

## Creation of the Indian Union: how a new nation was formed

by Mary Burdman

January 26, 2000 was the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of India. While the story of the tragic Partition of the subcontinent, into India and West and East Pakistan, is everywhere known, there is another, not so well known, but remarkable story of the creation of the Indian Union. The Indian Republic's early leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, and especially, the courageous Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, forged a national Union out of the many hundreds of separate states which had made up the British Raj, to found an entirely new nation.

The claim of many British historians, that it was the British Raj which "united" India, is a fraud. Even after Partition, London planned to leave a balkanized India to its new leaders on Aug. 15, 1947. The situation could have rapidly degenerated into unredeemable chaos. Under the leadership of the resolute Patel, India's first Deputy Prime Minister, the new government, even before the transfer of power, acted decisively, both politically, and, when necessary, militarily, to create a united India.

The book *Integration of the Indian States* (Madras, India: Orient Longman, 1956; second edition, 1985), by Vapal Pan-gunni Menon, tells the compelling story of how this fight for the Union was won. Menon himself, as Secretary for the Ministry of States established by Patel just before Independence, played a crucial role in this process.

Even more than Partition, the balkanization of India, which could have resulted from the deliberate British decision to demolish the political structure of the separate states, could have been the most serious threat to the survival of the new Indian republic. India's leaders acted with the decisive quality they have at times shown since — as, for example, Prime Minister Nehru did in Goa, when he relieved it of the occupation by the derelict Portuguese Empire in December 1961, or as

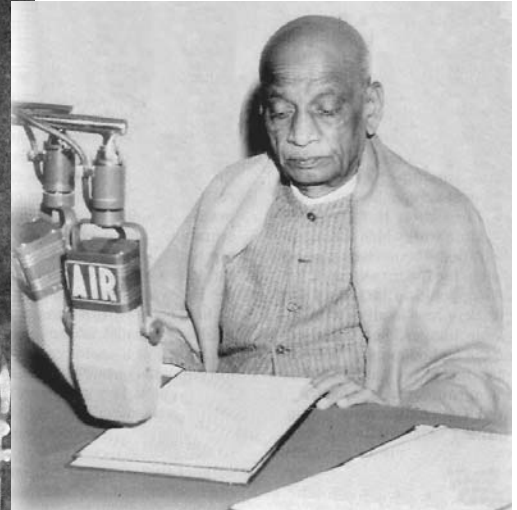
Indira Gandhi did in 1971, when Indian forces intervened to aid Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in its break from Pakistan — to ensure the survival of the nation, which they had been struggling for decades to free from British imperial rule.

### The 'Native states'

More than two centuries of British colonization set up the situation India's leaders had to deal with in the summer of 1947. At the height of the British Raj, there were 562 separate princely states, occupying two-fifths of India's land, and the territories, known as "British India," which were directly run by the colonial regime. On Aug. 15, 1947, the date of Independence, 554 princely states still existed along India's borders. These states, which ranged in size from the equivalent of European nations, to tiny principdoms of one or two square miles, were scattered in a chaotic patchwork throughout the territory of India. Yet, by the time that the new constitution came into force on Jan. 26, 1950, all had been successfully integrated into the Republic of India.

Almost all the states were in extremely backward conditions, politically and economically. Only two of the states had any kind of responsible government. Even where legislatures existed, they were generally simply appointed, and the ruler always had a veto. The princes maintained personal rule — with much British advice and assistance.

The states maintained their own military forces, and their own economic and fiscal policies — there was not even a general customs system throughout the subcontinent. Ports within the states had their own tariff systems, and at the same time, the states had no voice in running British India's ports. There were no common communications or taxation systems, or financial regulations in the subcontinent. Stretches of railways were owned separately by state governments.



*Sardar Patel (left, swearing in the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar as Rajpramukh, inaugurating the Saurashtra Union, and above, making a radio broadcast), the revolutionary and statesman of the Union of India. Gandhi said of him: "The task of dealing with the princes was truly formidable, but I am convinced that the Sardar was the only person who could have coped with it."*

In the provinces of British India at the time of Independence, there was a well-developed government administration. There was a uniform legal system, judiciary, and tax system, and (relatively) unified infrastructure.

In contrast, in most of the states, administration was "personal and primitive." Some states, such as Travancore, Mysore, and Baroda, did have well-organized administration; in a few, especially in the far south, government, education, and other institutional capabilities were as well developed, and in some ways more advanced, than in the provinces of British India. But, for the most part, while the princes lived in palaces, for the population, extreme poverty and backwardness were widespread. Some states were so small—a few acres—that they had no real government at all. There were 327 tiny states, with an average area of 20 square miles, and an average population of 3,000. Yet, under the Raj, these were political units, totally separate from the rest of India.

### **Echoes of Abraham Lincoln**

To meet the emergency situation to preserve the nation's unity, on July 4, 1947, Menon wrote a statement for the inauguration of the Ministry of States, which was approved and issued by Patel the next day. The statement said:

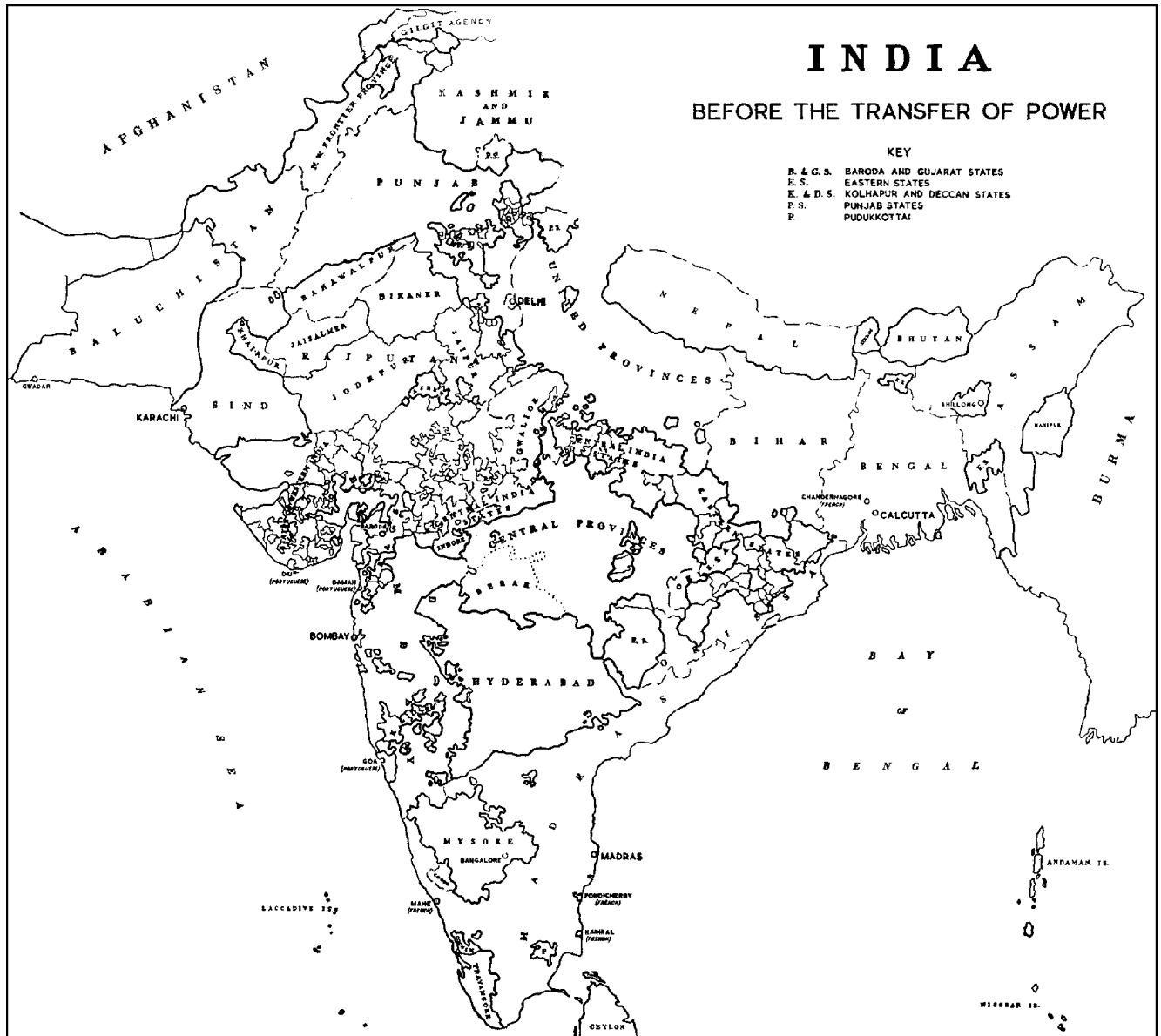
"The states have already accepted the basic principle, that for defence, foreign affairs, and communications, they would come into the Indian Union. We ask no more of them than

accession on these three subjects, in which the common interests of the country are involved. . . .

"This country with its institutions is the proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in the states and some in British India, but all alike partake of its culture and character. We are all knit together by bonds of blood and feeling, no less than of self-interest. None can segregate us into segments; no impassable barriers can be set up between us. I suggest that it is therefore better for us to make laws sitting together as friends, than as to make treaties as aliens. I invite my friends the rulers of states and their people, to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness and cooperation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our motherland, for the common good of all."

The ruling party, the Indian National Congress, "are no enemies of the Princely Order but, on the other hand, wish them and their people under their aegis all prosperity, contentment, and happiness. Nor would it be my policy, to conduct the relations of the new department with the states in any manner which savours of the domination of one over the other; if there would be any domination, it would that of our mutual interests and welfare. . . .

"We are at a momentous stage in the history of India. By common endeavour, we can raise the country to a new greatness, while lack of unity will expose us to fresh calami-



ties. I hope the Indian states will bear in mind, that the alternative to cooperation in the general interest, is anarchy and chaos, which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin, if we are unable to act together in the minimum of common tasks.”

The “inspiration for some of the passages” in this statement, Menon wrote, came from Abraham Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address.

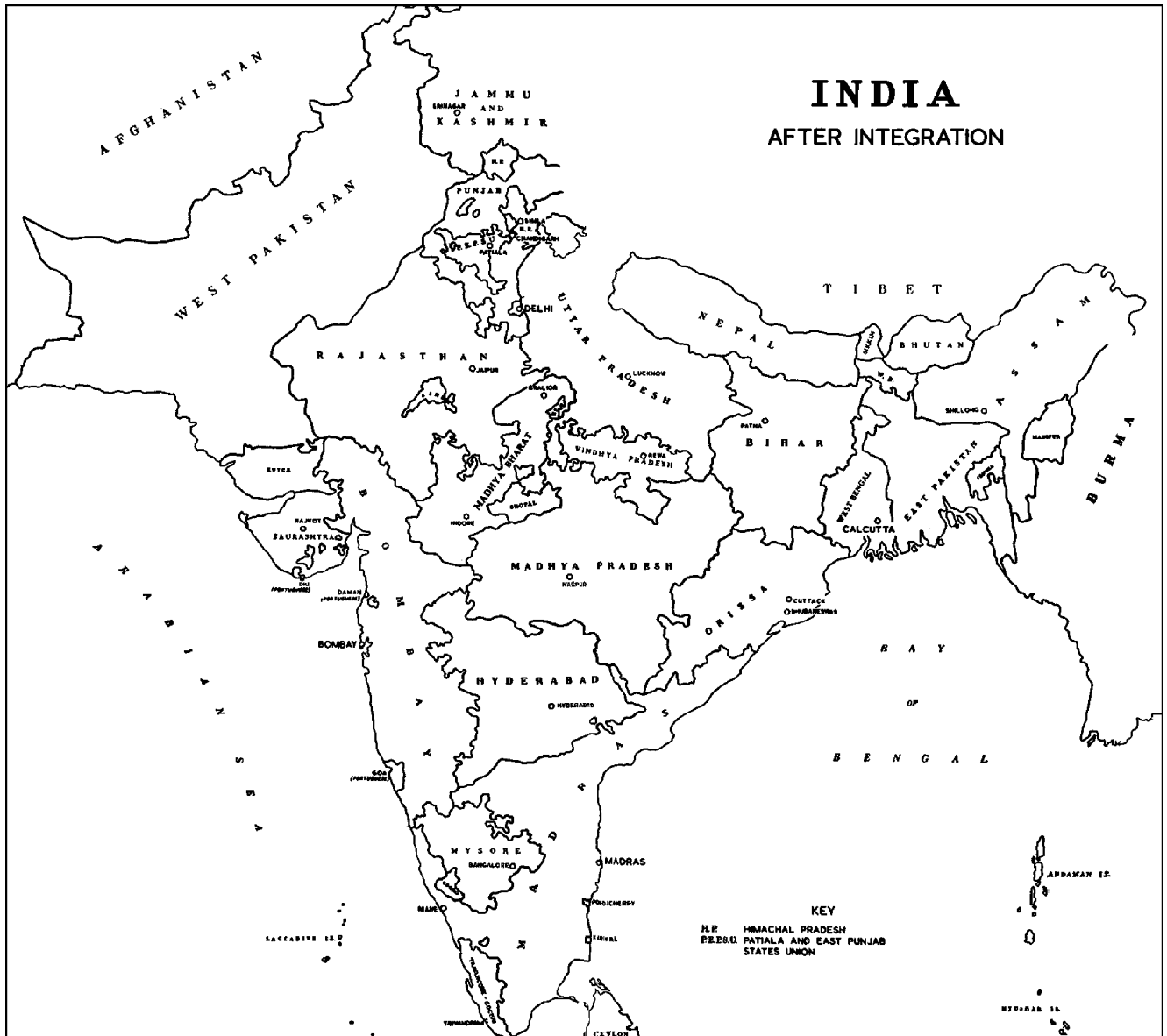
### The British Raj

India had only rarely been even partially politically unified, throughout its thousands of years of history. In the third century B.C., large parts of India were united under the Emperor Asoka, but for only about 100 years. Some 500 years later, Chandragupta and his son Samudragupta controlled large areas of India, but their empire also crumbled. From the

eighth century, Muslims began to conquer parts of India; the Moghuls, who invaded India from Central Asia, finally brought large areas together under Barbar, in the 16th century. His grandson Akbar established power over many of the smaller states, to take the Moghul Empire to its height. As the 18th century began, the Moghul Empire was falling apart.

No one had brought all of India into one political entity, until the British Raj. The greatest achievement of the British, Menon wrote, was to consolidate India politically—which itself gave rise to the national consciousness, which ultimately freed India of British rule, and made possible the “final step of bringing about the peaceful integration of the princely states. Today, for the first time in the country’s history, the writ of a single central government runs from Kailas to Kanyakumari, from Kathiawar to Kamarupa (Assam).”

The British, who along with the French came to India as



traders during the 17th century, took advantage of the disorder left by the disintegrating Moghul Empire. At first, the British East India Company only wanted trade; wars and conquest, whose costs ate up profits, were not wanted in London. However, enterprising Company agents took over more and more territory, and by 1773, the British Parliament asserted its authority over the operations of the East India Company, and supplied the troops for further consolidation and conquest. Governor-General Wellesley, whose brother was later the Duke of Wellington, came to India in 1798, and decided that Britain must become the paramount power; he greatly expanded British territory through conquest.

He also used a second method, which was to set up “subsidiary alliances” with the Indian rulers of the smaller states. Under Wellesley’s arrangements, the states which “allied” with the British, were not to make war or carry on negotiations

with any other state without the Company’s knowledge; the larger states were to maintain armies—at their own expense—trained and commanded by British officers, “for the preservation of the public peace.” The smaller states paid tribute to the Company. In return, the Company agreed to protect the rulers against external aggression and internal rebellion. Each state also was blessed with a British Resident.

This “system of subsidiary alliances, was Trojan Horse tactics in empire-building,” wrote Menon. “The Governor-General was present by proxy in every state that accepted it.” The Company gained well-trained troops to guard strategic areas, and the allegiance of many rulers, large and small. By 1823, the map of India under the British Raj was drawn, with only a few additions, in the Punjab and Sind, in the northwest, to be added in later decades.

The British then developed a complex system of control.

Some areas they ruled directly via a system of administration based on districts, Governor-run provinces, and the Governor-General, who was subordinate to London. At the same time, within what came to be known as the “Native states,” the British Residents were transformed from “diplomats from a foreign power,” into “executive and controlling officers of a superior government.” The Residents had the power; they deliberately fostered corruption and idleness among the puppet maharajahs, nizams, and nawabs.

Mountstuart Elphinstone, one of Wellesley’s inner circle, frankly admitted that the British used princely corruption for their own ends. “We must have some sink to receive all the corrupt matter that abounds in India, unless we are willing to taint our own system by stopping the discharge of it,” he said.

Sir John Malcolm, another of Wellesley’s associates, wrote in 1825: “The tranquility, not to say security, of our vast oriental possessions is involved in the preservation of native principalities which are depending on us for protection. These are also so obviously at our mercy, so entirely in our grasp, that besides other and great benefits we derive from their alliance, their co-existence with our rule is of itself a source of political strength, the value of which will never be known till it is lost.”

The 1833 Charter Act abolished the Company’s trading operations, and made it, essentially, the government of India. Then began a monstrous land-grab, which expanded the Raj to the base of the mountains of Afghanistan. However, the British were by no means prepared to administer these vast, seized territories, and chaos resulted. Deposed princes disbanded their courts and their armies, and tens of thousands of troops wandered about India, creating, Menon wrote, the “powder magazine to the Great Revolt of 1857, whatever might have been the spark that ultimately ignited it.”

During the Mutiny, many rulers sided with the British. So useful was their support, that it led to a radical change in policy. In 1858, Queen Victoria proclaimed: “We desire no extension of our present territorial possessions; . . . we shall sanction no encroachment on those of others. We shall respect the rights, dignity, and honour of Native Princes as our own; and we desire that they as well as our own subjects should enjoy that prosperity and that social advancement which can only be secured by internal peace and good government.”

The states, of course, were actually *not* independent or sovereign; they had no independent relations to the outside world. Many of the princely states were saved from collapse by the British, while others, such as Mysore and Banaras, were even created under the Raj.

In the wake of the Mutiny, the Company was deposed, and the British Crown took over the government of India. The Governor-General became Viceroy, the direct representative of the Crown, and one of the most powerful positions in all the Empire. In 1877, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli created a new title for Queen Victoria, “Queen-Empress.” The Crown also took over all the subsidiary treaties with the Native states. As Governor-General Lord Charles John Canning wrote:

“The territories under the sovereignty of the Crown became at once as important and as integral a part of India, as territories under its direct domination.” Although the states were not part of British India, and their inhabitants were not British subjects, a “Political Department” had been set up under the Governor-General for the states, with its own Indian Political Service, police force, and agents, controlled closely by the Secretary of State for India in London.

The Political Officers ran the states in traditional imperial fashion: “Dissentions and jealousies among the rulers were systematically sustained,” Menon wrote. “The states were isolated from British India in the same manner that India was isolated from the rest of Asia,” including within the British government.

The Crown began asserting all sorts of prerogatives, including its direct sanction of the succession in the Native states. The ruler inherited his title as a “gift from the paramount power,” and this, with like measures, brought the rulers ever-closer to the Crown. The relationship was firm by the time of World War I. The Indian states had already put their resources at the disposal of Her Majesty’s government in 1885, when war seemed imminent on the northwest frontier. During World War I, the rulers rallied to the defense of the Empire, with the resources of their states, including men, money, and matériel. These resources were great. Among the greatest supporters of the British war effort was Mir Usman Ali Khan Bahadur, the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, reputedly the wealthiest man in the world.

### **The rise of Indian nationalism**

Yet, throughout all this time, national aspirations were arising in India, as leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak emerged; the All-India Congress Committee was founded as the executive committee of the Indian National Congress. The British, while attempting to compromise the nationalist movement, were forced to respond. On Aug. 20, 1917, Edwin Samuel Montagu, Secretary of State for India, announced the “increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration, and gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.” Montagu toured India and presented a report on constitutional reforms. His policy, which was backed by the British authorities until August 1947, was to form a loose federation of self-governing and practically autonomous states, with a center responsible only for defense, tariffs, opium (!), exchange, railroads, the postal service, and telegraph communications.

Montagu’s report “paid glowing tributes to the princes for the part they played in the war,” and remarked that the political upheavals in British India were presenting a problem for the princes as well as the British administration. To help deal with this, in February 1921, a British royal proclamation set up a Chamber of Princes, as an advisory body to the Viceroy.

But India was already in the throes of a tremendous national upsurge. The British slaughter at Jallianwala Bagh in

1919, had inflamed the population. A new leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi, entered the Congress party, to transform it into an organization which could win India's freedom.

The princes became alarmed. They demanded attention to their relations to the paramount power in India — the British Crown. A British committee sent to India in early 1928, led by Sir Harcourt Butler, concluded that the states should not be “handed over” to any Indian government, or be responsible to an Indian legislature, without their consent. The states' position was formulated by British lawyers, led by Sir Leslie Scott, who proclaimed that, for the princes, the “paramount power is the British Crown. It is to it, that the states have entrusted their foreign relations, and external and internal authority.”

This view was not acceptable to India's nationalist leaders. A commission, led by Pandit Motilal Nehru, the father of Jawaharlal, was appointed to draw up a constitution for British India alone, which was to become a Dominion within the British Empire. The British policy was to exclude all the hundreds of states, but the Nehru Commission refused to agree. In 1928, it issued its report, which asserted that the interests and goals of the people of both British India and the states were the same. The report warned that “an attempt is being made to convert the Indian states into an Indian Ulster.”

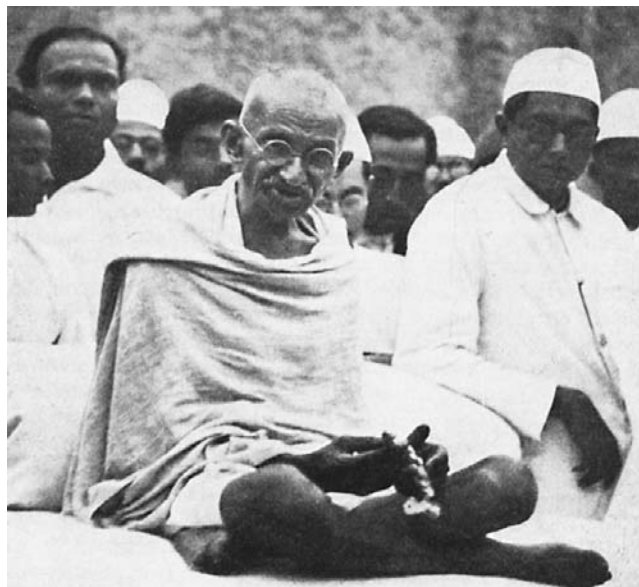
In 1930, Gandhi launched his Salt Campaign and civil disobedience. Called to the Round Table Conference in London in April 1930, with British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, Gandhi agreed to a federation for India, but insisted that it have a strong central government. Responsible government must be established in full and at once, Gandhi demanded, but the British refused. Britain's Government of India Act of 1935 called for a “federal” relationship between British India and the states. The Act claimed that the states were “different” from the Indian provinces, and that they had the right to decide voluntarily on whether they would join any Indian federation.

In December 1938, Gandhi acclaimed the awakening of political agitation in the states, and declared that there was “no half-way house between total extinction of the states and full responsible government.”

British and princely recalcitrance made even the federation impossible to achieve. World War II broke out, and, once again, the British needed the rulers' money and men. They put a stop to all motion for an Indian federal government. At the height of the war, Gandhi and other independence leaders launched the all-out “Quit India” movement, and were thrown into jail. At the same time, 98 Indian states' armed forces units were put at the disposal of the Crown.

### ‘Two nations’

The operation to split India was now fully under way. In January 1940, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, declared that Hindus and Muslims were “two separate nations,” and must share in the governance of India. Three months later, he stated that the Muslim “nation” must have a



*Mohandas K. Gandhi, who entered the Congress political movement, to transform it into an organization which could win India's freedom.*

separate state of Pakistan.

The idea of an Indian nation embracing all religions, was fundamental to the independence movement led by Gandhi, Nehru, and others. The Indian constitution established in 1950 created a “secular state.” However, this was by no means an anti-religious state. Gandhi was a profoundly religious man, but he maintained the position to his last day, that the nationality, culture, history, and fundamental interests of Hindu and Muslim, as well as Christian, Jain, Sikh, and many others in India, were the same. This idea was, and remains, essential for the existence of the Republic of India, which is today one of the largest Muslim nations in the world. (Pakistan has a population of 137 million people, 97% of whom are Muslim; India has a Muslim population of 95.2 million.)

Jinnah's “separate nations” policy was intended to tear India apart, not just into India and Pakistan, but also internally. To this communal strife, was added that of the princes. In 1944, the Nawab of Bhopal, a Muslim state in central India founded by an Afghan adventurer in 1708, was elected head of the Chamber of Princes. He was determined to forge this body into a “Third Force” in Indian politics. The Viceroy's political adviser, Sir Conrad Corfield, encouraged the princes to demand that India adopt a loose central government, with residual powers in the states; at the center, amid the communal tensions between the Congress party and Jinnah's Muslim League, the native states would hold the balance. On Sept. 18, 1944, the Chamber of Princes issued a resolution stating the necessity to “reiterate in the most unequivocal and emphatic terms, that the Crown's relationship with the states and the Crown's power in respect to the states cannot and should not be transferred to any third party or other authority without

the consent of the states concerned.” The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, tried to ignore this resolution, but the Chamber resigned in protest, and eventually he gave them the assurances they wanted.

## Independence

But Wavell’s assurances could not last. In July 1945, as World War II was coming to an end, the government of die-hard imperialist Winston Churchill was ousted, and the Labour Party came to power in Britain. In March 1946, the government of Prime Minister Clement Atlee sent a Cabinet mission to India, led by Lord Pethick-Lawrence. They were to discuss with the Indian leaders and the Viceroy, a new constitutional structure for all of India. On the fate of the Native states, Pethick-Lawrence stated: “What we plan is to invite the Indian states to take part in discussion for the setting up of machinery for framing the further constitutional structure. If I invite you to dinner, it is not obligatory for you to come.”

The commission issued a memorandum on May 12, 1946, proclaiming that when a new government or governments came into being in British India, His Majesty’s Government would cease to exercise the powers of paramountcy over the states. At the same time, His Majesty’s Government would not have such influence with these successor governments, “to enable them to carry out the obligations of paramountcy.” Thus, the “rights” of the states which “flowed” from their relationship with the Crown, would no longer exist, and all the rights surrendered by the states to the paramount power, would return to them. Political arrangements between the states and the British Crown, and British India, would, thus, end.

The provisions of this memo could have reduced India to the feuding chaos of previous centuries. While they conceded that the states might enter into a relationship with the successor government(s), there was nothing to prevent India from being left a patchwork of hundreds of divided states — i.e., the balkanization of a nation 100 times the size of the Balkans.

The British declaration on the lapse of paramountcy was the “greatest disservice” the British had done to India and to the states, Menon wrote. For a century, provinces and states were together the pillars of the central authority. Important military installations were located within the states, the railroad system spanned states as well as provinces, as did the postal service, telegraphs, food policy, and every other vital aspect of Indian government and life. The end of the Crown-states agreements, could have been taken to mean that all agreements involving the states, including for roads, railroads, ports, and communications, were also abolished. In a matter of weeks, India could have been torn to pieces.

In addition, the rulers of the 300 petty states would have overnight been given “the powers of life and death” over their subjects, although previously they had had jurisdiction only in minor matters.

True to form, the British Political Department was doing

its utmost to add to the chaos. The department was to be “gradually” dissolved, but the Congress party did not foresee all the consequences of this decision. In the period running up to Independence, the Political Department destroyed its records, pulled the Residents out of the states, and handed military jurisdiction over cantonment areas of the Crown forces over to the state rulers — thus exacerbating the push toward “independence.”

At the same time, the states were generally in very difficult circumstances. The Crown had protected them, including from internal problems. If the ever-worsening communal problems spread to the states, the Army, which was also being partitioned, would not have been able to act rapidly to control the strife.

Despite this, the Nawab of Bhopal asserted that the states wanted maximum sovereignty, with no interference from British India. He stated that, if there was to be India and Pakistan, there was no reason there could not also be a “third state” of the states. He wanted the states to keep their own separate militaries, finances, and infrastructure.

The potential danger of the situation was demonstrated when the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was later to declare his independence, demanded that his large but land-locked state get its own seaport, the Portuguese colony of Goa. He also demanded a direct rail route through Indian territory to this port. The Nizam’s personal “constitutional adviser” was Sir Walter Monckton, a member, during the 1930s, of the intimate circle of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), and created a Viscount by Winston Churchill.

Amid this internal dissention, when, as Menon wrote, the “government of India was a house divided against itself,” Prime Minister Atlee announced in the House of Commons, on Feb. 20, 1947, that Britain would transfer power no later than June 1948, and that Lord Louis Mountbatten was to become the last Viceroy. On the states, Atlee said: “His Majesty’s Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under paramountcy to any government of British India. It is not intended to bring paramountcy, as a system, to a conclusion earlier than the date of the final transfer of power, but it is contemplated that for the intervening period the relations of the Crown with individual states may be adjusted by agreement.”

Nehru and the Congress party would have none of this. Nehru insisted that the states must participate in the Constituent Assembly, which would serve as India’s government until the new constitution was prepared and enacted. Otherwise, he declared, they would be considered “hostile states,” and would suffer the consequences. Muslim League leader Liaquat Ali Khan protested Nehru’s decision, but a number of the princes did not. Several realized that it was clearly in the interests of their people and states to join with India, and they played a critical role in ensuring the formation of the republic. These princes, genuine patriots of India, included the Maharajah of Bikaner, Sir Sadul Singh, and the Maharajah of Patiala. The princely “third force” foundered.

## Only weeks to Independence

Only on June 3, 1947 did Mountbatten announce that the transfer of power from the British Raj was to occur by Aug. 15, 1947, giving India's leaders only a matter of weeks to create a government. Mountbatten announced that His Majesty's Government would relinquish power to two states, India and Pakistan. At the same time, he announced, paramountcy over the Native states would lapse — with nothing to replace it, thus abolishing a 150-year-old political structure overnight. This last decision introduced a “maximum degree of urgency into the situation,” Menon wrote.

Nehru asserted that the lapse of paramountcy did *not* amount to independence for the states, but Sir Corfield held that it could mean autonomy. Jinnah insisted that the states were entitled to say whether they would or would not join the Constituent Assemblies, and that every Indian state was a sovereign state, except insofar as they had entered into treaties with the Crown! Only the Crown was under certain obligations to them, and they to it; when the Crown left, the states could do as they liked. Nehru refused to accept this nonsense; the states, he pointed out, had no sovereignty. They had no international relations, no ability to declare war, and, in reality, of the 562 states, only a very few were even semi-autonomous.

Encouraged by the declarations of the British and Jinnah, two princes attempted to declare independence. On June 11, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of the State of Travancore, on India's southwest seacoast, announced that he had decided to set up an independent sovereign state, and a similar announcement was made the next day on behalf of the Nizam of Hyderabad.

The All-India Congress Committee responded by protesting the balkanization of India. The Congress committee said that it would not agree to the “theory of paramountcy as enunciated and interpreted by the British government.” The privileges and obligations, as well as the rights, linking the states and the Government of India, could not be adversely affected by lapse of paramountcy by the British Crown.

The situation was all the more dangerous, because most of the states had significant military capabilities. During World War II, many had strengthened their own armed forces. At time of partition, there were 75,000 troops in the Indian states' forces. The situation overall was of the “gravest danger to the integrity of the country,” wrote Menon. “And so the prophets of gloom predicted that the ship of Indian freedom would founder on the rock of the states.”

## A clean slate

Yet, the dangerous crisis also meant great opportunity, as Patel and Menon realized. The “Cabinet Mission” plan, for a weak federal center, had been made as a “compromise” between the Congress party demand for a united India, and the Muslim League demand for a separate Pakistan. With the agreement for partition, any need for a weak center had ended.

Under Patel's leadership, the Indians took action. Patel's

view was that the British could not simply declare all the fundamentals of paramountcy null and void. The government of India did not cease to be the supreme power after the British left; the difference was, that it would be an *Indian* supreme power. Defense, security, and geographical and economic “compulsions had not ceased to be operative.” The British had asserted that their supremacy to the Indian states was more than just based on treaties and agreements. Therefore, what the British had done was a violation of their own “principles.”

Now, the Indian supreme power had to assert itself. Patel created the new states department to bring them into the Indian Union. The “situation held dangerous potentialities, and that if we did not handle it promptly and effectively, our hard-earned freedom might disappear through the states' door,” Patel warned. Under his guidance, Menon began to negotiate agreements with as many states as he could, as rapidly as possible. The policy from which Menon worked, was to preserve the nation. States that were contiguous with India “must be made to feel legally and morally that they were part of it.” This also had to include, at the same time, laying the basis to create responsible government and administration within the impoverished and backward states, the only way that the integration of the states would succeed over time.

The situation had to be seen as a mixed evil, Menon told Patel: Good could be made from it, because the Indian government would be “writing on a clean slate, unhampered by treaties” or the policies of the British Raj. If paramountcy had simply been transferred to a free India, with all the obligations of the British government, “it would scarcely have been possible for us to have solved the problem of the Indian states in the way we did. By the lapse of paramountcy, we were able to write on a clean slate.”

For the emergency situation, Menon determined that steps must be taken to unite the princely states with India on three essential fronts. He drew up an “Instrument of Accession,” under which the rulers agreed that the Indian legislature would make the laws for their states for all defense matters, for external affairs, and for communications and transport infrastructure.

These instruments of accession were accompanied by Standstill Agreements, maintaining the basis for relations between the states and the central government until the new constitution would be finished and the states totally integrated.

This was essential, because enormous work had to be done to weld the hundreds of tiny states into viable political units, and to develop their internal capabilities.

Many of the rulers responded to the emergency. They agreed immediately to accede to India, sacrificing personal power, wealth, and position for the sake of the nation. They realized that after Partition, if they did not join India, the country would be “submerged in one big deluge.” Some of the bigger princes could have made much mischief: they had intact armies, which, in some states, were even comparable



to the Indian Army. But they put the interests of the nation above their own; some even lent the Center all their troops at a critical period—the conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir—regardless of their internal security situation.

There were difficulties, and some were dramatic: One excited prince even pulled a pistol on Menon during a highly charged interview, but immediately relented. Even the Nawab of Bhopal, after initial resistance, eventually agreed to accede to India before independence.

Some of the larger princes tried to hold out for whatever advantages they could gain. They were not successful. “What they failed to realize,” Menon wrote, “was that the new government of India could not possibly uphold the idea of *autocracy* in the states, and that, for their very existence, the rulers had to have either the support of their people, or the protection of the government of India.” They generally had neither.

Jinnah, of course, objected to the policy of accession, and told Mountbatten that it was “utterly wrong.” He announced publicly that he would guarantee the independence of the states in Pakistan.

In India, the rulers were allowed, for the time being, to retain their princely status, and were granted generous “Privy Purses” (all eventually abolished by 1970). Patel stated, when he recommended that these interim measures be included in the constitution, that they were a “small price paid for the bloodless revolution which affected the destinies of millions of our people.”

## Unifying the states

The rapid first phase of guaranteeing the accession of most of the states, was followed by a far longer, and much more laborious one. All the hundreds of smaller states had to be merged with the provinces, other states, or brought directly under the Center, to create viable political units. When princely states were brought into unions, for integration into the republic, political work had to begin from the ground up, establishing legislatures, administration, services, and other aspects of a modern state, which they utterly lacked.

One example of this process, was the formation of the union of Saurashtra out of the myriad states of the Kathiawar peninsula, off western India, near Bombay. Kathiawar, which was Gandhi’s home, included 14 larger states, 17 smaller ones, and 191 tiny entities. Forty-six of them were only two square miles or smaller. Over centuries, such a patchwork had developed, that many states had scattered bits of territory, completely included within other states, making 806 different jurisdictions in all. Yet, these states all had internal tariffs, separate judicial systems, and the like.

Menon determined that a union of these states had to be created first, before anything could be done. The princes considered the issue, but many demurred. Menon then showed his mettle, which enabled him to carry out this enormous task all over India: First, he went to Gandhi, and asked for his approval of the plan to unify the Kathiawar states. Gandhi immediately gave his blessing, which carried great weight

with the princes. On the other hand, Menon had another means to encourage the princes to agree: He threatened, that if they did not form their own union on Kathiawar, the states would be integrated into the neighboring province of Bombay, something the proud princes did not like at all. They succumbed, and Saurashtra was formed.

As the Constituent Assembly was writing the new Constitution for the Republic of India, similar constitutions were also drawn up for the new state unions. To guarantee the legitimacy of the entire process, the new Saurashtra Union re-acceded to India (the individual princes had done so previously). This process was followed by all of the new unions of states.

## British operations: Hyderabad

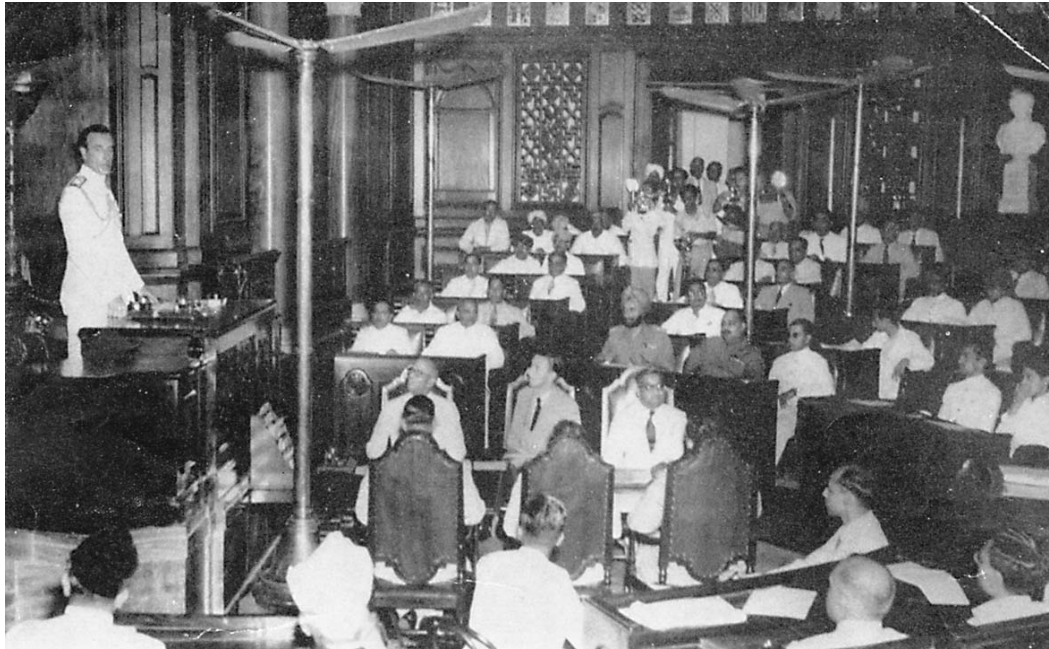
There was one most serious threat to the Indian Union: the prolonged machinations of the Nizam of Hyderabad to establish the “independence” of his state. This history shows what could have happened to India, were it not for the decisive moves of its leaders to create a strong national government. Hyderabad, located in a “pivotal position in the heart of the country,” was in 1947 the largest and most populous state in India. The vast majority of the people, about 20 million, were Hindus, but the despotic Nizam and his government, police, and soldiers were all drawn from the 3 million Muslims in the state.

The Nizam Mir Usman Ali Khan Bahadur, who included among his many appellations “Faithful Ally of the British Government,” personally gave the British government \$100 million, an enormous sum at the time, to finance World War I. The Nizam, however, also had his own ambitions: In 1925, he wrote to then-Viceroy Lord Reading, claiming that the “Nizams of Hyderabad have been independent in internal affairs of their state just as much as the British government in British India.” The Viceroy was not pleased, and responded that “it was the right of the British government to intervene in the internal affairs of Indian states,” and repudiated the Nizam’s claim that there was an equality between the governments of Hyderabad and Great Britain.

In June 1947, the Nizam saw his chance. He refused to send representatives to the Constituent Assemblies for either India or Pakistan, and claimed that he would become an independent sovereign as of Aug. 15. The Nizam wanted Dominion status for Hyderabad, as part of the British Commonwealth.

In July, he sent a delegation to the Viceroy in Delhi (now Earl Mountbatten), which included not only his chief spokesman, the Nawab of Chhatari, but also Sir Walter Monckton. The Nizam did not want to join either India or Pakistan, but demanded a “treaty” with India to ensure his rail communications and so forth.

The Nizam was also emphatic that he retain the services of Monckton as his “constitutional adviser,” even after the British Raj ended on Aug. 15. Monckton proposed that the Nizam “join” India, on the basis of a special “Article of Asso-



*Lord Mountbatten addressing the Chamber of Princes, set up in February 1921 by a British royal proclamation as an advisory body to the Viceroy, in New Delhi, July 25, 1947.*

ciation,” but Patel was adamant that only the full accession of Hyderabad, on the same terms as the other rulers had accepted, would be tolerated. Mountbatten wanted to take the Nizam on his own terms, but Patel refused to yield to Mountbatten on this. The Nizam would not allow a referendum of his population on the question. He was also preparing for other eventualities: He had his “Minister of War” order £3 million worth of weapons from Czechoslovakia, and he demanded the “right” to direct relations with any foreign power, something Hyderabad had never had before.

The situation in south India was becoming critical, and peace was very important for the stability of the new nation. At the same time, Patel refused to accept any compromise with the Nizam, and preferred to break off negotiations rather than yield to his demands, a position which Mountbatten did not appreciate. The Nizam proceeded to carry out all sorts of machinations, prolonging the negotiations with New Delhi throughout the emergency caused by the Pathan tribal invasion of Kashmir from Pakistan.

The Nizam repeatedly threatened to join Pakistan, which would have torn India apart. At the same time, the militant Muslim rowdies sponsored by the Nizam’s regime, known as the Razakars, who were terrorizing the unarmed, impoverished Hindu population of Hyderabad, began raiding villages in neighboring areas outside the state.

Under the burden of all the other urgent work to be done bringing the less recalcitrant states into the union, it was decided to allow a one-year period under an interim standstill agreement, on looser terms than the other rulers had accepted. This attempt to “buy peace,” was supported by both Mountbatten and Nehru; Patel, however, had well-founded doubts about the *bona fides* of the Nizam. Hyderabad’s additional

demands confirmed Patel’s view: The Nizam wanted the Indian troops to leave the state, while demanding an unimpaired supply of arms for his police and army—despite the fact that he already had a large supply of army stores. He imprisoned the leaders of the Hyderabad Congress party organization, and immediately violated the standstill agreement, by banning the use of Indian currency in Hyderabad, which had had its own currency, and granting a very generous loan to Pakistan—using Government of India securities; these were being cashed by the Pakistani government, despite promises to the contrary. New Delhi responded by making the securities non-negotiable, and prohibited the transfer of valuables to Hyderabad, because these were being used for arms purchases.

Meanwhile, in March 1948, Monckton, who had departed for London, was called back by the Nizam. Menon drily noted, that in the recurring attempts to negotiate with the Nizam’s delegation in Delhi, Monckton was most unhappy with his policies.

Through the spring of 1948, tensions worsened, and the Nizam, in a militant mood, used Hyderabad radio to proclaim that if India blockaded Hyderabad, the state “could stand on its own,” and would get world opinion on its side. (The Nizam had already entered into a direct agreement with United Press of America for such a purpose.) Worse, he claimed that if India took military action, thousands of Pathans would march into India. Kasim Razvi, leader of the Razakars, proclaimed that the 45 million Muslims in India would become a “fifth column.” Along with these threats to India’s internal security, the Nizam’s operations were also putting critical lines of communication, including the railroads which ran through Hyderabad, in jeopardy.

Despite the Nizam’s threats, Patel remained steadfast:

“The Hyderabad problem will have to be settled, as it has been done in the case of other states,” he stated. “No other way is possible. We cannot agree to the continuance of an isolated spot which would destroy the very Union which we have built up with our blood and toil. . . . If its demand to maintain an independent status is persisted in, it is bound to fail.”

Patel told Menon that he must tell the Nizam that only acceptance of accession and of setting up of *responsible government*, which the Nizam was refusing to do, would be accepted by the government of India. Meanwhile, Mountbatten, who had stayed on in India as Governor-General until June 1948, tried to intervene in the negotiations, although Patel’s stance was that Hyderabad was scarcely in a position to dictate terms. However, when Mountbatten gave in to the outrageous Hyderabad demands for more privileges, arms, and autonomy, Monckton and his entourage arrived once again in New Delhi, armed with even more extreme terms, thus derailing the negotiations. On June 21, Mountbatten left India permanently. He was very disappointed that his Hyderabad agreement had not worked. “Certainly,” noted Menon, “the Nizam could not have had a better friend.”

The Nizam thought that the continuing crisis with Pakistan over Kashmir would prevent the Indian government from taking action in Hyderabad. “The anti-India attitude of a section of the British press, and the plea for Hyderabad’s independence voiced by some British political leaders, confirmed the Nizam in his uncompromising attitude,” Menon wrote.

The British were running other operations, as well. The Indian press reported that an Australian by the name of Sidney Cotton was running an aerial arms-smuggling operation, using Karachi, Pakistan’s port, as his base.

By the beginning of August 1948, Laik Ali, a wealthy Hyderabad businessman who had represented Pakistan at the United Nations, demanded that Hyderabad’s status be taken up by the United Nations. Nehru, of course, responded that this was a purely domestic issue, and not a UN affair. The Nizam went so far as to write to U.S. President Henry Truman, demanding that he arbitrate; Truman refused.

As tensions mounted through the summer and autumn, it became clear in Delhi that there was no alternative to a military action to resolve the situation. On Sept. 9, the Indian Center decided to move into Hyderabad. The Indian Army knew that it would surely defeat the Hyderabad forces, but the critical problem was to ensure that “resistance would collapse within the shortest possible time,” Menon wrote.

The Indian forces succeeded: The entire operation was finished within one week. The Army entered Hyderabad in a two-pronged operation, on Sept. 13. There was some stiff resistance from the Hyderabad forces during the first two days, but this soon collapsed. On Sept. 17, Hyderabad surrendered, after a 108-hour operation.

Another facet of British dirty operations was soon exposed. As Indian troops entered Hyderabad on Sept. 13, they

captured a lieutenant, T.T. Moore, a former British Army commando and special services officer. Moore had been employed by the Hyderabad forces since August 1947. He was driving a jeep full of explosives, and had been given responsibility for demolitions, especially of bridges, by Hyderabad Army headquarters. There had been discussion of delaying the Indian Army operation for two days, until Sept. 15; this would have allowed Moore to destroy the bridges and seriously hamper the India Army operations.

On Sept. 23, the defeated Nizam cabled the UN that he was withdrawing the case, although at the UN itself, “certain foreign powers,” according to Menon, wanted to pursue it.

In an indication of the extent of popular support for the Indian action, Menon noted that there was “not a single communal incident in the whole length and breadth of India, throughout the time of the operation.” Its rapid completion brought universal jubilation.

The Nizam finally acceded to India on the same terms as the other rulers, and by November 1949, accepted the Constitution of India as the constitution for Hyderabad. He was retained, but only as constitutional head of government, and the Hindu population was warned that any revenge against the Muslim minority would reflect on the government of India.

Not surprisingly, the British press was very critical of the Indian police action in Hyderabad; questions were raised in the House of Commons, and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin accused India of having a “warlike mentality.”

If Hyderabad had been allowed to become “independent,” this would have almost cut India in two, Menon noted. “No nation can afford to be generous at the cost of its integrity, and India has no reason to be afraid of her own shadow.”

## **The consolidation of the Union**

As a result of the massive effort expended between July 1947 and January 1950, by the time the new Constitution was adopted, all of the 554 princely states had been integrated into the Indian Union. Two big states, Hyderabad and Mysore, were retained, 226 smaller states were merged into neighboring provinces, 310 were consolidated into six new states, which then joined the Union, and five became provinces under direct Union control. Out of a vast political checkerboard, 14 functioning administrative units were created.

As the Constitution came into force, administrative integration was proceeding; financial integration was worked out, and was to come into operation within a few months; the Indian states’ forces were being absorbed into the Indian Army.

India was also united economically for the first time. Internal customs duties were abolished, ensuring freedom of trade within the country. Ports, railroads, roads, and other infrastructure could now fully serve the interior, without restriction. For the first time, both national and regional economic planning, on an all-India basis, became possible. This development was also of great benefit to the states, because it made,

for the first time, all the economic and technical resources of the Center available to the states—a much-needed impetus for development programs for these areas.

The principles of this economic-financial union were carefully developed by the committee led by Sir V.T. Krishnamachari, initiated by the Ministry of States in October 1948. There was not to be any “trade-off” between India and the states. The policy was *not* that India would simply acquire the rights of the Indian states in their railways and other “federal” assets, as well as sources of revenue, in exchange for payment of compensation. The “remarkable achievement” of the Krishnamachari Committee, Menon wrote, was its idea, that *all* the federal resources of the people of the states and the rest of India, would be pooled together, for *overall* administration by a new Union government. This government’s power and authority, in turn, would be derived from all the units.

While acting from this broad principle, at the same time the Union government compensated the states for loss of revenues from railroads, tariffs, and so on, for a transition period of five years. This was done to ensure economic and political stability, essential for the more economically backward states.

By Partition, India lost an area of 364,737 square miles and a population of 81.5 millions; by the integration of the states, it gained an area of nearly 500,000 square miles and a

population of 86.5 millions (not including Jammu and Kashmir). The geographical, economic, and political unification of India was finally achieved. But these all had to be preserved, and this meant, as Patel emphasized, that the Indian Union now had to take action to ensure that the “lost centuries” in the states could be made up for, especially in the minds of the population. As Patel stated, “Almost overnight we have introduced in these states the superstructure of a modern system of government. The inspiration and stimulus has come from above rather than from below and unless the transplanted growth takes a healthy root in the soil, there will be a danger of collapse and chaos.”

The Indian Constitution, inaugurated 50 years ago, completed the process of integration. Now, citizens of both former states and provinces have the same fundamental rights, and the same relationship to the Center. “Thus,” wrote Menon, “finally and forever, the artificial barriers created by the erstwhile states have been abolished, and in their place has emerged, for the first time, a united and democratic India under a strong central government.

“If one were asked to name the most important factors that have contributed to the stability of the country, there is little doubt that one would mention at once two factors: the first being the integration of the Indian states, and the second, a Constitution framed with the willing consent of the people.”

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