

Goa Gets Her Freedom!

Portugal tried its best to play the victim card in the context of Dadra & Nagar Haveli (DNH) shedding off the colonial yoke by popular will in July / August 1954. The Salazar regime tried to mobilize opinion amongst their NATO allies , especially the UK which found itself on a rather sticky wicket : for while the sovereigns of England and Portugal had signed several treaties of eternal support and co-operation, the Queen was also the head of the Commonwealth, and India was the 'jewel' ! Even as it treaded cautiously, trying to balance both sides, India took umbrage and the British press reported 'Nehru's snub to Britain', while Portugal protested that the BBC coverage had been pro-India !

This dispatch from UK's Lisbon mission (August 2, 1954) says it all : *'The Portuguese are not foolish as to imagine that the UK would go to war with India ..all they ask us to do is to bring home to the Indian government that their present behavior is such as to benefit no one in the long run but the Russians ..*

In a bid to de-escalate the tension, India did accept the Portuguese proposal of (August 8, 1954)of a Joint team of observers with three to be nominated by each side , but it never got off the ground because of the procedural issues. Portugal had in fact approached Denmark Belgium, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Switzerland, Luxembourg, US,UK , Italy and Vatican, but UK developed cold feet for it realized that if this principle were to be accepted, there would be many more Joint Observers in its existing colonies! Once this became a global

issue – opinions were divided on predicted lines, with Belgium, Italy, Chile, South Africa Brazil, Spain, Argentina and the Holy See making oral representations to the Government of India and USSR, China, Nepal, Iraq and Burma coming out to defend the Indian position . Egypt was guarded in its response. Canada agreed to take up the matter privately with Nehru, but recused itself from the Joint Observer's team.

A perusal of the now unclassified confidential documents also shows that Salazar did consider a 'frontier modification': surrender of DNH in lieu of a formal Indian recognition over Goa, Daman and Diu. Fortunately, this was not seriously followed up by the UK or any other government, and there was no formal proposal made in this regard. The public opinion of India would have been aghast , for the entire opposition (PSP, CPI, Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party) and the Goan nationalists led by TB Cunha and PD Gaitonde , among others were anguished by the 'legalistic' interpretations of Nehru and his team . They pointed out that less than 50,000 of the 638,000 voters of Goa, Daman and Diu chose to exercise their ballot in the elections called by the Portuguese state in 1955 .

Writing in the *Free Goa* of May 25, 1957, TB Cunha said 'the Prime Minister's statement about the Portuguese possessions in India betrays a perplexed state of mind, and shows a lack of determination on the part of the government.' Efforts at economic blockade of Goa were not successful as the Karachi port became active to extend logistics support for import of oil, and export of minerals.

Meanwhile, the Afro Asian bloc under the NAM and the UN Trusteeship Council were putting tremendous pressure on Portugal, and it was finding itself increasingly isolated. On December 15, 1960, the UNGA voted overwhelmingly (68 to six with 17 abstentions) that

Portugal was obliged under the UN charter to furnish a report on her colonial territories (including Goa). This gave India the confidence to pass the legislation to incorporate DNH into India on August 11, 1961. Meanwhile the construction of the Berlin Wall began on August 13 and the attention of US and NATO shifted to the European theatre. US made it clear to Portugal that its military assistance was only in the context of NATO. This was quite a relief for India, and on August 17 Nehru informed the Parliament that 'the steps for the liberation of Goa could include the use of Indian Army at the appropriate time'. Soon thereafter at the Belgrade NAM conference in September, he came under fire from the African delegates for not doing enough to liberate Goa, which would signal the end of Portugese colonies in Africa. Thus by the time he returned to India, the die had been cast and instructions were given to the Indian Army to take steps for Operation Vijay, which lasted a little over twenty six hours!