: "Have you heard anything to confirm this report?" It was of course part of the Chinese propaganda, happily echoed by Panikkar in Beijing.

In another cable, Delhi repeats the same query to Lhasa: "It is impossible to say how far this is true but opinion widely held in important circles here."

On that day, Dayal comes back to a telegram dated November 19 about the aircraft to Lhasa: "Tibetan Government has inquired through Shakabpa whether Government of India will allow use of Indian airfield in case it becomes necessary for Dalai Lama to escape from Lhasa by air. Presumably they wish to be assured that Government of India will give permission for flight by foreign aircraft if an Indian aircraft CANNOT be provided."

Dayal also speaks of "the likelihood of Indian aircraft being made available in case of need."

November 27

The Political Officer notes the content of the telegram about the 'negotiations': "It is rumoured here that a large number of monks from 3 Chief Monasteries have proceeded to Kham after being Blessed by Dalai Lama for negotiations with Chinese. Letters received by local residents from relatives in Lhasa also suggest that some people in Lhasa expect an early negotiated settlement. Mission Lhasa may be able to say how far these rumours are true."

Sinha, the diligent Head of the Mission immediately answers that the information probably relates to a party of about hundred monks from three Monasteries who left Lhasa recently to join Lhalu Shape as Advisory Body. These monks may possibly be able to stiffen morale of troops and create spirit of resistance amongst local population."

It is not very clear how 300 monks can act as an 'Advisory Body'. It is probably an euphemism for 'personal guard'.

Later, the PO, quoting Delhi's telegram of November 17, says that Assam (probably the Governor Jairamdas Dhaulatram) is anxious to receive "all possible news regarding Chinese troops movements North of MCMAHON line. Grateful for any further information that it may be possible to get in Lhasa."

November 28

Sumul Sinha clarifies to the Ministry and Gangtok that the Tibetan Government has NO information regarding alleged high level talks between Tibet and Chinese officials in Chamdo: "Kashag consider idea of Chinese negotiating with Tibetan prisoners as rather ridiculous. Nonetheless it is considered possible that captives are being made to accept terms which in any case Tibetan Government will repudiate unless such terms promise preservation of present status of Tibet and lead to evacuation of Chinese troops from Tibet. On the whole they consider Peking reports to be baseless."

It is interesting to note that it will a 'prisoner of war', Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, the deposed Governor of Chamdo who would head the negotiations with the Chinese in May 1951. The infamous 17-Point Agreement would be repudiated in March 1959 only.

Sinha continues: "Kashag mentioned that they are disillusioned by Chinese conduct. They are utterly distrustful of Chinese who break their promises almost as soon as they are made."

It was only a beginning, in the following years, the Tibetans will have many other occasions to be 'disillusioned'.

Sinha report to Delhi that according to the Kashag: "[The] Chinese made elaborate promises to Khampas who were placed under political tutelage in three stages. Within a few days of the conquest of Kham, Khampas entered the second stage and rigid controls were clamped down on life in Kham.

They feel that once Chinese are able to ring down Iron Curtain over Tibet there will be NO further prospect of Tibet being able to maintain any measure of autonomy."

How true it was, but Delhi still lived on a cloud.

According to Sinha, the Tibetan Government is still putting up a brave face: "[They] would rather accept defeat than bow to superior force employed by Chinese. They say that they are prepared for the consequences. They intend sending a further appeal to U.N. soon. Meanwhile they intend taking action to liberalize the administration under the guidance of His Holiness."

This might be rather late; in any case, too late for the Communists who were on their way to 'liberate' Tibet.

In continuation of the reprimand send earlier by Menon to Sinha, the Foreign Secretary comments further: "We do expect officers frankly to give their views and recommendations provided this is done objectively and dispassionately. We have nothing but appreciation for the manner in which you have been discharging your duties in a difficult assignment."

November 29

The gullible Indian Ambassador in Beijing is informed by Delhi that "Tibetan Government have NO information regarding any high-level talks between Tibetan and Chinese officials in Chamdo."

November 30

The Indian Mission conveys to Gangtok for some time "there have been mischievous rumours in Lhasa that the Government of India were willing to recognize de facto Chinese suzerainty over Tibet in return for Chinese acceptance of India's trade posts in Tibet."

Sinha however warns that in the changed circumstances "arising out of the establishment of Chinese rule over Tibet, old treaties will become untenable, if they do NOT automatically lapse." He says that he merely wanted to draw the PO's attention on this.

The Political Officer answers a cable from the previous day and informs Delhi that on instructions from Lhasa, the Tibetan Representatives have inquired whether Government of India can arrange accommodation at Kalimpong or Darjeeling for Dalai Lama and his party in case they have to leave Tibet. The query continues: "They say that they cannot find adequate accommodation privately. Though precise numbers cannot be stated party is likely to include at least a dozen officials and many servants."

Dayal notes: "I presume state and district authorities can requisition or obtain houses on rent without difficulty at this season. Darjeeling area would probably be most convenient place to locate the party to start with. They would also like it best because many Tibetans including officials are already living there and because late Dalai Lama spent his exile there."

Already in 1910, fleeing the Chinese troops the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had a long stay in Kalimpong. Dayal however adds: "Government of India may

consider whether for an extended stay it would NOT be better to move the party further away from this border say to Simla or elsewhere in Western Himalaya." He concludes: "Tibetans are evidently anxious to be fully prepared for all eventualities."

Though it is not directly related to the Mission in Lhasa or the Political Officer in Sikkim, it is worth mentioning a letter sent by Nehru to the Prime Minister of Kashmir, Shaikh Abdullah **on the same time**.

The Indian Prime Minister is worried about the J&K frontier with Tibet. He writes: "In view of developments in Tibet, Ladakh comes a little more in the world picture. There are frequent references to Ladakh in the foreign press. I do not personally think that these Tibetan developments will have any marked affect on Ladakh in the near future. Nevertheless, we have to be wide awake and wary."

It was a good intention, unfortunately a few years later, China will start building a road on Indian territory without the 'awareness of Delhi. We know the tragic consequences, even more than six decades later.

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche is mentioned by Nehru: "I heard yesterday that the Head Lama from Leh and some other Lamas were here in Delhi and that they wanted to see me. I have not met them yet as I have been very busy and I have asked Dharma Vira²⁴ to see them."

He tells the Shaikh that he might meet them later 'for a few minutes' because "I have heard indirectly that they are very unhappy over the state of affairs in Ladakh and feel rather bitter about it."

The Prime Minister who had certainly heard that a column of the PLA had entered via Western Tibet, says: "I do not know anything about the conditions in Ladakh but I feel that Ladakh, in the present context, has to be handled with great care, and someone with a wide appreciation of events must keep in constant touch with Ladakh or be in charge of it. It is to be

²⁴ A Member of Parliament.

considered almost an international problem because of Tibetan developments. It becomes essential also that the people of Ladakh should be more or less contented. If they are discontented, there will be a tendency to intrigue with outsiders."

Shaikh Abdullah is told by the Indian Prime Minister that he has to look after Ladakh, Nehru is conscious that the goodwill of the border population will be crucial in the future. He writes: "It is obvious that the Buddhist religion and the monasteries play a great part in the life of Ladakh. Therefore, it becomes necessary to treat these monasteries in a friendly way and have their goodwill and co-operation."

He frankly admits that Ladakh has been a completely neglected Province of Kashmir State for a hundred years: "Practically nothing has been done for it and they had a sensation of being a colony of Kashmir. This sensation has to go and they must be made to feel that they are common sharers in the freedom of the State and that they are going to profit by it."

Like for the populations of NEFA, the Prime Minister advocates minimum government interference in the local customs and affairs: "They should have the sensation of doing things by themselves, i.e. of a measure of self-government. All this may take some time but beginnings might be made in making them feel that way. Where possible, Ladakhis might be appointed to offices of responsibility and responsible positions in Ladakh. I am sure that even friendly and cooperative treatment will go a long way. If you took interest in this matter and discussed it with Ladakhi representatives and assured them of your policy, this itself would prove very helpful."

Nehru has a quite condescending approach to the Ladakhis: "These people know little about the outside world and are totally inexperienced. They may even act foolishly, but it does seem to me important to remove any trace of bitterness and resentment from their minds. The Head Lama is an influential

person and if he feels that way, many others will also do so. Ultimately, a difficult situation might be created."

It looks like a duplication of the *Philosophy of NEFA* so dear to Nehru and Verrier Edwin for the North-East.

Nehru tells the Kashmir Prime Minister that their main grievance is that the officials appointed there are not good and have functioned badly; that they have no integrity and are widely disliked and distrusted: "If this is their charge, it should be investigated. If this is their charge, it should be investigated. Apart from the truth of the charge, it is necessary to send an officer there who is trusted by the people if he has to produce any results."

From the Ladakhi side, there is another complain about the land reforms.

Nehru writes: "I wonder, if some special attention could be paid to this matter so that some kind of cooperative farming might be associated with the Comphas [Gompas or monasteries]. It will be difficult to do anything at present which breaks up the whole religious structure of Ladakh."

Finally, Nehru informs the Shaikh that he would see 'the Lamas' and "I shall not say much."

November 30

S.N. Haksar, a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, sends note to the members of the Cabinet for Foreign Affairs the Foreign Affairs Committee²⁵ regarding the flight of an aircraft to Lhasa to evacuate the Dalai Lama.

Haksar writes: "Although the Dalai Lama has no intention at present to leave Lhasa, an enquiry has been made by the Tibetan Government whether a plane could be sent by us to Lhasa to evacuate Dalai Lama should this

²⁵ Among them Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Deputy Prime Minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education, C. Rajagopalachari, Cabinet Minister and N. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar, Minister of Transport & Railways.

become necessary at a later date, and alternatively whether we would allow the use of Indian air-fields." This is on the assumption that the Tibetan Government make their own arrangements for a flight.

The note gives the technical background of the proposed flight and repeat the point made earlier by the Prime Minister: "The question has to be considered from the technical and the political aspects. ...There is a good airport at Darbhanga²⁶ and two air strips nearer Lhasa. Lhasa is well within range of a Dakota, and it can easily fly both ways without refueling. It is true that some of the highest peaks are in this area but it is possible to avoid them by flying over the valleys and the rivers which do not attain a height greater than 15 or 16 thousand feet."

Haksar notes that regarding the landing in Lhasa, the Indian Mission had mentioned a big plain which can be easily converted into a landing strip: "This is probably the same plain as is mentioned as a possible airfield site in the Report of Tolstoy and Dolan, two American Army Officers who travelled from India to China via Tibet in 1942-43 on a mission to survey the routes and possible airfields."

Tolstoy and Dolan were intelligence officers sent by the US government to enquire about the routes through Tibet. Haksar continues: "the plain is of hard-packed clay and allows an approach clear of mountains at both ends. All that seems to be needed is to clear it of stones. The Tibetan Government employ an Austrian²⁷ as an engineer and this man should be quite competent to supervise the removal of the stones."

²⁶ Darbhanga Airport is the longest runway airport of Bihar. It is spread over a 200-acre area of the city. It was built exclusively for the use of Maharajah of Darbhanga's aeroplanes. Spirit Air started operations from Darbhanga in 2009, but was forced to withdraw due to its smaller strip.

Darbhangaviations was a private Indian airline started in 1950 by Maharaja Kameshwar Singh of Darbhanga. It had three aircraft and became defunct by 1962.

²⁷ Peter Aufshneiter

The Committee is informed that Air Vice Marshal Mukherji believes that the flight to Lhasa does not entail "any special hazard and is no more risky than, for instance, a flight to Leh". It was his conclusion after studying the maps and reading the report of the American Mission.

Regarding the political aspect, it is obviously trickier.

Patel and his colleagues are told that Robert Trumbull is taking a keen interest in this matter: "Evidently, he wants to get a first class newspaper story out of it, and is prepared to pay the cost of the flight. He has been in communication with the Tibetan authorities at Lhasa and with Shakabpa." Trumbull has suggested Lessitor, an American pilot, to undertake this flight. Lessitor is said to have considerable experience of flying over the 'hump' and is at present the chief pilot of the Darbhanga Airways, whose plane he intends to use for the purpose."

Haksar adds that this would be a purely private arrangement: "The Tibetan Government charter a plane from an Air Company and the Government of India have no concern with it beyond granting permission to an air company to undertake a charter flight which is ordinarily granted as a matter of course."

Further the Government of India is ready to offer "sanctuary to the Dalai Lama in India and it would be difficult to stand in the way of his evacuation by withholding the formal sanction to make the charter flight."

The Joint Secretary suggests that it should be possible to refuse permission to Trumbull's plane "if we can make alternative arrangements for the flight." But the Committee is warned that the Trumbull's initiative may "splash to the world the news that he was the rescuer it would give the Chinese the much needed evidence in support of their allegation of Anglo-American influences being at work in Tibet. It would be preferable that we, and not Trumbull, arrange the plane."

The Dalai Lama will eventually escape to Chumbi by road.

Haksar explains the rationale of the Indian position: "It should not be difficult to get an Indian pilot to undertake the flight but even if one is not available and Lessitor has to be employed, he should be engaged by us rather than by Robert Trumbull. In view of the importance of keeping the proposed flight of Dalai Lama a close secret, a search for an Indian pilot has not been made yet but it would begin if the principle of the flight is accepted. In that case a reply should go to Tibet that it would be possible to send a plane when necessary provided the weather permits and there is no apprehension of any resistance at the Lhasa air-strip then."