

18. ENQUIRY ABOUT NETAJI IN MOSCOW

(i)

On reaching Moscow in autumn 1955, I remembered the statement Goga had made about Netaji in Berlin the previous year. Movements of foreign visitors to Russia seemed to be not so strictly watched as I had observed when I had lived there. Encouraged by the realising that I was not followed by the agents of the Russian secret police, I walked through the Gorki street, the main thoroughfare of the Soviet Capital, into the Pushkin's place.

As if mechanically operated, my legs turned into the Strasnai Boulevard. House No. 13 there had remained intact during all those years I had not been there. Entering the gates I turned left to meet the 'zezurny' the houseguard. It is very common throughout Russia that the reliable guards to the institutions of secretive nature function most efficiently as invisible weapons in the hands of the Soviet secret police.

Luckily, comrade zezurny of the KUTV (Communist University for the workers of the East, run by the comintern) was the same good old Petrov, very friendly to me during my student days, foreign students in Moscow had far better rations and pocket money than average upper strata State employees. Since I had kept our zezurny well fed during the days of food scarcity in Moscow, he had remained grateful to me.

As good old friends we settled down in the kitchen to have some tea from the samovar. The hints I had given were enough for him to admit frankly—"To pay my gratitude I shall help you in your enquiries of a confidential nature."

Petrov listened attentively when I repeated Goga's

account, and then came out—"Comrade Vera will be able to help you in this matter."

"Which Vera you mean?"

"Why, the Dark Vera who used to practice her conversation in Bengali with you."

"How can she be helpful in this respect?"

"She had worked as the chief of the Asiatic Secret section of the comintern till Stalin's death."

"Where is she now?"

"She deals with the Asiatic tourist section of the INTOURIST."

"Will you please put me in touch with her as early as you can?"

"You turn up casually in this kitchen tomorrow evening after dark, and you can talk to her quietly."

"Are you sure, she has some information about the matter I am investigating?"

"Quite sure. Early 1950 when Mao Tse-tung visited us, she was called to Kremlin for certain consultations concerning India."

"She seemed to have become an expert in Indian affairs for the Soviet Government?"

"One day I too had to report to a meeting of Chinese Communist officers who had come to Moscow to enquire about some Mongolian students who studied here with you."

My rounds into old Comintern circle convinced me that I was on the right track. Soviet circles were most eager to come in close contact with India, specially after the State visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to their country. Preparations were also on way for the return visit of the Soviet Premier with the party chief Khrushchev to India.

The 'Hindi-Rusi Bhai-Bhai' atmosphere allowed me to go ahead boldly in my mission. ✓

(ii)

Vera briefed me in fluent Bengali—"You remember Akimov, isn't so? The same wicked fellow who interrogated you at Lubyanka. During the war years he had become the Chief of the Indian military unit."

"Indian military unit here in Russia?"

"There were no Indians in it. This was a secret formation of Soviet nationals who were getting trained to handle Indian affairs on the line of the Indian civil Service of the British."

"What for?"

"The Stalin-Hitler secret negotiations at the end of 1940, had allotted India as the Russian sphere when the British were driven out from there. Soviet machinery had to be kept ready at hand to take charge of our Indian possessions. Any how, this Indian unit remained inoperative due to Hitler's treachery towards Stalin."

"How did that treachery affect Indian affairs?"

"After the Nazi invasion of Russia, India had been regarded as his own sphere of aspiration by Hitler. To serve as their agent in this deal, the Nazis arranged the escape of the Indian Fascist leader Subhas Chandra Bose to Berlin."

"Subhas Babu was not a Fascist."

"According to Soviet authorities like Akimov, he was. Akimov had succeeded in collecting voluminous reports regarding Bose through his communist party agents in India. One day I was present as a member of the India Unit at Lubyanka, when Akimov himself had said about Bose that he had joined the Fascists already during his trips to Europe in early thirties."

"It is all wrong."

"Akimov went so far as to quote the statements of Congress leaders themselves to prove the fact that Subhas Bose was a Fascist."

"The statement must have been misconstrued by the Indian Communist Party."

"I do not doubt the correctness of Indian Comparty reports. Subhas Bose, on reaching Berlin became the most important Asiatic Fascist ally of Hitler. He got his men trained with the man of the great traitor General Vlassov to attack our Sovietland."

"You are misinformed. When Subhas Babu departed for the East, he left definite instructions that the Indian Legion in Europe must be used against the British-Indian troops alone in or near India. He had no fight with the Soviet Union. Rather, he always took the Russians to be staunch enemies of the British, and so, the natural friend of India."

"However, Akimov did not take Subhas Bose's action in that light. When our Chinese comrades unearthed Subhas Bose's presence in Dairen, he was arrested, and Akimov went all the way in Manchuria to interrogate him. As we all expected, Akimov classified him as an ally of the German Fascists, and got placed in the Central prison of Yakutsk along with numerous others of his class."

Petrov turned up to tell us that some other occupants of the house going to use that common kitchen to make their supper. I arranged to meet Vera again the next day at the Gorki Park along the Moskva river promenade.

(iii)

Other details I gathered from Vera convinced me that, once Netaji and his followers were locked up in Yakutsk, they were held by Soviet secret police incommunicado. In the long history of those Siberian prisons, only outstanding men of great literary talent like Dostoyevski were able to come out alive when the outside world had agitated for them.

But Vera assured me—"Now under the leadership of

Comrade Khrushchev our policy towards the foreign prisoners war are getting liberalised. Quite a number of them, for whom enquiries have been made from their own governments are getting repatriated.

"Do you think it will be possible for us to get Subhas Babu repatriated?" I interrupted Vera.

"Why not. This would have been the easiest thing if it was done at the Prime Minister's level when your Jawaharlal had paid us a visit only a few months ago. In our country nothing is achieved on personal level but on State level repatriation matters are possible."

Promising Vera to meet her before leaving Moscow, I went to our Indian Embassy. One or two high ranking officers there were personally known to me. When I talked about the main purpose of my visit to them, the senior most amongst them smiled—"You have picked up Calcutta Bazar gossip about Netaji. Its no use spoiling Indo-Soviet relationship by raising this unnecessary question."

"I do not think, this will spoil the relationship between our two countries." I replied—"After all, the present Soviet leaders are on way to rectifying many wrongs done to a number of foreign countries during Stalin's regime. In our case, the publication of Stalin-Hitler documents has made it clear that Stalin had territorial aspirations in the direction of our country. It was also Stalin who had done wrong to Netaji. Now, at a time of the start of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union, the question of investigating and finally repatriating Netaji will get the Indo-Soviet friendship cemented as nothing else could do."

My compatriot was not convinced by my arguments. Out of sheer co-incidence I met our Military attache in the same Embassy compound. He was more reasonable and promised to take up the matter through his channels,

though he made it clear to me that the affair concerned our External Affairs Ministry exclusively.

Next time when I met Vera, she herself retorted—"You had a rebuff about the repatriation of your own war prisoners from the side of your Embassy. I expected it to be so."

"How did you come to know?"

"As an old India hand of the old Comintern, I am deeply concerned with Indo-Soviet affairs, and know quite well, if I just care to, whatever happens in your Embassy."

"Who tells you all those matters?"

"Why? All your liason work with our government departments are done through Valya, who is in your employment and who has her office just where one enters into your Embassy offices. Valya is my old colleague, and told me all what happened to your plans in your own Embassy. Now, at this stage, I must warn you that once your purpose is known to the Soviet authorities, you will have great difficulties in persuing the matter further. Besides, you will be exposing your Soviet friends to great dangers."

I took up the hint, and went around gathering some material I required for my book on Soviet Union, I was going to publish on return to India.

Due to Vera's friendly intervention, I was not followed by secret police agents while visiting other parts of the Soviet Union. But even her influence did not succeed in getting me a visa for visiting the Siberian territories of the Soviet Union.

Even then, I made the very best use of the newly granted concessions to the tourists and set out on a trip to the Afghan borders via Tashkent and Termez on the Amu Darya.

Though feeling depressed by the wrong functioning

of our own Embassy machinery in Moscow, which had defeated me in my mission concerning Netaji affairs, I hoped to make the best use of my visit while staying with my old Comintern friends now working in Central Asia.

19. LOCATING NETAJI THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA

(i)

At the eve of the Russian October festival in 1955, I was still held up in Moscow. Vera warned me: "For the sake of a ferocious Fascist you have spoiled your present visit to the Soviet Union. Now it is time, I warned you, if you are not careful you may be sent away to Yakutsk as Subhas Babu's companion."

"Nothing would please me more."

"Mind it, never in life you will be able to see the light of the outside world, nor ever your own country would know what happened to you."

"Why do you punish us that way at the same time boasting of everlasting Indo-Soviet friendship?"

"Because nothing is more hateful to us or greater sin in our Soviet Union than taking sides with a Fascist."

"But I told you, Subhas Babu was not a Fascist."

"Your own Embassy here would not agree with you."

"How do you know?"

"Did I not tell you that your Embassy does not maintain any secrecy from our country. Rather they allow most of the delicate questions to be handled through my friend—Comrade Valentina Veramova, who is an employee of your Embassy but most loyal and reliable secret police agent posted in any of the foreign Embassies here. She has reported against your suspicious enquiries in Moscow, which may get you transported to Siberia. Our authorities at this stage may not grant you an exit permit to enable you to leave the Soviet Union."

I had kept it a secret from Vera that I had approached the Soviet Police for an exit permit through our Embassy.

To come out of the embarrassing position I put it to Vera— 'as a very old friend and the responsible secretary of the secret section of the Comintern section dealing with India, you know my antecedents much better than any one else here in Moscow.'

"I know that you have always been opposed to the Communist party of India. Here in the Soviet Union, the reports of the Communist party of the country concerned counts much more than the recommendations of their Embassies. We are better posted in your case as well from the reports of the Indian Communist party to us than with your papers sent to us through your Embassy channels."

"Do both of these reports tally with each other?"

"More or less they are similar. Your Embassy had made your case forceful by emphasising that you are a Member of the Indian Parliament. Valentina had attached a note in which she had enumerated all your abuses to the Soviet Union from the floor of your House."

"I do not remember to have spoken against the Soviet Union."

"We lift our information from the Communist party papers in India. They have branded you as imperialist agent. With your investigations here so sympathetic to a renowned Fascist like Subhas Bose, you have confirmed all the Communist party allegations against you. Now, the matters have reached a stage when instead of getting Subhas Bose out of Siberia, you may yourself get condemned in the arctic dungeons there."

"What would be your advice under the circumstances?"

"You return home straight away. Through the INTOURIST section under my control, I shall get you an exit permit and put you on plane bound for Tashkent tonight. From there you can take another Aeroflot service

to Kabul via Termez. That is the best I can do for my dear 'Subhas' of Comintern days."

My enthusiasm for investigating Netaji's case in Russia was considerably damped due to the amazing pattern of the functioning of our Moscow Embassy. It was to serve as a warning that India could not entrust its Moscow Mission for handling Netaji's case or the question of any other prisoner of war locked up in the dungeons of the Soviet Union.

(ii)

Our Ilyushin-12, aeroplane took off from Moscow's Vnukovo airport at the odd hours of 3 A.M. in the morning. After a short intermediate stop at Uralsk we landed at Aktyubinsk in Kazakhstan. Vera had signalled Askaroff, who had been a co-student with me at the KUTV in the middle of the Thirties. He also worked now for the INTOURIST in Central Asia. At the Aktyubinsk airport he met me to accompany me until I finally left the Soviet territories.

The temperature at the Kazakh airport showed many degrees below zero. A ferocious Siberian wind was practically blowing us off. I complained—"What a place to live?"

Askaroff smiled—"Just imagine the life of the prisoners at Yakutsk! Dostoevsky had called it a death-house though he was not banished to so distant a corner in Siberia."

"You must help me in getting our Indian war prisoners out of that mortuary."

"Due to a new turn in our politics, perhaps we shall have to do that in our own interest."

"How?"

"You must have observed that due to the Chinese eyes our developed Central Asian regions, we shall be forced to fight against them some time or other. In such an emergency,

to keep our hold in Asia, it is most essential that we get the support of India at our side."

"If you released our war prisoners, and specially, Subhas Babu, the our whole country will fight side by side with you against the Chinese."

"My only wish is, there were many people in both our countries who thought and acted rightly on the same political line we have just chalked out."

When we were air-borne again, which ever side we looked, all habitation and vegetation were swept away. Further up in our southward direction we flew over the KZYL-KUM and the KARA-KUM deserts. The Amu-Darya which cuts the high pamirs and flows turbulently dividing the Soviet Union with Afghanistan, just Vanishes in the Red and Black sands as the names of the deserts indicate respectively.

"Look!" Askaroff reverted to our talk—"To find out precisely where the Amu-Darya vanishes in the vast sandy ocean is much easier than finding out your war prisoners in this vast Sovietland."

"But we shall have to achieve the difficult job at any cost."

"The only great obstacle before us is that we are individuals, not the Government. If the Governments of our two countries take interest in your project, everything can be accomplished in no time."

Flattered by my compliments, Askaroff boasted—"You will find it out yourself if you moved about in these regions that my deeds are now narrated around camp—fires all around in Central Asia. I have fought battles against the Chinese to save the life and liberty of our borderland people. The same type of campaign you too will have to carry out in your Himalayan regions. why not we join hands right now?"

"The settling up of our war-prisoner's case will naturally put us on that joint venture."

"In this particular task too I am not worried about the difficulties from our side. I am personally interested, and wish to see that your plans succeed, because a number of my personal Indian friends too are suffering unnecessarily in our Siberian prisons. I am convinced about their innocence. They have never been Fascists of which they are accused."

(iii)

I was held up at Tashkent for three days as there was only one flight a week to Kabul. Askaroff talked a good deal about Netaji—"I feel for your great leader so much because I had an occasion to meet him personally."

"When was it?"

"In March 1941, when he was on his way to Berlin. I was assigned by the comintern to escort him our Afghan borders to Moscow."

"That is interesting."

"Yes, I was so much fascinated by his adventurous personality. He related a good deal about his trip through Afghanistan. Many travellers have described the strains and the delights of the Hindukush route, but Subhas had his own style of narrating his experiences. The two gigantic statues of Buddha at Bamian, the largest in the world, had transformed his political trip into pilgrimage. Though the icy weather and filthy living of Kabul had made him sick, he endured the crossing of the cloud-turbaned Koh-i-Baba with the renewed strength of 'Dhamma' like Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century."

"Was he very much weakened when you received him?"

"Not particularly. He stepped out of the Amu-Darya ferry-boat at Termez enquiring from his German escort whether he knew the history of the place. When the German pleaded ignorance on the subject, Subhas Babu told him—"Many great adventurers and conquerers have used

this crossing during their campaigns, which have influenced the history of the world."

"For us Subhas Babu's crossing too of the Termez ferry has been of great importance."

"Quite right." Askaroff nodded—"I remember, when his German escort had left him alone in my Company for a while, Subhas Babu had no good word for the Fascists. He had enquired from me whether it would be possible for him on reaching Moscow to meet some of our Soviet leaders. I did cable his request to Moscow, but during Stalin's regime no body in Russia could dare to meet a leader like Subhas at one's own initiative. As a result he had to fly to Berlin the same day he had reached Moscow by train from Tashkent."

"What a pity!"

"I am sure, if Subhas had succeeded in contacting and impressing Stalin, he would have secured Soviet armed support to drive out the British from India much earlier than he got from the Germans and the Japanese."

"Just possible."

"Anyway, some of my Comintern friends who had received Subhas Babu at Moscow railway station, told me that, he was not at all happy in getting into the Berlin bound aeroplane. But there was no other choice left to him."

By the time I was to leave Tashkent, Askaroff assured me most sincerely that he could pass on to me any further news he received about Netaji from Yakutsk. Without any Governmental help or in spite of their opposition we chalked out a concrete plan to go ahead with our investigations.

(iv)

My Tashkent-Kabul flight turned up to be quite an exciting one. Askaroff had introduced me to the pilot who took me to the cockpit and offered me the co-pilot's seat

which I most gratefully accepted. On his flying map I drew a line from memory of the route Netaji had taken for his plunge into the Unknown. We set our course along that route.

The sight of Samarkand looks really like a 'jewel set in sand'. Our pilot was well acquainted with the legend that Shehrazade had told the Sultan Shehryar the stories of the Arabian Nights in this town. But right now we were interested in Netaji's story.

Casualty I asked the pilot—"Can we cross the Hindukush or the Himalayas without oxygen aids?"

"For a normal man it is not very difficult. After crossing the Amu-Darya you will see the ancient caravan route passing through the Hindukush. On land everyone does it without oxygen. By air too it is possible in most of the cases."

"What are the possibilities if you fly over the Pamirs and the Karakoram in an unpressurised plane?"

"There also you may get away without oxygen. Are you planning any hops from Siberia to your Ganga?"

"For the time being I am thinking only of the theoretical possibilities."

"Even technically you have not to worry much. You can make it in ordinary twin-engine planes. Only keep it in mind that the hearts of Mongols always faint at the Pamirs. Anyway, you are not a Mongol horseman but a modern flyingman."

We had a few hours stop at Termez. Taking a Staff-car I went around the town and reached the Amu-Darya ferries. Just across the river was Afghanistan, where the historic caravan-route continued on its way to our own country.

By our Ilyushin we crossed the rugged Hindukush mountains in an hour for which Netaji had to trek for ten days. Suddenly the pilot pointed out—"There the Pamirs and the

Karakorams peep in their full grandeur today. It is that region where the Chinese are troubling both India and our Sovietland."

I had a great desire to take a turn towards those mountains, but the pilot reminded—"Make it on your flight from Yakutsk."

20. GANGA TO YAKUTSK

(i)

"...Renew the stories of men who against hope repelled the chain, and make the world's dead spirit leap and roar again."—This slogan of the Hungarian revolutionary Matthew Arnold was an agreed code-word between my Soviet friends and myself. They signalled it to me in Berlin in the spring of 1964. It was an invitation for me to meet one of my Soviet writer friend and to get active for the repatriation of our national heroes from Russia.

The German aircraft manufacturer—Dornier had brought out a new type of STOL (short take off and landing) plane which was ideally suited for our Himalayan defences. I succeeded in acquiring one of such planes for test flight to India, but all my enthusiasm for such work got damped by the patently bureaucratic set up of the Government of India. Now I had to take a scheduled air-liner by which one can not do justice to the type of job I was interested in achieving.

Somehow, I managed to keep my appointment with a Russian writer at Capri in Italy. During my Moscow trip a few weeks earlier I had missed him. There, he was determined not to see me for fear of getting into trouble with the secret police of his own country.

We met at Capri in the same house at Marina piccola where I had met Maxim Gorki as a student before Hitler had come to power in Germany. The Soviet writer I had come to meet now had been also a pupil of Gorki in Moscow.

Petya talked now openly—"You are worried now about a few individuals, but can't you see through what a hell we people of the Communist block are forced to pass through.

There are very few families in the Soviet Union without having one member who was not a victim of Stalin's crimes and who are still in need of official rehabilitation."

"But our case of Subhas Babu is quite an exceptional one."

"Well, even if you take up his case in Russia, you will have to understand the realities prevailing in Russia today."

"What are they?"

"It is significant that the Soviet press today writes less and less about fascism and Nazi-concentration camps. Do you know why? Because the first death camps were not set up by the Germans but the Soviet authorities. The first such camps began operating at Khalmagor near Arkhangelsk in the arctic circle already in 1921. Therefore, it is wiser for our press to write less about Nazi camps to avoid comparison being made with Soviet institutions of the same nature. We are afraid that if your prisoners of war are repatriated they would disclose details which may put Nazi camps as more civilised than the Soviet ones."

"Is the number of inmates of the Soviet camps larger than of the Nazis?"

"The population of the Soviet concentration camps over the three decades of their existence has been estimated as between 8 and 12 million people. The truth is at last coming out. It has already been officially admitted that over a year ago the editorial offices of literary periodicals had received about ten thousand novels, stories, articles memoirs on concentration camps. All this had caused confusion in high Soviet offices. Today on the one hand Stalinism is condemned and described as hostile to the Soviet Union, indeed criminal, and on the other anti-Stalinists even like comrade Khrushchev are equally condemned."

"These realities are quite unpalatable not only to Soviet communists but to the members of their Indian branch as

well. They put forward a great hurdle in our way of reaching our noble objective."

My talks with the Soviet literary friend convinced me that I would not be able to achieve any concrete results even if I made my way to Moscow again. For following a correct course, I had to return home, tell our people of the prevailing realities, and force the hands of our own Government to consider the matter of Netaji's and other heroes' repatriation a matter of the highest national importance.

(ii)

However crazy it may sound to others, I believe, it is essential to have crossed the Sulaiman ranges himself before one can justifiably get qualified to participate actually in Netaji affairs. After leaving Peshawar, on the second leg of his plunge into the Unknown, Netaji had to get himself forged through physical hardships for shaking off all fears of death further on in life. His case can be compared to the legendary sailor who was on a dark night and stormy sea unable to do his job due to his mental fear of getting sunk. Then a roaring wave actually engulfed him. The sailor was thrown out overboard. When he got picked up and was brought back to the ship again, the sailor laughed at the dark forces of nature for their childish play.

Netaji had to set off from Peshawar at night on a country track of the tribal territory and march through the Sulaiman ranges to get across the loops of the Kabul river. The second night he had to spend in a mosque at Adda-Sherrif. Further on, only on the fourth day, he was able to get far enough inside Afghanistan and further away from the British C. I. D. bulldogs.

In comparative safety and comfort of Dakota plane, I have flown over that Netaji's track a number of times tracing out and taking photographs of the exact path he had trodden. Our aeronautical chart had shown that area as

prohibited. The Peshawar tower under Pakistani control had also warned us—"Do not flirt with the Kabul and the Indus rivers. The consequences would be very serious."

The landscape below us was all around rugged. Slate-coloured Sulaiman ranges looked naked and hungry. It looked amazing how a man hailing from the soft soil of Bengal pursued by British bullets could muster as much strength and courage to spend cold and windy nights over those rocks.

"We are only ten minutes away from Peshawar." Our navigator told us.

"How long Netaji had taken to cover the same distance?" I enquired.

"About five nights of hard enforced marches in cold Pamir-Hindukush icy winds raging in their full blast."

(iii)

Let us compare this Sulaiman trekking which taxed Netaji's endurance to his utmost with the sort of trekking a Russian prisoner needs to come out of Yakutsk in the north east Siberia lying practically in Arctic tundras. Firstly, getting out of the clutches of the British lion is always comparatively much more easier than from the bear-hug of the Russians. Slipping away from the Elgin road home in Calcutta is different from getting out of the high stone walls with electrically barbed wires of the Central prison in Yakutsk. Our Ganga too is not an easy reach from Siberia. Not even on a map. And it is, of course, a little more difficult for a prisoner in Russian hands. History does not record any escape from the barbaric Siberian prisons to the safety of a civilised foreign soil. Some correct knowledge of the Russian affairs is gained only by the luckless stragglers like myself blown off to Siberia by fate.

The realities of the Netaji affairs too can be correctly appraised only when one knows for certain preferably at

ones own cost, that, Russian affairs are completely different from what one would have expected after reading the Soviet pictorial so cheaply made available in places like the College Street of Calcutta.

Those of us who take pride in their fertile imagination do not take the trouble of studying Russian affairs, not to speak of trekking Sulaiman or the Siberian regions. Without explaining, how could Netaji might have made his way back to India, which is far more difficult for obvious reasons than his escape, they already see Netaji having come back amongst them. With all due respect to their devotion to Netaji, it must be emphasised that they unwittingly become a Governmental to make the Indian public mind forget all about Netaji's troubles while in Russian hands. Once they all of a sudden declare Netaji's advent in some place or other in India, the Central Government gets a pretence with a mischievous smile to declare that, since Netaji's case got explained, there is no need to reopen his affairs any more. Taking different routes the imaginative 'devoties' and the intransigent Government, both bury Netaji's historic contribution to the cause of our freedom as well as his pointer towards the preservation of independence. Both ways are contrary to the teachings, principles, and the examples of Netaji's dynamic action.

(iv)

My own Moscow-Delhi flight in 1963-64 winter over the Pamir, Karakoram and the Badri-Kedar peaks will always remain a constant spring of inspiration for shaking off angry polemics and getting on to concrete action in respect of Netaji affairs.

At mid-night I had boarded the plane at the Sheremetevo airport of Moscow. My head was full of exciting news of Yakutsk camp with which my friends had tried to help me in the Netaji affairs. Leaning back in a corner of the plane,

I dozed. Then I dreamt of having landed at Yakutsk. From some dark cell there a voice known to me came out—"Mother Ganga! accept my Jai Hind."

We heard the Ganga roar in reply.

At dawn, shaken up by the navigator for joining him in the cock pit, I looked ahead. In the distance, our eyes dazzled with the blood-red over a majestic panorama of snow-capped mountains. Further we flew, still loftier white peaks appeared with blue lakes and green pastures at their feet.

"Where are we?" I enquired.

"Over the Pamirs. In a short while we shall locate Gilgit and further on Gangotri."

"So near?"

The white snows of these very mountains serve as a cementing force in our Indo-Soviet relations today."

"I do not get your point."

"Peking is moving fast in her adventure to oust us from our Pamir strongholds. So, we proclaim Gilgit a part of India, which it justly is. With this Indo-Soviet joint move in these regions, the Chinese invading armies could be smashed by the loss of their main invasion base at Kashgar."

"We have only one leader who can readily mobilise the total strength of our country to smash the Chicom menace into dust."

"Who is he?"

"Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose."

"Why does he not give such a lead right now?"

"We are told he is in your custody at Yakutsk."

"Just make the matter clear to our Soviet authorities, and we shall fly him back to his home."

(v)

We were able to spot the Gangotri Massif. Our plane followed the course of the Ganga.

The two upper arms of the Ganga swayed in parallel directions. Then, they became one.

The mighty river leaped and roared in joy.

But it did not reach Yakutsk.

21. OUT FIGHT TO FREE NETAJI

(i)

On this Independence day in 1965, Netaji must have his deserving place in our national affairs. During the coming session of the Parliament an all out effort is going to be made to rectify the mistakes of the Shah Nawaz Committee. Chances are, the reawakening of our people would lead us to the most glorious victory on the Home and the Himalayan fronts.

There is enough data, photographic material and other evidence at Taipei to prove the truth that the alleged air-disaster involving Netaji did not take place at all. The irony in this particular case is that the Shah Nawaz Committee deliberately avoided visiting Taipei—the site of the so called air disaster, and even then it phanatically declared Netaji as dead. Even the least sense of justice and truth in this matter dictate that in face of the overwhelming evidence at Taipei that the Netaji air-disaster did not take place, our Government must not argue in support of the obviously wrong findings of the Shah Nawaz Committee. The only correct decision for them now to take is to institute a new enquiry and get the wrongs done by the Shah Nawaz Committee rectified.

Once we have succeeded in getting the wrong official version changed and the real truth established, the path will get cleared up for further measures to be taken regarding Netaji. When our Government have retracted from the untruth they will be in a proper position to make enquiries regarding Netaji, also from the other Governments concerned.

(ii)

Since the publication of the Netaji series in the Ananda Bazar Patrika and the Hindusthan Standard, some more material has come to light as our eye opener. These new facts corroborate my findings in Berlin and Moscow that Netaji was in the Russian prison of Yakutsk in 1950-51.

But the bare statement of this real fact has enraged our Russophils having considerable influence in the political circles of New Delhi. Their first reaction is that this 'accusation' is going to affect our good relationship with the Russians. Outright I must tell them that they are wrong. They need not fear provided they get themselves properly educated in the realities of the Soviet affairs in Soviet Union itself.

Let us see how other countries are handling such cases. Sweden has a very similar problem with Russia regarding their diplomat Wallenberg, as we have in the case of our Netaji. Evidence supplied by Italian and other foreign prisoners of war repatriated after the death of Stalin has convinced two Swedish Supreme Court judges that 'there can be no doubt about it that Mr. Wallenberg, after taken into effective custody by the Russians in January 1945, had been a prisoner in the Soviet Union.' Eversince the Swedish Foreign Ministry has made repeated representations to the Russians demanding the return of Wallenberg. The Russians have repeatedly rejected the Swedish notes saying that Wallenberg was unknown to the Soviet authorities. According to the fears of our Indian Russophils, the Wallenberg affair must have by now caused deteriorations in the Swedish-Soviet relations. But nothing of the sort has happened in reality.

The facts are that the Swedish have arisen higher in Russian estimation, since they have succeeded in tracing the most guarded secrets of Stalin regime concerning human

material. The Swedish Soviet relations have improved in spite of the Wallenberg episode.

In the middle of June this year, about the same time as our Prime Minister visited Moscow, the Swedish Premier too paid another official visit to Moscow. This time too the Swedish Premier raised as on all previous occasions, the case of Wallenberg. The Russians too repeated their emphatic denials. In spite of this, the Swedish people have not given up their fight for Wallenberg. Rather they have intensified their demand. The Wallenberg Committee consisting of a group of influential Swedish citizens continues their search and confronts the Russians with new evidence.

This Wallenberg case is a good example for us to learn how to direct our firepower effectively in Netaji affairs. We must demand from our Prime Minister that he takes up the case of Netaji the same way as the Swedish Premier has taken up that of his Wallenberg. As is the case with Wallenberg, there are a number of rehabilitated Russians and repatriated German and Italian prisoners of war whose evidence irrefutably proves that Netaji was being kept a prisoner at Yakutsk in Russia. Our Central Government now must take up Netaji's case in our national interest. The sooner they do it greater would be the justification to call themselves dignified in action.

(iii)

Unfortunately, New Delhi's action so far in similar cases as of Netaji, has been rather disappointing. A typical case is that of Dr. Abani Mukherji. I have narrated this case in Netaji series and also told it in the Maidan public meeting at Calcutta on last June 27th. Hearing my voice, Abani Babu's younger brother contacted me and gave me a copy of the official letter he had received from our External Affairs

regarding the "whereabouts of Dr. Abani Mukherji." It is dated—New Delhi, the 24th July 1957 :

"With reference to this Ministry's letter of even number, dated the 8th March, 1957, on the subject mentioned above I am directed to say that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic have now informed that Dr. Abani Mukherji, who had taken on Soviet citizenship, died on the 28th October, 1937. He left no will or testament behind. His widow, Mme. Rosa Fitingoff, is a pensioner and her address is "Obiedinsky Peryulok, House No. 7, Apartment No. 3, Moscow. His daughter, Maya Mukherji, is now married and is living outside Moscow. His son Gora Gaur Mukherji died on the front during the last war."

Our External Affairs considers the case of Dr. Abani Mukherji closed with this letter. But the real facts lead us to different conclusions. Our Ministry has been informed by the Russians that Dr. Abani Mukherji died in 1937, where as Abani Babu's brother has been receiving letters from him until 1942. Dr. Mukherji's son, whom we called Goga in Moscow, is declared dead during the last war. But I myself met Goga in 1954 in East Berlin and in 1960 in Moscow. He was the first one to communicate to me the statement of the rehabilitated Comintern functionary—Mazut, that he had seen Subhas Babu at Yakutsk in 1950-51. According to Mazut Subhas Babu was locked up in Cell No. 45 and Abani Babu in No. 57 of the Central prison of Yakutsk.

In face of such detailed evidence it is a tragic irony that Russia's reply is being considered as true and continues to be argued by our own External Affairs Ministry. In face of it we have to see to it that the same process is due to the insistence of the public opinion in India.

In view of the detailed evidence I have in my possession and in order to expedite our fight to free Netaji, it is our humble request to our Prime Minister that he should take

up Netaji's case with Mr. Mikhail Suslov in Moscow. Mr. Suslov has been handling the affairs of the most secretive Comintern and Cominform apparatus and has now become the most powerful man in Russia after the succeeded in toppling down Khrushchev.

The formation of a new Netaji Enquiry Committee is imperative for New Delhi. But to expedite the measures to free Netaji from Russian hands, all legal or other technicalities should be waived aside. This is also high time we stopped our fruitless lazy armchair discussions and wishful thinking about Netaji's appearances in different parts of the country. Misleading rumours surely work as serious obstructions in getting Netaji repatriated. No distractions are tolerable or stand to reason. Without hesitation or inhibition we shall have to march forward for the noble cause of Netaji.

On this Independence day let us get determined and channel our affection and respect for Netaji into a mighty fighting force to force a decision, of course, in the immortal spirit of Netaji himself.