

**PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (DEFENCE WING)
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

VIGNETTES FROM THE FIRST INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

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As we celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Indian Independence Day, it will be interesting to recall the scene from the first Independence Day celebrations 60 years ago.

On August 14, 1947 at the stroke of midnight hour, power transferred from the British empire to the government of independent India. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as the first Prime Minister and the Constituent Assembly headed by its president Dr. Rajendra Prasad appointed Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India, as the first Governor General of independent India.

Contrary to popular perception, the national flag was first unfurled over the Red Fort on August 16, 1947, and not August 15th. The mood in the capital was ecstatic and the atmosphere was informal as we reproduce an article on the account of the day published in Fauji Akhbar (now christened Sainik Samachar) in its special issue dated August 30, 1947. This is the oldest defence journal of the country being published since 1909. Along with the

article, we are also releasing seven rare pictures from the photo archives of the Directorate of Public Relations which vividly showcase the different moods of the day on August 15, 1947.

INDEPENDENCE DAY IN DELHI

(Reproduced from *Fauji Akhbar*, August 30, 1947)

Surging crowds of happy, good humoured people from Delhi and its environs broke through slender police cordons at the Constituent Assembly on 15th August, 1947 morning and Princes' Park in the evening, milled amongst detachments of armed force units drawn up as guards of honour and gave Pandit Nehru and Lord Mountbatten thunderous cheers.

The formal ceremonies, carefully rehearsed, had to be abandoned; in their place was a spontaneous exhibition of joy and happiness which made August 15 an unforgettable day.

MOUNTBATTEN CHEERED

On both occasions the Governor-General, when he drove in his State coach, was acclaimed as no other Governor-General of India within living memory has been greeted. Cries of "Mountbatten Zindabad" and Lord Sahib Zindabad" were heard along with the major and persistent shouts hailing Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and the Congress.

As the State coach neared its destination, people rushed to it, shook Lord and Lady Mountbatten by the hand touched them, cheered them and presented them with small national flags.

In the afternoon at Princes' Park even stranger scenes were seen—Lord Mountbatten and Pandit Nehru helping lost children and two Indian women caught in the stampede into the State coach, Pandit Nehru sitting on the rolled-up hood of the coach, heartiness and good cheer, lusty, full-throated plaudits of laughing people, and the complete absence of any bitterness, hostility or untoward incidents.

SWEARING-IN-CEREMONY

The Governor-General and Ministers of the Union of India were sworn in at Government House. The

ceremony resembled Lord Mountbatten's oath-taking as Viceroy only a few months ago. The Chief Justice of the Federal court, Mr. Justice Kania, administered the oath to the Governor-General who then swore in his Ministers, one by one, beginning with the Prime Minister. Mr. Jagjivan Ram, still in hospital after his recent plane crash, was the only Minister absent. Those who may have thought that this was too formal a ceremony perhaps little knew what would happen subsequently.

The walled enclosure outside the Assembly door facing Parliament Street had been cordoned off by the police. Red carpets had been laid down on the steps. Detachments of the Navy, Army and R.I.A.F. were drawn up. Everything was ready for the traditional drive in State of the Governor-General. Cars streamed in, bringing distinguished visitors. All of a sudden there was a movement at the police barricades. Laughing and shouting slogans, people rushed towards the Assembly entrance.

INFORMAL ATMOSPHERE

They got in amidst the guard of honour who stood woodenly, neither breaking ranks nor interfering with the people. The crowd shouted persistently for Pandit Nehru and when he appeared on the terrace the cheering was prolonged and loud. British soldiers and airmen who were there as spectators entered into the spirit of the rejoicing. While Pandit Nehru stood on the parapet of the terrace, the Governor-General's Bodyguard cantered in the well-trained chargers picking their way through the crowd without causing anyone injury. With difficulty a way was made for the State coach. As it came near, the people gave the Governor-General an ovation

The scenes inside the Assembly Hall were, like those at the midnight session, solemn and impressive.

KING'S SPEECH

Although constitutionally Lord Mountbatten had ceased to be Viceroy of India, the Assembly treated his arrival to make the "King's Speech" as if the chronological lag had not taken place and as if he was still Viceroy. He was given the seat of honour, the President having vacated his in favour of the distinguished visitor.

Dr. Prasad sat on Lord Mountbatten's right and Lady Mountbatten on his left. The Governor-General's speech was well received and the House warmly applauded it.

The reference to Mr. Gandhi evoked prolonged cheers. Dr. Prasad replied in Hindustani first then in English. He spoke with considerable emotion. Messages from heads of foreign countries were read out.

Finally, Lord Mountbatten made a signal for the National Flag of India to be flown over the dome of the building. Standing up himself and making a tiny gesture towards the roof, Lord Mountbatten brought the House to their feet as the first of a salvo of 31 minute guns heralded the appearance of the flag to those outside.

When Their Excellencies left the Assembly building, the cheers were even louder. Pandit Nehru had come out to the terrace to watch the departure of the Governor-General. Lord Mountbatten looked up and waved to the Prime Minister and saluted the flag now flying over the building.

A "MISHAP"

Both Lord and Lady Mountbatten were on their feet when the coach suddenly began to move forward. They were thrown on to the seat. Laughing at their own discomfiture, they waved happily, acknowledging the continued demonstrations of affection.

It was perhaps the most informal procession of this kind seen in India. Seldom since the days of Lord

Rippon have Indian crowds shown so much warm friendship, to a British Governor-General.

Over half a million people had gathered at Princes Park to watch the hoisting of the National Flag by the Governor-General. The parade ground had been enclosed with wire fencing, seats had been numbered and all arrangements made to receive guests. The crowd, however, took possession. It was their day.

The police after initial efforts to check the rush, shrugged their shoulders and let the people have their way. Many notable guests, including some Ministers, Diplomatic representatives and Service Chiefs had to return after trying in vain to enter. The drill and the march past were abandoned. When the National Flag was hoisted there was a shower of rain and a rainbow appeared vividly in the sky. The people saw in these good omens.

They looked at three prominent colours of the rainbow and exclaimed "Heavenly Flag". Their Excellencies and Pandit Nehru returned from the parade ground amidst scenes of unbounded enthusiasm.

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