



Prime Minister Nehru in pensive mood

The Conflicting Issues

Answering questions in Parliament at the end of August and the beginning of September, Mr Nehru clarified the picture on the Sino-Indian border by confirming that:

(a) Chinese patrols had attacked Indian outposts on the north-eastern frontier (the McMahon line) and had occupied an outpost at Longju. This was quoted as 'a case of clear aggression'; part of the frontier had now been put under the direct control of the Indian military authorities

(b) a sector of the Chinese road linking Sinkiang and Tibet had been built across Indian territory at Ladakh; Indian protests had been of no avail, the Chinese insisting this area to be theirs

(c) negotiations with China about a disputed section of territory on the border of Uttar Pradesh had come to nothing.

The Indian Prime Minister also made the important declaration that any aggression against the independent States of Bhutan and Sikkim would be considered as aggression against India. He did so in reply to questions about reports that China was contemplating the establishment of a 'Himalayan Federation' which would include Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. China was also said to have started a propaganda campaign for the inclusion of all Mongolian and Mongoloid people into the 'great Chinese family'. While these reports, which aroused much indignation in India, remain unconfirmed, Chinese maps do claim over 200 square miles of Bhutan's territory.

The Chinese government was slow to react publicly to these disclosures, but broke its silence on 8th September. Premier Chou En-lai, in a letter to Mr Nehru, declared the Indian government responsible for the Sino-Indian border incidents and laid claims to large sections of Indian territory. The letter affirmed that differences should be settled by negotiation, pending which the *status quo* should be preserved on the frontier, but it insisted that Indian troops should be withdrawn immediately from areas which China considered as hers. Chou En-lai alleged the situation on the Sino-Indian frontier had been caused by the 'trespassing and provocation of the Indian troops.'

The Chinese letter confirmed that the border incidents should be seen first in the Tibetan context. While past incidents, it said, had been settled without tension because of the friendly attitude on both sides, the position changed after the Tibetan rebellion; since then the 'border situation has become increasingly tense'; not only had Indian troops occupied Longju and other areas, but they were also 'shielding armed Tibetan rebel bandits.' Chou En-lai went on:

'I can assure your Excellency that it is merely for the purpose of preventing remnant armed Tibetan rebels from crossing the border back and forth to carry out harassing activities that the Chinese government have in recent months despatched guard units to be stationed on the south-eastern part of the Tibetan region of China.'

The Chinese statement rejected the Indian view that the legality of the present Sino-Indian frontier rested on agreements concluded over the past hundred years and asserted that the frontier had never been officially determined. It described the McMahon line as 'decidedly illegal' being 'a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibet region and China,' and it claimed 90,000 square kilometres of territory south of the McMahon line as Chinese. Similarly, Chou En-lai denied the validity of the present Ladakh frontier, and asserted that there existed 'a customary line derived from historical tradition' which was shown on Chinese maps. He was more evasive about the frontiers with Bhutan and Sikkim, perhaps in an attempt to discredit reports about the 'Himalayan Federation.' He said that this question did not fall 'within the present scope of discussion,' and that China would live in friendship with both regions, acknowledging their relationship with India.

Chou En-lai's letter was followed by a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (11th to 13th September) which launched a campaign against India and Mr Nehru personally. But the speakers added little to the contents of Chou En-lai's letter. A *People's Daily* editorial of 16th September sounded a more conciliatory note saying that 'after a heated round of argument, there is reason to expect an easing of the tension that has existed in Sino-Indian relations.' Nevertheless both sides make it clear that they intend to adhere to their respective interpretation of the frontiers. The *People's Daily* again suggested that the *status quo* should be maintained pending negotiations, but this usually means that China will stay put once she had made an incursion across the frontier.

Kashmir's valleys offer Communist China gateways into India

