

Statement by Clement Attlee on Burma (24 July 1947)


Caption: On 24 July 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee speaks about the talks held with the President of the Burma Constituent Assembly, Thakin Nu, on Burma’s independence, particularly focusing on the arrangements for the transfer of power.

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BURMA (TRANSFER OF POWER)

The Prime Minister: I desire to make a statement with regard to Burma.

The conversations between His Majesty's Government and the Burma Goodwill Mission, led by Thakin Nu, President of the Burma Constituent Assembly and now deputy-chairman of the Governor's Executive Council, ended on 2nd July.

The conversations turned principally on the arrangements for the transfer of power in Burma and the future relations between Burma and His Majesty's Government.

It has been agreed that immediate steps shall be taken by the exchange of missions between Burma and this country to examine and if possible to reach provisional agreement on various matters such as defence, finance, nationality, commercial relations, and contractual obligations arising out of the transfer of power. The common objective of His Majesty's Government and the Government of Burma will be if possible to reach provisional conclusions on these matters by the date on which the Constituent Assembly completes the drafting of a new constitution for Burma.

His Majesty's Government have given the mission an assurance that they intend to introduce legislation at the beginning of the next session of Parliament in the autumn to give effect to the transfer of power to the Burmese Government under the constitution which is to be set up by the Constituent Assembly which is now sitting. His Majesty's Government will do their utmost to carry the necessary Bill through Parliament as quickly as possible.

As regards the future relations between Burma and His Majesty's Government it has been agreed that should the final decision of the Constituent Assembly be that Burma is to become an independent state outside the British Commonwealth, the object of both countries will be to maintain the most cordial relations and that all steps that are practicable should be taken to this end.

The mission have represented that it is desirable that, for the period between now and the achievement by Burma of her full independence, the Interim Government set up under the Government of

Burma (Temporary Provisions) Order, 1945, is recognised as the provisional Government of Burma. In order to make clear their sincere desire to help Burma to achieve her full independence as early as possible His Majesty's Government agree that the present Interim Government as so constituted shall become the provisional Government of Burma until the transfer of power is completed.

The senior member of the Cabinet will by convention be designated as Prime Minister, and the other members as Ministers.

I should inform the House that the agreement which I have just read was communicated by the Burma Goodwill Mission under Thakin Nu to the late U Aung San and his colleagues in the Executive Council and that I am informed by the Governor that it received their approval. That approval was given almost immediately before the lamentable outrage of Saturday last.

Mr. Eden: Can the right hon. Gentleman say what will be the role of British troops in Burma pending this transfer of power and whether he has any more recent information about the actual situation in that country?

The Prime Minister: British troops in Burma, pending the transfer of power, are responsible for the ~~def~~ external defence of Burma and for the safeguard of special interests of His Majesty's Government, such as stores, installations, etc., the property of His Majesty's Government in that country. They are also available, if the Government of Burma so request, to act in support of the Burma Army in the maintenance of internal security. With regard to the events in Burma, information has come through with regard to finding a large amount of arms in various concealed places, but I am not in a position to make a full statement. I will make a full statement as soon as I can.

Mr. Gammans: Can the Prime Minister assure the House that, if the majority of the Constituent Assembly decide that Burma shall not remain within the British Commonwealth, no further financial aid will be forthcoming?

The Prime Minister: I should not like to anticipate anything on an hypothesis. We shall have to consider what the situation is like.