

GOA — S.E.A.T.O. BASE FOR WAR?

“Whoever hath seen Goa need not see Lisbon.”

—Portuguese Colonialist proverb.

By A. M. KATHRADA

SPEAKING at a conference at Sitapur on 21st August, 1955, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said:—

“It is not that we covet Goa. That little bit of territory makes no difference to this great country. But even a small enclave under foreign colonial rule does make a difference and it is a constant irritant both to the self-respect and national interest of India. It may be a source of danger more especially if a hostile and reactionary country like Portugal holds on to it.”

Lest the full significance of these words escape the attention of the more casual reader let us reconsider them against a background of certain facts and recent happenings.

(1) Portugal is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. When joining N.A.T.O. in 1951 she signed a pact of mutual assistance and defence with the United States, saying:—

“Portugal was to use such monies and armaments as necessary to defend its imperial possessions in India and elsewhere.”

(2) The United States and Portugal have only recently constructed a huge airfield in Goa at the cost of millions of rupees.

(3) While international reaction subtly or blatantly combined to maintain Goa as a N.A.T.O. or S.E.A.T.O. base in Asia, in another part of the colonial world; in Morocco and Algeria, this same N.A.T.O. organisation was confirming the very dangers and fears that Pandit Nehru had expressed.

Speaking of the fresh massacres in North Africa the Chief of the Moroccan Information Office in New York, Ben Aboud said at a Press Conference held at the Egyptian Embassy on 25th August:—

It was “tragically ironic that N.A.T.O. has served in North Africa only to allow the French to pour forces into that area to kill defenceless people by the thousands with American weapons.”

(4) And finally we have the words of Dr. Salazar, ruthless dictator of Portugal for 27 years:—

“... if the question of Goa is understood as the transfer to the Indian Union of sovereignty over the Portuguese territories, it is certain that the question will not be solved by peaceful means.”

Stripped of all diplomatic coatings in statesmen's pronouncements, the above is the gist of the problem in Goa. We have on the one hand the colonial powers of the world, all lined up to maintain the status quo in Goa for military and economic purposes, while on the other we have the might of the erstwhile oppressed colonial people who have taken their destiny into their own hands and are determined that not only Goa but all similar pockets of imperialism everywhere are eradicated. This attitude was sharply expressed on behalf of Asian and African peoples by Premier Chou En Lai of China, one of the newest countries to cast off the yoke of oppression and foreign rule, when speaking at the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung:—

“One should say,” he said, “that now the common desire of the awakened countries and peoples of Asia and Africa is to oppose racial discrimination and to demand fundamental human rights, to oppose colonialism and to demand national independence, to firmly defend their own territorial integrity and sovereignty. The struggle of the Egyptian people for the restoration of their sovereignty over the Suez Canal zone, the struggle of the Iranian people for the restoration of sovereignty over their petroleum resources and the demand for the restoration of the territorial rights of India over Goa and of Indonesia over West Irian, have all won sympathy from many countries in Asia and Africa. China's will to liberate her own territory, Taiwan, has likewise won the support of all righteous people in the Asian and African region.”

TRAGEDY OF PORTUGUESE COLONIALISM

Before going into details of the conditions obtaining in Goa let us first get a brief insight into life in Portugal itself and in one of its colonies nearer to us in South Africa.

Salazar, of “democracy is out of date” notoriety, has as mentioned before been dictator of fascist Portugal for 27 years. Apart from it being a fully fledged police state with no democratic rights for the masses of the people, 40 per cent of the population of Portugal is illiterate. The agricultural workers receive an average wage of 30s. per week. In 1953 the infant mortality rate in Portugal was as high as 96 per thousand compared with 28 in Britain and 19 in Sweden.

So much for conditions in Portugal itself. How much worse must it be for its colonial subjects!

Take Angola for instance, or the “Hungry Country,” as it is tragically known to its unfortunate inhabitants—the country of the 379,000 “contradados”—literal translation, “contract workers”—in fact nothing less than 20th century slaves.

To assist us in coming to this conclusion we have the words of a

slave master himself, politely titled General Manager of the Cassequel Sugar Plantation, a Senhor Monteiro, in reply to questions put to him by the prominent British author, Basil Davidson.

Q. What happens if a forced labourer refuses to work?

A. Oh, but they will work. They do.

Q. Still, supposing they won't?

A. Then we send them to the police station.

Q. And what do the police do with them?

A. To men who won't work? Put them in prison of course.

Some while before this, a Senhor Henrique Galvaö, member of the Portuguese National Assembly and a supporter of Salazar carried out an objective investigation into conditions in Angola and paid the price by being flung into Salazar's prison. His report, which was published later by the Portuguese underground came to the conclusion that "it was not surprising that infant mortality reaches a figure of 60 per cent and that a death rate as high as 40 per cent is not rare among workers themselves."

Of labour, Galvaö says that the settlers make requests for a " 'supply' of workers. This word 'supply' is used indifferently of goods or of men.

"In some ways the situation is worse than simple slavery. Under slavery after all, the Native is bought as an animal; his owner prefers him to remain as fit as a horse or an ox. Yet here the Native is not bought—he is hired from the State although he is called a free man. And his employer cares little if he sickens or dies once he is working, because when he sickens or dies, his employer will simply ask for another."

To complete the tragedy of Portuguese colonialism it must be remembered that less than $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the population of Angola is at school. In April, 1954, for its population of 4 million, Angola had 151 doctors.

"GOA DOURADA"

"Goa Dourada" (Golden Goa) as it was known to the Portuguese conquerors was taken in 1510 by Affonso de Albuquerque. Situated on the western coast of India it has an area of 1,301 square miles and has deposits of iron, manganese and cocoanut.

According to official Portuguese statistics of 1951 there were about 638,000 people in the territories of Goa, Daman and Diu of whom 600,000 were in Goa.

Goa is an integral part of India historically, geographically, technically, economically, culturally and the Portuguese have no moral, legal or any other right over that enclave. In the words of the Argentinian newspaper, "Democracia":—

"Portugal cannot take its usurption of Goa for 400 years as a title of possession."

Out of the total population of 638,000 in the three Portuguese enclaves, all but 1,438 are Indian. 61 per cent of the population are Hindu and 37 per cent Christian. The Konki language is predominant in Goa while in Daman and Diu, Gujrati is spoken.

Being a duty-free port Goa is a haven for foreign racketeers and smugglers. It is estimated that organised smuggling of gold and liquor takes place over the border to the value of £10 million a year.

There is no democratic electoral system to speak of in Goa. Only recently the Portuguese authorities engineered farcical legislative council "elections" under police threats and intimidation.

Of the total population of over 600,000 there were only 50,000 registered voters. The legislative Council consists of 23 members, of whom five are nominated by the Government, seven chosen by the Portuguese-supported organisations and eleven "elected" by a so-called direct poll.

TRANQUILITY?

Under such conditions the Portuguese maintained that all was quiet in Goa. On the 20th March, 1954 a statement was issued by the Foreign Ministry of Portugal that there was "complete tranquility of life in the Portuguese territory of Goa where the fundamental guarantees and civil liberties prescribed by law are fully respected."

As against this we have the facts of the growth both in Portugal and Goa of a powerful movement for the return of Goa to India. In fact just about 31 days before the Portuguese statement, on the 17th of February, 1954, the popular Goan patriot, Dr. Gaitonde was arrested and deported to Lisbon. To mark the first anniversary of the arrest of their leader, widespread demonstrations took place in Panjim, Mohase, Canacon and many parts of Goa on February 17th, this year, as a result of which over 150 Goans were arrested.

History books tell us that there were no less than 50 major revolts against the Portuguese in Goa in the last 200 years. As recently as August of this year the correspondent of the London "Observer," a newspaper by no means friendly disposed towards colonial peoples, reported from Goa that people from all walks of life clearly indicated that they preferred to return to India. He wrote:—

"I could find no Hindu peasant willing to praise Portugal. On the other hand, I found the middle-class, both Hindu and Roman Catholic, turning towards India."

So great, for instance, is the nationalist movement in the village of Sakoi Veram that the Portuguese threatened to bomb it. The inhabitants were given four days, ending on the 28th August, to quit the village, where over 300 Goans were arrested since 15th August. According to the Goan National Congress sources a further 120 Goans were arrested in Margoa, Bicholem and other villages.

The fighters for freedom have burnt down hutments for billeting Portuguese troops. Meanwhile, the Satyagraha Council of the Goan National Congress at a two-day meeting on 22nd August at the Indian port of Karwar decided to intensify the non co-operation movement.

In Portugal itself there is increasing solidarity with the Goan freedom movement. Already in September, 1954, Professor Rui Luiz Gomez and four others were arrested for issuing a Manifesto demanding negotiations between India and Portugal for the settlement of the Goa issue and protesting against the despatch of troops to Goa. In recent weeks, slogans and posters are reported to have appeared in many parts of Portugal supporting the movement to unite Goa with India and demanding the release of the imprisoned Professor and his compatriots.

WORLD-WIDE SUPPORT

The great 29-nation Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung representing 1,600 million people declared its opposition to any form of colonialism and its full support for colonial peoples fighting against imperialist oppression.

Support for the struggle of the Goan peoples has been echoed in country after country all over the world.

In the People's Republic of China scores of rallies were held and attended by thousands of people. In Chunking, Sian, Peking, Canton, Wuhan, Shengyang, Shanghai, Tienstan, masses of people from all walks of life gathered together to make their voices heard.

Thousands gathered at Hanoi in **Vietnam** to support peace leader, Le Dinh Tham proclaim:—

“Goa belongs to India; it would surely return to the bosom of the Indian people.”

From **Burma** came support in the form of an all-parties resolution in Parliament denouncing imperialism in Goa, while Prime Minister U Nu described the events there as;

“a kind of spark that can lead to conflagration,” adding that “Asians cannot tolerate colonialism whether by Portugal or any other country.”

Joining in support, **Cairo's** powerful paper “Al Akhbar” noted that; “Portuguese imperialism had departed and will continue to depart.”

Canada's “St. Louis Post” foresaw that;

“Portugal will eventually be forced to recognise realities. Why not now before there is further bloodshed, further bitterness?”

Similar sentiments were expressed in **Korean** “Rodong Shinmoon,” in “Abadi” of **Indonesia**, “Landadipa” of **Ceylon**, etc. The **Iraqi** daily, “Al Bilad” warned that:

“Imperialism is finished and neither Portuguese bullets in Goa nor French arms in North Africa can restore it to life.”

And so, in country after country of Asia and Africa, in newspaper editorials, through Ministerial pronouncements, at mass rallies the peoples voiced their feelings against Portuguese injustice.

IN INDIA

In India we witnessed what was perhaps an unprecedented unity of the people and the various political parties in support of the Goan people. An All-Parties Convention of M.P.'s and Members of Legislative Assemblies held in New Delhi on July 23rd unanimously agreed to urge the Government to make a final effort to settle the Goa issue through peaceful negotiations. Should these negotiations fail the Convention appealed to the Government to “enforce suitable sanctions to eliminate once and for all the remnants of colonialism in India.” Thousands of men and women came forward as volunteers in the Satyagraha movement. The Government of India had already withdrawn its legation from Lisbon in July, 1953 and had asked Portugal to do likewise by the 8th August, 1955.

On August 15th, 1955 when large batches of volunteers entered Goa, the Portuguese fascists with the aid of armed soldiers carried out the most brutal atrocities against the unarmed volunteers which resulted in the death of 31 people, and injuries to many more.

“In a stone customs post at the border,” writes a correspondent of “Time,” describing the Portuguese murder, “were ten Portuguese and Goan policemen armed with rifles and stenguns. Half concealed in thick bush behind them were white Portuguese and Negro soldiers from Mozambique. The satyagrahas had advanced 30 feet inside the Goa border when the Portuguese fired a burst over their heads. At once the satyagrahas, as previously instructed by their leaders, crouched down on the muddy ground. Then one woman satyagraha jumped up and holding the Indian flag overhead, ran forward. A second burst from the customs house brought her down. Two men satyagrahas tried to reach her, but the police shot them down and continued firing into the rest of the crouching satyagrahas.”

Naturally this and similar incidents gave rise to a wave of anger throughout India. In Delhi, schools, shops and various enterprises observed a complete stoppage of work, while 200,000 people gathered at a protest rally. Similar strikes and demonstrations took place in Bombay, Calcutta, Hyderabad and Nagpur. Indian newspapers condemned the massacres in equally strong terms.

In Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru condemned the massacre as “brutal and extremely uncivilised.” The Chairman of the Council of States, S. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the atrocities of the Portuguese authorities were a provocation and a challenge to India. E. M. Naboomprasad, Acting Secretary-General of the Indian Communist Party, declared in a statement that the Portuguese “murders were

a challenge to the people and the Indian Government." He demanded immediate and effective steps to liberate Goa.

In addition to this the Indian Government ordered three shipping companies to suspend their services to Goa and Indian dockers have announced their decision to boycott all cargo steamers bound for Goa.

Under such circumstances when the masses of people not only of India but throughout the world looked forward eagerly and determinedly to the "dynamic policy" that had been promised, Pandit Nehru's two statements on the situation must have come as a sorry disappointment, to say the least.

Firstly, at a specially summoned meeting of the parliamentary parties, he denounced the riots, accused opposition parties of organising the riots deliberately to discredit him. Then he apologised to all foreign embassies and firms who had suffered damage and offered them compensation.

Then, as if not satisfied with his first weak and uncalled for statement, Pandit Nehru in another statement on September 6th expressed disapproval of mass and individual satyagraha by the Indian people. He said India was "not out to grab Goa," she was simply concerned with wresting Goa from Portuguese domination. He also spoke of "some international forces at work which are bringing the Goan problem nearer to solution."

This attitude surely came as an anti-climax to the happenings in Goa in the recent period. The vagueness of his statements, the complete absence of the "dynamic policy" that he had promised the Indian people has earned for Mr. Nehru the criticism of even some of his close followers.

The influential "Times of India" attacked him for "vaccilation, contradiction and appeasement." The "Free Press Journal" accused him of "obliquely encouraging the satyagrahas with vague, irresponsible statements that satyagraha will solve the problems of Goan freedom."

During the debate in the Council of States, the leader of the Communist group Mr. Bhupesh Gupta said Mr. Nehru was pursuing a "policy of failure" in Goa.

Perhaps the most welcome and realistic suggestions to the masses of the Indian and colonial peoples came from another Communist leader, A. K. Gopalan. He suggested that firmer measures, including economic sanctions against the Portuguese in Goa, must be taken, **"and if necessary, the Government should resort to police action to restore peace."**

Taking it from any angle the situation in Goa has become as clear as can be. The clear alignment of international forces on the question leaves no room for doubt as to who the real friends of colonial freedom have been, and still are, and who the enemies.

One wonders then what Pandit Nehru referred to when he vaguely spoke of "some international forces at work" that were supposed to be bringing the problem nearer solution. Is his continued vagueness, vaccilation and apparent neutrality still warranted?