

**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**

BRITISH CONSULATE – GENERAL

Camp, Coonoor

D.O. No CAMP L 4

11-6-1947

SECRET

My dear Rahman,

The Governor had a long conversation with me yesterday during which he read me extracts from a long letter which he had written to the secretary of the French Colonial Minister. In this letter he has insisted that it impossible for France to keep French India in the French Union unless it becomes autonomous, for its continued existence must depend on the friendly toleration of the future Governments of Hindustan and Pakistan. Autonomy must, he said, be granted within three months and preferably by August 15<sup>th</sup>. He also said in his letter that, unless the French Government could give him their confidence, he wished to be relieved as soon as possible by a governor armed with wide powers. An interesting part of his letter was that in which he envisaged the future fragmentation of India. In particular he referred to the probability of splits within the ranks of the Congress. His idea of making Pondicherry a university town for the spread of French culture had, he said, met with the approval of the members of the Government of India whom he had whom he had recently met in Delhi. He said they had told him that

so far the only foreign culture which India had known was the Anglo-Saxon one and that they would welcome" having a window open on France and its culture". He also stated that the population of French India were perplexed by events in British India and that, if the two Dominions of Hindustan and Pakistan remained within the British Commonwealth, they would certainly prefer-provided they had complete local autonomy – to remain in the French Union rather than join a Dominion of the British Commonwealth.

2. He referred in his conversation with me to his recent visit to Delhi and said that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had mentioned the question of the 'loges'. He said that he was recommending to the French Government that they should at once abandon all claims to the 'loges' as a "generous gesture". This, he said, should be done at once, but he feared that French insistence on legal formalities might delay matters for as much as a year. The Ministry of the Colonies might adopt the view that to give up the 'loges' was a cession of sovereignty which would entail a reference to the French parliament and the enactment of special legislation. He reiterated that he was impressing on the French Government that the immediate abandonment of all claims to the 'loges'. Which were of no material value to France, and speedy action to give French India a status equivalent to that of the Dominions of Hindustan and Pakistan were imperative. The acceptance of Dominion status temporarily by the Congress and Muslim League gave France a breathing space by "to delay would be to lose all". In former conversations with me he has always regarded Chandernagore as lost to France. Now, however, he thinks that, if his recommendations are acted on, it may be possible to keep Chandernagore within the French Union. He is more doubtful about Mahé. In conclusion he said that he

had left Delhi with the impression that the Indian leaders he had met were not in any hurry to deal with the problem of French India but would leave it until they had settled the numerous and more important problems confronting them.

3. If Baron has told me the truth the situation now boils down to a tussle between him and reactionary elements in the Ministry of the Colonies. If his views prevail French India will presumably obtain local autonomy and the status of a Dominion within the French Union. The Ministry are, however, according to Baron, not enamoured of the idea as they fear that it may create an awkward precedent for other parts of the French Empire – he quoted Madagascar – where the French are faced with nationalist agitation. I think, too, that, as Baron has told them that India is likely to be further divided after the departure of the British, they might prefer to gamble on the Governments of Pakistan and Hindustan being too occupied with internal troubles to worry about French India, rather than to take action likely to encourage nationalist aspirations in other parts of their colonial empire. There is a further point which seems worthy of attention, and that is the intention of the French to make Pondicherry a university town and a center of French culture while keeping it within the French Union and separate from independent India. In view of Baron's remarks about the probable fragmentation of India after the British withdrawal I think that it might be as well to consider the possibility that the French may cherish hopes of being able to derive benefits other than purely cultural ones. It is not necessary for the spread of French culture to keep a part of India within the French Union. The establishment of French cultural and educational institutions in cooperation with the Governments of Hindustan and Pakistan in such centers as Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras would seem to be

amore efficacious way of doing this than the creation of a 'cite universitaire' in an insignificant and comparatively remote place like Pondicherry. It is of course quite possible that the French are only actuated by '*amour propre*' and the desire to establish a cultural center which will attract the best intellects of India. At the same time it should, I think, be remembered that Communism, though it has lately somewhat lost ground, is still very strong in France and that the possibility of the Communist party coming to power still exists. Were this to happen, a French cultural and educational center in a part of India outside the jurisdiction of any Indian Government might be embarrassing. French India is, however, so dependent economically on India that I do not believe it would ever be very difficult to detach it from France by economic measures. Provided that chaos does not develop in South India, the mass of the population of French India will, I think, always be more inclined to join their brothers in India rather than remain under the aegis of a foreign power. It is also unlikely that the petty local politicians who will come to power if autonomy is granted will give them either an efficient or honest administration. At the moment the Communists are still the dominant party in Pondicherry and local autonomy will mean that French India will be run by them, for they are in a majority in the Representative Assembly of French India. This may prove embarrassing to the Madras and Bengal Governments.

4. I have made the comments in para 3 above with considerable diffidence as I necessarily have only a restricted local view of things, and I do not know the opinions of the Government of India on the future of French India. If it is possible I should be very grateful if I can be given an indication of the Government of India's views and also a

brief account of what transpired at Baron's interviews in Delhi as so far  
I have only his account to go on.

(Sd) Fletcher

Major Atta-ul-Rahman,  
Under Secretary to the Government of India  
in the Department of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations.