

INDIA'S BIGGEST COVER-UP

ANUJ DHAR

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Prologue

Information Commissioner AN Tiwari's darting eyes seized the three 30-something men sitting across the table. Only Sayantan Dasgupta was conspicuous by his tall, dark, handsome presence. The other two were short, plump and sported unfashionable short hair. Chandrachur Ghose would have looked studious in his chubby countenance and glasses but for an occasional meaningless smirk. The third harried-looking person was me. Tiwari's anxious eyebrows were now wrinkling his forehead.

"Haven't you people anything better to do?" he asked.

The room we were sitting in was in a spruced up part of an otherwise worn-out building temporarily housing offices of the Central Information Commission, the watchdog body created only two years earlier to regulate India's new freedom of information regime. The Right to Information Act, 2005, had elevated the country into a select group of nations giving their public the right to seek information from their government. Of course, to respond or not was the Government's prerogative within the ambit of the Act. In our case the Government hadn't to our satisfaction, and so there we were.

There was a muted laugh, and Tiwari frowned to silence the two middle-aged, middle-level Ministry of Home Affairs officials to my left.

"Sir, this is..."

The commissioner was not keen to hear counter-arguments from us nevertheless.

"Look, I was born in Cuttack. I went to the same school as Netaji did. I can do without your perspective on the mystery."

Tiwari needed no lessons in history or anything from us. But it was not just the history we were sitting there for.

We learn about the past largely from the historians and researchers working on the information available in public domain—in archives, libraries or in private collections. There isn't much the historians can do except to speculate when they know something is there but can't reach it. The liberty of speculation is lost when they don't even know that something exists.

Ours was essentially a case of history being held hostage to state secrecy. And we were lucky to be making our case before a man who had been a bureaucrat all his life before being appointed on the information panel.

As in the preceding decades, in 2006, when we made our case before the Central Information Commission, a standard lookback at Subhas Chandra Bose climaxed with the breaking point in his relations with the Congress party in 1939. The twice-elected Congress president's run-in with Mahatma Gandhi was the turning point of the Indian freedom struggle. Bose stood for treating non-violence and *satyagraha* as only a means to an end—"to be adjusted and altered, as exigencies and expediency demand"—on the path to *swaraj*, or complete freedom from the colonial rule. Saint Gandhi, on the other side, would "adhere to that ideal of highest standard of non-violence, even if the pursuit means sacrificing and giving up the political goal of *swaraj*". [1]

Gandhi and Bose had not hit it off well from the first time they faced each other in Mumbai's Mani Bhawan in 1921. The latter had just returned from London having quit the ICS, the best job any youngster could land in those days. For a man who had no experience of public life and was 28 years junior to the biggest phenomenon of Indian politics, Bose had the gumption to tell Gandhi that his plan to make India free was fudgy. Gandhi had the greatness to counsel Bose to get clarity from Chitta

Ranjan Das.

Over the next two decades or so, most of which was spent in either jails or exile in Europe, Bose differed on several issues with the man he would call the Father of the Nation. He wore his heart on his sleeves throughout over a range of issues—the execution of revolutionary Bhagat Singh, possible dominion status for India, the need for modern industry, intra-party democracy and so on.

With that sort of backdrop, Congress president Bose wasn't going too far. In his own words, "the Gandhi Wing would not follow" his lead and he "would not agree to be a puppet president". [2] Not allowed to work on his own terms, Bose was hounded till he stepped down. He created the Forward Bloc within the party, which further annoyed the entire top-rung leadership. They snatched the charge of Bengal state Congress from him and debarred him from contesting for any position in the party for three years. Screaming headlines in newspapers at that time would have you believe it was Bose, not the British, the top leadership was probably at war with.

The bitter smile that Dilip Kumar Roy saw on his best friend's face was the result of the "most unkindest cut of all". "Subhas Bose punished for 'grave act of indiscipline'," an 8-column *Hindustan Times* headline read. To Roy, "it was not the discipline that he minded. But that he was asked to eat humble pie and beg the high command to forgive him, when the boot was on the other leg". [3] Roy felt that his friend was put through "the unjust humiliation" only because he had "the courage of his conviction and said openly that he did not believe in the cult of non-violence". [4]

Many of the stalwarts who backed Gandhi against Bose at that time weren't the peaceniks they professed to be. When they and their followers were running India years later, brute state force and streaming inputs from the Intelligence Bureau and not hallowed Gandhian principles saw India through. Goa was not liberated through *satyagraha*. Rebellious Mizos weren't sent emissaries from Gandhidham; they got poundings from the Indian Air Force fighter planes.

In 1940 Bose was a nowhere man. "Those who do not go with Gandhiji are politically dead," [5] said a Gandhi supporter about the 43-year-old, just not ready for that sort of fate. So he exfiltrated himself to another theatre from where he could fight freely. It was in the national interest, but too bad it turned out to be in Nazi Germany. It could have been Russia, but the Soviets were just sympathetic. Nothing more. For all the right things it stood for, the United States sided with British colonialism. Bose came to despise the US. He wanted his country to be free above anything else. So, unmindful of dangers to his life, he escaped from British custody in India, crossed into Afghanistan and—passing through the lawless land which is now the haunt of Taliban and Al-Qaida—found his way to Berlin via Moscow and Rome. No Indian leader of his stature could ever think of the things he did.

India's star freedom fighter was born in Nazi Germany. In a remarkable image makeover for Bose, from the politician *Subhas babu*, he became the military leader *Netaji*. As Netaji, Bose's two initial contributions to the idea of modern India were a national slogan and a national anthem. His political opponents at home were compelled to accept them years later. They couldn't think of anything comparable.

On the run from the biggest power on earth, Bose mixed fearlessly with the deadliest men of his times. They were his friends by default, for they were the enemies of his enemy. Apply the body language rules to the pictures which have recently been made public through Wikimedia Commons by the German Federal Archive and you will see Bose on the high table with Hitler's top brass, having them eating out of his hand.



The tilt in monster Heinrich Himmler's mannerism is for real. Obviously, like Benito Mussolini before him, the *Reichsführer* was drawn to the fugitive Indian like an iron clip to a magnet. The admiring look in Adolf Hitler's devilish eyes as Bose gives him a firm handshake is an iconic freezeframe for many, continuing embarrassment for others and a stick to beat Bose with for those who abhorred him for entirely domestic reasons.



A German pointed out to me that before he joined the Axis, Bose had opposed Gandhi's *protégé* Jawaharlal Nehru's idea that the European Jews could be given sanctuary in India. I submitted that most Indians of that time couldn't think of anything else except their own emancipation. On a personal level, Bose was as much humane and enlightened as any other Cambridge alumni. Between 1933 and 1939, for example, he had for friends Kitty and Alex, a sensitive, newly married Jewish couple in Berlin. Before they met, Kitty had heard an American priest in Berlin calling Bose a "traitor to the British government". But in their first meeting, Bose came across to her as a "mystic, a spiritual man". In their last, he told her to "leave this country soon". [6]

The couple went to the US and from her Massachusetts home in 1965 Kitty Kurti wrote her tribute for "Netaji". She reminisced about the various issues they had discussed. Bose had told her about certain Hindu holy men who while physically far away could still be able to "appear and talk to you". [7] Kitty noted that Bose "did not attempt to hide" [8] from her his deep contempt for the Nazis. In the same vein, he cited India's exploitation by British imperialism and explained why he had to do business with the Nazis. "It is dreadful but it must be done. ...India must gain her independence, cost what it may," [9] he told the couple after a meeting with Hermann Göring. Of Jews, Bose said, "they

are an old and fine race" gifted with "depth and insight" and felt that they had been "miserably persecuted" across the centuries. [10]

It was India's interest that mattered to Bose foremost. Nehru's idea about bringing European Jews to poverty-stricken India was airy, unworkable and only good for grabbing headlines. So long as Nehru and his family ruled India, I told the German, Israel was not allowed to open its embassy in New Delhi. There is an old Indian saying: An elephant has two sets of teeth. One for the purpose of eating and the other for flaunting.

Bose's violent push for India's freedom during the Second World War with his quickly assembled, Japan-backed Indian National Army (INA) had a great start, or so it seemed. Bose's deep baritone on the radio sent Indian hopes soaring unbelievably high. And yet the dreams of a blitzkrieg by Bose's non-existent airplanes never materialised. His exhortation "George Washington had an army when he won freedom. Garibaldi had an army when he liberated Italy" [11] came to nothing when the action began. The INA men were routed in battlefield, at the very hands of the Indian mercenaries enrolled in the British Indian Army.

An Indian Army assessment of 1946 said "the INA was 95% 'ballyhoo' and 5% 'serious business'". It was "still an embryo organisation" when it went to war; a "purely guerilla force...with no aircraft, no artillery, no heavy mortars, no tanks or AFVs," a "David against Goliath but a David without a sling". Out of 15,000-odd INA soldiers who actually saw action, 750 were killed; 1,500 died of disease; 2,000 escaped; 3,000 surrendered and the rest 7,000 fell into the British hands. "It was never a cause of real trouble or annoyance to the Allies," [12] the report concluded.

The trouble was just starting. An Indian Army officer intermingled with the imprisoned INA men "awaiting repatriation to India" to get a sense of their outlook. He reported back that it was no use trying to belittle Bose: "He is regarded by them as a 'Leader' who is honest, utterly sincere and who has raised the status of the Indian community in the Far East far above that of the other minorities under Japanese occupation." [13] These people were then brought to India and put on trial at the very place they had vowed to march into. But the idea to make the Red Fort trials the Indian version of Nuremberg and Tokyo trials backfired. Bose's war was justified.



The humiliation of the INA soldiers—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian—galvanised the Indians like they hadn't been ever since India was brought under direct British government rule. The Governor of the present-day Indian state Uttar Pradesh wrote to the Viceroy in New Delhi in November 1945 that those hitting the streets were actually suggesting that "Bose is rapidly usurping the place held by Gandhi in popular esteem". [14] INA's GS Dhillon openly engaged in fistfights with his captors and

dared the jury, including future Indian Army chief KS Cariappa, to hang him. They would have done so without any delay, but in the dead of night, city walls were plastered with handbills warning of bloody retribution. In 1946, the Intelligence Bureau—the spy agency that had monitored the Indians since 1885—reckoned that “there has seldom been a matter which has attracted so much Indian public interest and, it is safe to say, sympathy”. [15] The British were wise enough to see the writing on the wall.

“But where was Netaji then?” I wondered as a school boy. Then, there in one corner of a history book approved by the Government, I read that he had died in an air crash in Taiwan. In college years I learnt that there was some dispute about the crash just after the end of the war, Bose’s cremation in Taiwan and his assumed ashes kept in a Japanese Buddhist temple. Now I surf the net and see a BBC story saying that his “body was never recovered, fuelling rumour and speculation...that Bose survived the crash”. [16]

I wonder why do we Indians continue to think about Bose's fate? We are the sort of people who have never let any tragedy of howsoever gargantuan proportions overwhelm us. Millions died when Partition occurred and not a stone stands in their remembrance anywhere on Indian soil. I don't know if it is a good or bad thing, but we have a knack for putting the past behind us. Controversies surround the death and assassinations of our three prime ministers and yet the cumulative interest in them is not a patch on the Bose mystery. So, there has got to be a little more than rumours and speculations for the people to keep it alive so many decades after Bose's political clout dissipated even from his home state Bengal.

In 1956 and again in 1970, the governments of Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi were pressurised into launching probes to resolve the issue. The inquiries of INA veteran Shah Nawaz Khan and well-known judge GD Khosla backed the air crash theory and yet there was no end to what some people believed. They claimed that the official inquests were fixed.

In the 1960s an unbelievable urban tale had conjured up Bose as a fugitive holy man in a remote corner of India. Kitty Kurti wondered if her friend was a “*sanyasin*, appearing now and then in this or that village”. [17] Those claiming to be speaking for “Bose” raised the bogey of a war criminal tag he couldn't shake off due to the complicity of the Indian government, which had inherited all the international obligations of the Raj. Some others blamed the Nehru government for planting the holy man tales “knowing well” that Bose had died not in Taipei, but subsequently in a Siberian gulag.

Some thirteen years ago a court order reopened the case and the WWII mystery became a hot topic in the 21st century India. The inquiry of MK Mukherjee, a former Supreme Court judge, proved to be the gamechanger. The judge rapped the Government for not being sincere and evidenced that the story of Bose's death in Taiwan was actually a Japanese smokescreen to obfuscate the trail of his escape towards Soviet Russia.

The Government reacted with a vengeance as it received the report in 2005. Official sources trashed the judge and his “damp squib” [18] report in a Delhi newspaper leak. Sir Humphrey Appleby would have been proud of the Indian bureaucrats. They appeared to have picked up his stratagem on “how to discredit an unwelcome report”. Stage three: “Undermine the recommendations.” Stage four: “Discredit the person who produced the report.” [19]

On 18 May 2006, the Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry report was placed before Parliament with a single-page Memorandum of Action Taken Report signed by Home Minister Shivraj Patil. Even a school report card would have been far more detailed. And when the Opposition lawmakers rose in protest, they were taken head-on by two Bengali battering rams, shattering the myth that all Bengalis care too much about the fate of the most famous of them all.

Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi growled at the BJP members. “Why did the former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visit Renkoji temple and pay tributes to the ashes?” [20] Minister

Pranab Mukherjee reasoned with the enraged parliamentarians: “You can have the full discussion, instead of making these types of off-the-cuff comments. Let there be a structured discussion....”[21]

“Drop this sagacious tone, Mr Minister!” I said watching the TV. The Lok Sabha channel was beaming live the discussion, and conjectural visuals from another time and place were playing on my mind. To me it was “Pranab Mukherjee’s Mission impossible”. Should you find the title flattering because of the Tom Cruise-starrer it has been paraphrased on, let me put it crudely: The mission represented a botched attempt to cover up the Bose mystery.

The old fox can’t deny it. It is on the secret files, partly, and also the lips of many Subhas Bose family members in its uncensored form.

In 1995 a group of Japanese war veterans, proud of their association with the INA, made an appeal that the Indian government should take “Bose’s ashes” to India. The demand was discussed by Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, Home Minister SB Chavan, Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee and the all-important Committee of Secretaries (CoS) headed by the Cabinet Secretary. The Intelligence Bureau’s was the voice of caution. “If the ashes are brought to India, the people of West Bengal are likely to construe it as an imposition on them of the official version of Netaji’s death.”

How do I know this? Well, it is on record. In fact, let me show you the relevant portion from a Top Secret record accessed in public interest, which overrides everything else:

views of MEA and IB. IB's views are to the effect that it would not be advisable to take any initiative to bring back the ashes to India as there is no demand from any quarter for this. If the ashes are brought to India, the People of West Bengal are likely to construe it as an

F.No.1/12014/27/93-IS(D.III)
Ministry of Home Affairs

PI

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The Ministry of External Affairs, however, stuck with the opposite view. “The ashes should be brought back to India.” It was even ready with the outlines of a “preparatory action” to create a “consensus in favour of burying the controversy” under which “respected public figures” could be “discreetly encouraged to make statements, including in Parliament, requesting the Government to bring back the ashes”. To sort the issue out, Prime Minister Rao asked the Home Minister to place the matter before the Cabinet. That happened on 8 February 1995.

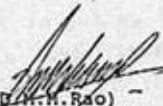
No. 6/CM/95(iii)
 GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR)
 CABINET SECRETARIAT (MANTRIMANDAL SACHIVALAYA)

NEW DELHI, the 6th February, 1995.
 18 Magha, 1916 (S).

The following will constitute additional item on the agenda
 for the meeting of the Cabinet scheduled to be held at 1145
 hours, on Wednesday, the 8th February, 1995 in the Conference
 Room (No.155) South Block, New Delhi :-

SUBJECTS

5. Proposal to bring the mortal remains of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose from Japan to India. (Note dated 2.2.1995 (CD-92/95) from the Ministry of Home Affairs, attached).

PI


(P.M.Rao)
 Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet.

At the meeting, Home Secretary K Padmanabhaiah submitted a Top Secret backgrounder discussing the case as seen by the jaundiced eyes of the Government. While it was being prepared, the Home Ministry asked Mukherjee's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to furnish a copy of the all-important Japanese record conclusively proving Bose's death. The MEA responded that it had none.

The Cabinet decided to stall for time and not bring the ashes to India. However, there was no stopping Pranab Mukherjee. Maybe he was privy to some ultra secret information. Or perhaps some Congress party psychic had told him, "Bose died in Taiwan; don't bother about evidence."

So, the Bengali anti-hero—strictly in this instance only—hopped across the world in 1995 in a never-before quest to exorcise the ghost of Bose mystery. After meeting the Japanese Foreign Minister in Tokyo, Mukherjee flew to Germany. Sanitized official records speak of his meeting with Bose's daughter Anita Pfaff who, against the wishes of her family, was eager to help Pranab Mukherjee in taking the ashes to India.

But wait, why ask the daughter when the mother is still around?

I immensely enjoyed James Cameron's *Titanic*. I read how a large number of Indians shed copious tears over a fictitious story of a woman not being able to overcome the loss of her love despite decades rolling by. And I fail to understand how the same Indians could never empathise with Emilie Schenkl, who was not at peace even forty years after Bose had disappeared.

Just before she died, Emilie was given a rude jolt by Pranab Mukherjee. He asked her to sign a paper so that the ashes kept in the Japanese temple could be taken to India as Bose's ashes. According to a less charitable and probably bloated account, octogenarian Emilie was offered "a blank cheque". "She was told that she could earn any amount in any currency for such a favour. She took the blank cheque and tore it to pieces, asking the emissary never to approach her in the future." [22]

A less disgraceful, but authentic, version of the event later emerged from Subhas's Germany-based grandnephew Surya Kumar Bose:

On 20 October 1995 auntie rang me after 10:30pm from her daughter Anita Pfaff's home in Augsburg. She was quite agitated. She told me that Mr Pranab Mukherjee was coming to Augsburg on 21st October 1995 to convince her and Anita to give their approval for bringing the so-called "ashes" of Netaji to India. Mr Mukherjee also wanted her to sign a document which he would take back to India as proof of her approval. She again emphasised to me that she had never believed in the plane crash story and would neither sign any document nor agree in any way to bringing the "ashes" to India or to anywhere else.

On 21 October 1995 Anita and her husband Dr Martin Pfaff had to take Mr Pranab Mukherjee out for lunch as auntie could not tolerate any discussion on the so-called "ashes" in her presence. Auntie told Pranab Mukherjee quite clearly that she did not believe that Netaji had died in a plane crash...and that those "ashes"...had nothing to do with Subhas. [23]

Emilie was just stating the standard view held by almost all the Bose family members, and for good reasons.

Surya had to speak with his grandaunt again when an Indian daily subsequently carried a newsitem (mis)quoting Pranab Mukherjee as saying that Emilie “had given her approval to the Government of India’s plans for bringing the ‘ashes’ to India, and that he (Mukherjee) had a document to prove it”. Emilie turned livid and

reiterated that she had signed no such document and had approved of nothing. Mr Pranab Mukherjee was propagating an untruth for reasons best known to him and the Government of India. [24]

A decade later, Pranab Mukherjee was described in the Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry report as one of the seven witnesses who had testified before it in favour of the story of Bose’s death in Taiwan. The rest included a fellow Congressman who did not know much; a former INA veteran who lied under oath and a prejudiced journalist known to Mukherjee.

In an ironical twist, Mukherjee, having returned to power in 2004, then sat in judgment on the commission report along with his other Cabinet colleagues. Since the chances of minister Mukherjee taking an objective view of judge Mukherjee’s report were bleak, there were murmurs of protest. Pranab was accused of trying to scuttle the commission’s inquiry and that probably led to his facing “mob fury in Kolkata” while his car was entering a hotel on 18 June 2006.

“Mukherjee later said the report had already been placed in Parliament and ‘we wanted a discussion on the report but the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stalled the debate’.” [25]

Going by the transcript of parliamentary proceedings, it was nothing like that. The promised “structured discussion” on the dismissal of the commission report took place in August 2006. In the Rajya Sabha, incensed MPs from different parties shouted at Shivraj Patil: “Why are you so keen to prove that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is dead?” [26] Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, another Bengali luminary, invited scorn that with his alleged help “Congress succeeded in putting to rest a debate on the subject”. [27]

The highlight of the discussion in the Lok Sabha, before it was lost to interruptions, was the emotional defence of Justice Mukherjee and his report by Bose’s mannerly nephew Subrata Bose. He told the House that Mukherjee’s name was recommended by the Chief Justice of India. He called him “a man of integrity”, who carried out “the inquiry with an open mind”. [28] Subrata could say so with conviction because he had closely followed the commission’s inquiry as a deponent. He accused the Government of deliberate “suppression of facts and information” and destroying files “which contained relevant information”. [29] His charge that the Government had indulged in destruction of evidence on Bose’s fate was seconded by Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee in her brief intervention.

“The Government stands accused...in the court of the people of India,” Subrata wound up his address, demanding approval of the commission’s findings by the Government. “This will be the chance for the Government to amend [its]...willful misconduct of...over 59 years”. [30]

Prabodh Panda, another member, took objection to the delay in making public the report as also the ATR report, which he described as “one page of white paper”. “The mystery has not been solved, but it [has] remained.” [31]

The Rajya Sabha discussion on August 24 was also drowned in the din. For some reasons it was scheduled to the ungodly hour of 8pm. Lasting up to 11.30pm, it was unusually lively and had many participants, the most outstanding of whom was former HRD Minister Dr Murli Manohar Joshi.

Opening the debate, Dr Barun Mukherjee said if indeed the Government’s decision to dismiss the commission’s main findings was biased, “the future generation will not forgive us for that”. [32] Dr Chandan Mitra said he could not understand why certain Bose files were kept classified in the name of ties with certain friendly foreign nations. “Are the friendly countries more important or are the people of India more important?” he asked. “It is not a political question, it is a question of our

nationhood,” he underscored and predicted that “the people of this country will not rest quiet even if it takes three more generations” [33] to get at the truth about Bose.

Shivraj Patil’s response was made up of legalistic, political mumbo jumbo and oodles of cynicism. “If he were alive, what made him stay away from the country? Why did he not come, if he were alive?” [34] Dr Joshi gave him a rejoinder: “Suppose Netaji was arrested by some country, suppose he was not a free man? How could he come? Now, this is a thing which you have to find out, which the country has to find out... That is the most important thing. If you want to know it, and, if you can help it, well and good; otherwise, people will decide themselves what to do.” [35]

Patil went for the jugular, going so far as to denigrate a former Prime Minister no longer around to defend himself.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha in 1978, Morarji Desai had to set aside the findings of GD Khosla and Shah Nawaz panels in view of glaring contradictions in evidence and “contemporary official documentary records”. After it was formed, the Mukherjee Commission directed the Government to produce those contemporary records.

But on 18 December 2001, the office of Prime Minister Vajpayee, who had served under Desai as Foreign Minister, made an astonishing claim. A PMO affidavit said that “due searches” had failed to locate any such records and, therefore, the PMO was “not in a position to provide any clarification/explanation” why Desai “had made such statement on the floor of the Parliament”. Justice Mukherjee responded that some notings in a secret file suggested that such records were in existence earlier. Still the PMO had no clue.

In 2006, the Congress-led UPA government latched on to the stand taken by the Vajpayee government. Home Minister Patil insinuated in Parliament that since the records referred to by Desai could not be traced, the former PM must have misled the nation. From this logic flowed Patil’s jibe that former PM’s 1978 “statement could have been motivated, not by reasons of law, but by reasons political”. [36]

Hindus don’t end up in graves, or else Desai would have turned in his after this instance of the pot calling the kettle black. All his life, Desai had lived by Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals. He wore self-spun *khadi* till the end and made a nauseating fetish out of naturopathy. So far his pre-Independence politics went, for a while he was engaged in trying to queer Subhas Bose’s pitch. So, could he have lied in Parliament for a man he had never sided with?

The Prime Minister’s Office would disagree. Desai’s profile on the official PMO site reads that “for him, truth was an article of faith and not expediency”. As a minister in Nehru’s cabinet Desai was never heard, even on the grapevine, saying anything which might be construed as favourable by those seeking the resolution of Bose mystery. As Prime Minister, Desai was as cynical as Patil. On 16 January 1978, he dismissed historian Dr RC Majumdar’s view that there was a “good case for the appointment of a fresh committee to investigate into the matter”. The words Desai had used then were echoed by Patil in 2006.

If it is assumed that he were alive, I do not think he would have remained out of India till now. He would have doubtless come here soon after or later at any time during the last so many years. Even under the law if a person is not heard of for seven years, he is presumed to be dead.

In fact, Desai was far more harsher. On February 2 he made this comment in a letter: “So many years after the event any fresh investigation seems to me to be a sheer waste of money or any further controversy about it a sheer waste of time.”

Prime Minister Desai was all for continuing with the official policy on Bose’s fate. But he could not sustain it in the brazen fashion of his predecessors mainly due to the circumstances prevailing in 1978. Shivraj Patil was lucky to have not faced even a fraction of the pressure the MPs had mounted back then. They called for a fresh inquiry which could specifically sniff out secret records and reach out to the Russians. Desai bit the bullet and conceded that Bose death claims were inconclusive. There

indeed were contradictions in evidence and the British Raj-era records did throw the air crash theory open to questions. Desai gave away this concession to get the monkey of “fresh inquiry” off his back. If there was any political dimension to Desai’s statement, it was this.

The trouble for the Government started in 1999 when the Calcutta High Court assessed Desai’s statement in its right perspective and ordered that a new inquiry should be launched as a direct corollary to the PM’s admission in Parliament that the evidence on Bose’s death was inconclusive. Since Patil could not have faulted the court, he made dead Desai the fall guy. Official records show the UPA government using a shady logic to discredit Desai. It goes something like this: It is gospel when the “eyewitnesses” back the Taipei crash theory with contradictory statements and no supporting documentary evidence. But it is telling lies when a Prime Minister of India, a top notch follower of the Mahatma, makes a statement in Parliament repudiating the crash theory. Why? Because the Government can’t find the records on the basis of which Desai said so.

But which government is it that can’t find the records? Is it not the one which by its own admissions to the Mukherjee Commission illegally destroyed and misplaced several Bose records in the past? You don’t have to be a former Supreme Court judge to make deductions as Manoj Mukherjee did. The bottom line in his report was that the commission found “it extremely difficult to persuade itself to believe that a Prime Minister of the country would make an incorrect statement on the floor of the Parliament to invite the risk of breach of privilege”. His conclusion, a fair one to arrive at, was that the non-availability of records cited by Prime Minister Desai “put a spoke in the wheel of this inquiry”. [37] Funny how those who had shoved this spoke later complained that the wheel hadn’t moved enough.

It beats me why the Government of India could not find the “contemporary official documentary records” Desai referred to when some of them have been clearly referred to in the official records. Published transcripts of parliamentary proceedings show them being read out aloud in the Lok Sabha in 1977.

Writing to Prime Minister Desai on 13 December 1977, Dr Majumdar drew his attention to recently declassified British records containing expressions of disbelief in the news of Bose’s death. Desai was still not convinced. In his reply dated 16 January 1978, he argued that “presumably...they were not sure whether the Japanese announcement was correct”. He asked the historian to cite more records. Majumdar in his 3 February 1978 letter referred to a record where an American journalist was quoted saying that he had seen Bose after his reported death. He also quoted from an IB report speaking of “discrepancies” in the air crash theory which made it “little doubtful” to arrive at “any definite conclusion”.

After going through Majumdar’s letters, the official records and hearing the MPs, who repeatedly spoke of Gandhi’s disbelief in Bose’s death, Desai deduced what anyone who is not biased would: There was no finality to the case.

Another strong line in Shivraj Patil’s defence of the rejection of the Mukherjee Commission’s report was the flaunting of pro-air crash findings of a previous commission headed by High Court judge GD Khosla. Extolling Khosla’s “legal acumen to assess the validity and reliability of the evidence given by the witnesses”, Patil told Parliament that his report was more “unambiguous and conclusive” than Mukherjee’s and hence acceptable to Government. The “inconclusive” aspect of Mukherjee’s report pertained to its not been able to determine “in the absence of any clinching evidence” where and how Bose had actually died. The Ministry of Home Affairs picked on this.

Contrasting Khosla’s “competence” with Mukherjee’s sense of “confusion”, Minister Patil said: “A person [Khosla] who has the acumen to evaluate the evidence produced before him, oral as well as documentary, a person who is trained to judge, is saying this, ‘I, therefore, find it proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Bose...[died in Taiwan]’.”

The question before us is: Why a report of this nature should be discarded in favour of a report which is of inconclusive nature? There was no reason for the Khosla Commission to arrive at a wrong conclusion. [38]

A proper answer awaits you in subsequent chapters, but for now, just answer the following simple question, and you'll know the subtext of Patil's statement. Which one of the following do you think would be best suited to inquire into Subhas Bose's reported death?

- A. A Congress MP.
- B. A friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, and a biographer of Indira Gandhi to boot.
- C. A former Supreme Court of India judge.

The credibility—as it were—of GD Khosla was in his being in tune with the powers that be, those who were hostile towards Bose's legacy. Khosla was a good writer, but a dishonest investigator. His complicity in treading the official line and that of the Government which accepted his fraudulent 1974 report became clearer as Information Commissioner Tiwari overcame his initial reluctance to back the case my friends and I had mounted under the Right to Information Act.

This is how it unfolded: Barely a month after Shivraj Patil's upholding the Khosla's and Congress MP Shah Nawaz's inquiries, Sayantan Dasgupta, Chandrachur Ghose & I filed an application under the RTI Act. Mission Netaji, our group, sought from Patil's Ministry of Home Affairs the "authenticated copies of documents used as exhibits by the Shah Nawaz Khan and GD Khosla panels". The idea behind this simple request was to better the understanding about the much-touted conclusions drawn by them. However, the Special Officer on Duty handling our RTI request evidently freaked out. He wasted no time in telling us that it could not be "acceded to" for reasons covered by section 8(1) of the RTI Act. This was the section empowering the Government to not to part with security classified information. Classified? In 2006? What on earth for?!

The confidence with which the dapper Home Minister had run down the dissenting MPs hardly exuded from his ministry's response.

After receiving this point-blank refusal we complained to the Central Information Commission (CIC). Information Commissioner AN Tiwari was the adjudicator.

In the first hearing, the ministry officials said they did not know of any such exhibits; because unlike the Mukherjee report the previous two had not appended any such lists. Obviously Shah Nawaz and GD Khosla were not on the same page as MK Mukherjee over transparency as well. Be that as it may, round one went to the MHA officials. Noting that "the matter was quite old and the institutional memory was quite blurred", Tiwari directed us to seek specific documents. It was a tough task, considering that no details of the exhibits were available anywhere in any archive or library. But before the next hearing we were able to give the ministry a memory booster. A copy of a classified record listing out 202 documents used as exhibits by the Khosla Commission was furnished along with a revised application seeking release of all these documents.

"Where did you get this from?" the officials protested in the next hearing. It was of no use; the tables had been turned on them. Tiwari directed the ministry to release the 202 records specified by us. He wondered why was the Government keeping thousands of Bose records secret. "Why don't you send them to the National Archives?" he asked. He got the answer by the year end.

A "Secret" letter from the Home Secretary, a friend of his, stated that the "matter had been considered carefully at the highest level in the ministry". The records were determined to be "sensitive in nature" and disclosure of many "may lead to a serious law and order problem in the country, especially in West Bengal". This was too much for Tiwari to bear. He noted that

the matter was of a serious national importance...[and] in spite of that, the Ministry of Home Affairs had been taking a somewhat perfunctory position. They were seen to be unwilling or unprepared to take a considered view regarding which parts of the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's papers should be kept secret and for what reason. [39]

Tiwari transferred the matter to be heard by the full Bench of the commission in an extraordinary session. On 5 June 2007 the full Bench of the CIC comprising Chief Information Commissioner

Wajahat Habibullah and Information Commissioners Padma Balasubramanian, Dr OP Kejariwal, Prof MM Ansari and AN Tiwari—who succeeded Habibullah as the chief—hammered home that the matter was of “wide public concern and therefore of national importance”.

Government officials agreed because there was no running away from it. They bared fangs when I charged the Government with the destruction of records on Bose. Sayantan and Vishal Sharma, our youngest colleague, further contested their claim. Chandrachur retaliated that “the intention of the ministry is to hide and not disclose” and its “responsibility does not end just by saying that certain documents are missing or cannot be located”.

The officials repeated before the Bench that some of the documents sought by us were “top secret in nature and may lead to chaos in the country if disclosed”. The CIC did not agree that we were some kind of agents of chaos in the making and backed us. Rejecting the Home Ministry’s “considered view” not to supply us the documents, it said in its landmark order that

earlier, a public authority could bar any information from disclosure under the Official Secrets Act, simply by classifying the information as secret or top secret. That option has been effectively excluded by the RTI Act. ...The decision to bar an information from disclosure can no more be arbitrary.... The commission has noted that the MHA has expressed its resolve before us to examine these records of undoubted national importance and send them to the National Archives.... The commission recommends that this resolve be translated into action as early as possible as by doing so, the MHA would not only be discharging its legal duties and rendering an essential service to a public cause, it may finally help resolve an unsolved mystery of independent India. [40]

As conceded by the MHA officials before the Bench that “the decision concerning disclosure has to be taken at the highest level”, in late September-November 2007, Home Minister Shivraj Patil took issue of the 202 records to the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs. The CCPA decided in favour of release because it was felt “the worst that the Congress-led coalition government may have to face was a controversy that would die a natural death”. [41]

Despite this so-called “highest-level” decision, out of 202 only 91 exhibits were eventually released by the MHA to us. One paper—a note by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru—remained classified. There was no word about the rest 110—including Home, Foreign ministry records/files; letters from Home Minister, High Commissioner, Taiwan government and Intelligence Bureau Director; a report on the INA treasure said to have been lost along with Bose and a memo from Director of Military Intelligence over Mahatma Gandhi’s view on the matter. These papers were simply “unavailable”. The difficulty in accepting this skewed explanation was that many of the “unavailable” records contained information against the air crash theory.

For instance, not to be found among the released papers was a 1952 “Top Secret” correspondence between then Commissioner for India in Port of Spain and the Foreign Secretary in Delhi. This commissioner was AM Sahay, Subhas Bose’s wartime diplomatic pointman. Now a Nehru loyalist, Sahay was making revelations that should have made the Government fidgety about Bose’s death. He characterized the air crash story as a “show” and revealed that he had come to know of Bose’s “death” probably before it had taken place.

There is one thing extraordinary in the whole show which needs some explanation from the Japanese. So far as my information goes, Netaji was removed to a hospital after the accident and he died there. How is it that the crash took place on the 18th and the announcement regarding his death was made on the same day, or was it that the plane crashed on the previous day?

Sahay also provided a fairly good circumstantial detail that Bose had been planning to move to Soviet Russia in the last months of the war. Was this the reason why this record went missing? Because you see the Government of India, from the days of Nehru to the present, doesn’t even want to accept that there is a Russian angle to the Bose mystery. Wishing it away in Parliament on 24 August 2006 was Shivraj Patil.

Now, you know Japan had fought against Russia or the Soviet Union. Germany had fought a war against the Soviet Union. ...And even after this do you think he would have gone to Russia?

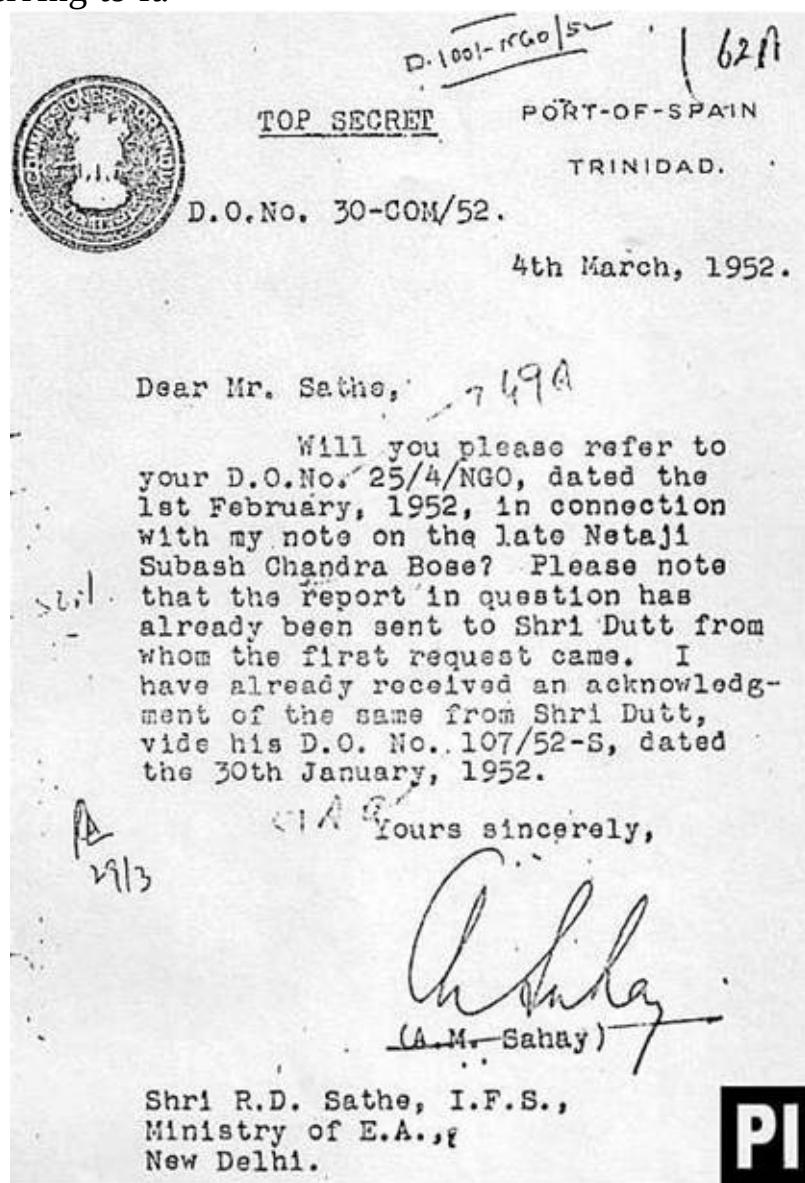
If his ministry had provided us the Khosla Commission exhibit Nos 43/C and 43/D, it might have

given one reason why. Sahay had himself received a communication from Bose on August 16 for a rendezvous in Manchuria—the gateway to the USSR—and the same was conveyed to the Foreign Secretary in his now “unavailable” report.

[Bose] informed me [in January 1945] that the Japanese would no more be able to lend much support to our (INA's) fight in future. Japan was being attacked by American air force regularly, inflicting heavy losses on the Japanese, making it impossible for them to send their air support to our army in Burma or Manipur. Netaji said that he could see the end of the war in course of months and he wanted me to try to persuade the Japanese to allow us to establish direct contact with the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo. I was in Tokyo in the beginning of February 1945. I met General Tojo and the Chief of the General Staff and discussed the matter at length. I told them that if we could deal with the Soviets directly, we might be able to help in improving the Russo-Japanese relation that was necessary to strengthen Japan's position.

The plan was to proceed to Manchuria and be there when the end of war comes, so that we may be within Soviet sphere after the surrender of the Japanese. War came to an end on 15th August. A special messenger from Netaji came to see me on 16th from Bangkok with a letter from him asking me to get ready to secure transport from the Japanese and to leave for Manchuria, and to meet him there. He suggested that although the Soviets had declared war against the Japanese, it would be desirable to be arrested by the Soviet authorities in Manchuria because we could later negotiate with them and might persuade them to accept us as their friends and not enemies.

Could the Government really have lost such “Top Secret” record of historical importance? A source confirmed to me that it had been taken out of the relevant file and only a trace of it was found in other secret records referring to it.



I did not worry too much about the missing Sahay correspondence because the list of unavailable records was rather long. A secret Intelligence Bureau report not given to us encapsulated details not conforming to the Home Minister's worldview. The report was based on the inputs provided by a source who had heard Bose and the Japanese general overseeing his “last flight” say this: “They were talking about the ways of letting loose Mr Bose... His destination was already understood to be Soviet

Russia.”

According to yet another unavailable report of 17 October 1945, the Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) in China reported about interception of a secret Japanese message advising Bose “to be separated from his fellow travellers at the time of his journey from Burma in an aircraft”.

“DMI’s supposition is that though Bose’s family were in that plane that crashed, Bose was not there and he subsequently escaped....”

Also untraceable was a record which directly relayed to Prime Minister Nehru in June 1951 the confirmation that the Japanese had secretly committed themselves to sending their ally Bose to the USSR.

In a nutshell, there it was; the latest in the several government successes in riding out the storm of the Bose mystery. But unlike previous occasions when the controversy was contained with the charge that it was a mere conspiracy theory, the year 2006 marked a turnaround. For the first time, unimpeachable evidence of an official cover-up emerged. And because it related to a six-decades-old controversy spawning mind-boggling subplots, taking a bewildering array of high-profile personalities in its fold and leaving a stockpile of classified records in its wake—it had to be India’s biggest cover-up.

1. Bose mystery begins

10. We would reiterate our original suggestion that Mr. S.A. Ayer should also be interrogated or asked to make a statement. If a solution to the Bose mystery is indeed sought, it would clearly be advantageous to obtain such clues or corroboration as Ayer may well be in a position to give.

NAI

G. Anderson

Lt. Col.
for Comit. O.S.D.I.C.

Much before it gained currency, the nomenclature “Bose mystery” was being used by a British colonel operating out of India’s intelligence hub in a cloistered corner of Delhi’s Red Fort. GD Anderson was in charge of one of the many entities pursuing the leads on Subhas Bose’s reported death and possible escape. For many months after the Japanese announcement, several British, Indian and even American officers, working in a somewhat grid-like formation, analysed, shared, questioned and re-questioned the gathered intelligence on an issue many smart-talking analysts on TV in India today would brush off as unintelligent stuff meant for the consumption of semi-literate conspiracy theorists.

The focus of the intelligence community in India, *circa* 1946, had been fixed on a 6-foot sturdy Kashmiri. His eyes reflected an imperious streak, which could have been due to his aristocratic lineage or a show of plain defiance. As a captain in British Indian Army, Raja Habibur Rahman Khan had witnessed its humiliating capitulation to the Japanese in Burma in 1942. He regarded it British rather than Indian loss and was consequently invited by Major Mohan Singh and Major Iwaichi Fujiwara to join the newly-formed Indian National Army.

Rahman became the commandant of Officers’ Training School, set up to reorient the INA officers so that they could turn their guns against their former masters. When Subhas Bose arrived in Japan, he noticed the spark in Rahman’s eyes. He rose to be INA’s Deputy Chief of Staff and ADC to Bose, the head of Azad Hind (Free India) Government. Lt Col Habibur Rahman’s loyalty to Bose was well-known. In INA compatriot Shah Nawaz Khan’s estimate, Rahman would have carried out his any order “even at the cost of his life”. Bose’s military secretary Col Mahboob Ahmed would elaborate that Rahman could keep secrets “all his life, unless countermanded by Netaji himself”. This sort of devotion, Mehboob recalled in the 1970s, could not have been understood unless one was in the INA. “We fought for India, but India was something very vague. Netaji was the symbol for which we fought.” [1]

In 1946, Habibur Rahman held the key to unlocking the mystery of Bose’s fate.

The endgame of Subhas Bose’s chequered life—as recounted by Rahman—began with the ominous ringing of a phone. This was on 11 August 1945 in a sleepy guesthouse in Seremban, some 100 miles from Singapore. Bose had been staying here for a fortnight along with some of close aides, grappling with a series of setbacks. The latest one was sounded over the phone by Maj Gen Mohammad Zaman Kiani. Soviet Russia had launched a surprise attack on already down and out Japan, Bose’s only benefactor.

Bose reached Singapore on August 13 and took stock of the hopeless situation. Brought to its knees by the nuclear strikes, the Japanese resistance to the Red Army in Manchuria was not expected

to last long. His smiling sang-froid couldn't mask the worrying fact that his struggle had reached a dead-end and the enemy was closing in.

On August 14 Bose called a meeting at his seashore bungalow, just after receiving the details of the Japanese surrender to be announced the next day. In attendance were SA Ayer, Dr MK Lakshmyya, AN Sarkar, MZ Kiani, Maj Gen Alagappan, Col GR Nagar and Habibur Rahman. A view emerged that Bose should remain in Singapore "because at that stage he could not look for protection or help from any country". [2] The other one was that he "should not surrender at Singapore as the British would be very vindictive". [3]

"No," said Bose. He was resigned to his fate. "The worst they can do is to put me against the wall and shoot me and I am prepared for it." Then he gave his men a final pep talk. "The tremendous sacrifices made by the soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj and civilian population will not go in vain. ... Your efforts should be to see that all we had done in the Far East should be known to our countrymen." [4] In a prescient reading of the situation, Bose told them to expect "a tremendous effect on the freedom struggle" once the Indians knew of what they had done for them.

The meeting broke with the decision that the INA would surrender as a separate entity and that it be conveyed to the Japanese general headquarters in Singapore.

At about 8 on the morning of August 15 all of them had to reassemble because "the Japanese commander in Singapore could not give an assurance for a separate surrender by Azad Hind Government and Army as he said that he had no such instructions and it would not be practicable for him to get in touch with Tokyo; even wireless communications having been disrupted". [5] Now the consensus emerged that Bose should himself visit Tokyo and finalise the modalities of surrender. For that he should move to Bangkok, then the seat of Azad Hind Government, with Ayer, Rahman and Lt Col Pritam Singh accompanying him from Singapore, and Major NG Swami, N Raghavan, John Thivy and Maj Gen AC Chatterji joining them from elsewhere.

At 9.30am on August 16 Bose and others took off for Bangkok. Once there, Bose, Kiani, Rahman, Pritam, Ayer and INA Chief of Staff Maj Gen JK Bhonsle, headed to confabulate with Hachiya Teruo, Minister-designate to Azad Hind Government and Lt Gen Saburo Isoda & Colonel Kagawa of Hikari Kikan, the Japanese military unit liaising with Bose's government.

They held a conference at which Hachiya spoke in English. They discussed the INA and Japanese surrender. Hachiya and Isoda informed Bose that no orders had been received from the Japanese government regarding the INA surrender, and, therefore, they were not in a position to advise them on the proposal of a separate surrender by the INA. [6]

Hachiya proposed that Bose should fly to Saigon and contact Field Marshal Count Terauchi Hisaichi, the commander of the Japanese forces in South East Asia. Bose was OK with it. He gelled well with Terauchi, and Hachiya and Isoda were offering to accompany him to Saigon—the Ho Chi Minh City of today. At noon on August 17 two planes landed at a deserted Saigon aerodrome. Bose, Ayer, Pritam, Rahman and a Japanese officer arrived first, followed by Hachiya, Isoda, Col Gulzara Singh, Debnath Das and Major Abid Hasan, the man who had travelled with Bose in a German submarine to Japan. As Bose deplaned, a photograph—his last—was snapped.



[Image taken from "Challenge to the Empire-A study of Netaji" by SC Maikap]

At the aerodrome, Isoda was informed by Lt Col Tada Minoru, a staff officer from Terauchi's HQ, that they had made arrangements to fly out Bose in the very first plane which was to leave in the evening. Dissatisfied, Isoda and Tada left for the HQ. That was in Dalat, roughly an hour's flight away from Saigon. Col Yano Muraji, chief of the India Section in Terauchi's HQ, met Isoda in Dalat and reiterated Tada's position.

At around noon Isoda and Tada met Bose in Saigon at the residence of local Indian Independence League head. "Terauchi had received no orders from Tokyo in connection with the surrender of the INA and, therefore, he was not in a position to give any advice on the matter." [7] The only option left was to fly to Tokyo. Bose sent for Rahman and in his presence

the Japanese officers informed that it was not possible to get a separate plane for the party as was originally expected because the Allies had issued instructions to the Japanese government, which had surrendered on the 15th August 1945, not to fly any plane without their permission. They said, however, that one plane was leaving soon in which one seat was available. [8]

Bose broke the meeting to consult with his other aides. Gulzara, Pritam, Hasan, Ayer, Debnath and Rahman were against Bose's travelling alone. Accompanied by Rahman and Ayer, Bose rejoined the meeting and the Japanese somehow managed to secure one additional seat. In Rahman's words,

all three of us then returned and met the rest of the party. Here Netaji informed that now he had two seats to avail of. Netaji then asked as to who would accompany him. He looked at each of us who were standing and while he looked at me he said, "You will come with me...." [9]

Bose told Ayer, Hasan and Gulzara to come to the airport with their luggage just in case more seats were made available. For the rest, he had already requested the Japanese to fly them to Tokyo as soon as they could.

At the Saigon airport a Mitsubishi Ki-21 bomber—the Allies called it "Sally"—was already on the taxi strip with its engines running when Bose and others reached at 4.30pm. The door clunked open and from it emerged a Japanese general the same age as Bose but appearing younger due to his glassy face, set off by a luxuriant moustache. Lt Gen Tsunamasa Shidei, staff officer of Terauchi's HQ and just appointed deputy chief of staff of Quantung Army, greeted Bose and showed him in. Bose, donning his now trademark INA cap, khaki bush shirt and trousers, bid his men goodbye and got in, followed quickly by Rahman. Ayer, Hasan, Pritam, Gulzara and Debnath stood transfixed as the plane took off and then faded into the sky.

Comfort flying was the last thing Bose and Rahman could expect in a bomber doubling as a transporter. The half a dozen passengers squatted on the floor for there were no proper seats. In the cockpit beneath a greenhouse-type arrangement made of celluloid were Pilot Warrant Officer Aoyagi Juzaburo and Associate Pilot Major Takizawa. Lt Col Tadeo Sakai, Lt Col Shiro Nonogaki, Major

Taro Kono, Major Ihaho Takahashi were in the rear. Bose had been invited to the co-pilot's seat on the starboard side, but he found it cramped. Shidei took it up and Bose preferred to sit behind the pilot. Behind him was Rahman, just opposite to Shidei, and next to him protruding from the ceiling was a petrol tank.

Around 7pm the plane landed in Tourane, now Da Nang, on the south Vietnamese coast. Bose and other officers checked in at the largest hotel in the town. On the 18th morning they resumed the journey to Tokyo and at 2pm had landed at Matsuyama aerodrome in Taihoku, Formosa—today's Taipei, the capital of Taiwan.

Rahman emerged shivering; he had been feeling cold as the bomber notched up to 14,000 feet during the flight. He held out a pullover but Bose said he did not need it. Rahman put on a full sleeves bush shirt, coat, breeches and top long boots. It struck him somewhat odd to see Bose standing there and "looking into the distance".

This was Rahman's third stopover at the scenic city surrounded with hills. The allied strafing had reduced the Matsuyama aerodrome into a picture of devastation, though. Bombed-out buildings were no longer in use and no hangar or any other plane was in sight. Only a skeleton staff comprising some groundcrew personnel was around. The only visually appealing site at the aerodrome was a colourful tent, where a light lunch was being served.

We also helped ourselves to sandwiches and some bananas. All this took us about half an hour when we were signalled again to emplane. [10]

And then the most contested air disaster in the history of India happened.

At 2.30pm the nosewheel lifted off the ground gently and the plane began its climb. Captain Nakamura, the maintenance officer at the Matsuyama aerodrome, first heard a terrifying boom. He turned and saw something fall off the plane. It was the propeller and the port engine. On board, Rahman too heard a shattering boom.

As soon as the noise was heard, the plane started wobbling with its nose downwards and I heard a wailing noise usually heard at the time when a plane makes a nose dive. My immediate reaction was to cover my face with both hands and at that time our heads were downwards and I remember having been struck by the packages at my back. [11]

The pilots made desperate attempts to control the plane but couldn't. The joystick trembled and the needles on the dashboard flickered wildly. Plunging 300 feet in three seconds, the plane impacted the ground at nearly 300 kmph. It swerved violently and screeched to a halt after hitting a heap of rubble.

Rahman tumbled over. His forehead got ruptured after hitting the floor and right knee bruised against something hard and sharp. Nonogaki was thrown out to safety but Shidei had been flung to his death. The general hit the starboard in front of him and then the fuel tank struck him from behind, smashing his head. Sakai, Takahashi and Arai regained consciousness in time to run out. Major Kono made desperate rescue bids. The fallen fuel tank had cut him off from Bose and Rahman. He saw pilot Takizawa slumping down with his bloodied face pierced by the joystick. Kono couldn't dare to take a look at Aoyagi, also face down. He broke through the cockpit windscreen and jumped out.

The front portion of the crashed plane was now ruptured and enflamed. Habibur Rahman "thought that the end was only a matter of seconds" for the rear had been blocked by tumbling packages.

Netaji was injured in the head but he had struggled to his feet and was about to move in my direction to get away from the fire and to get out of the plane through the rear. But this was out of question. There was not an inch of passage through which we could get out. So I said to him 'aage se nikliye, Netaji'. [12]

Bose staggered to the front to find the entrance door blocked by a firewall. "It was touch and go," Rahman later recalled. Bose leapt through the flames.

With both hands he fought his way through the fire.... When the plane crashed, Netaji got a splash of petrol all over his cotton Khaki and it caught fire when he struggled through the nose of the plane...I followed him through the same flames. The moment I got out, I saw him about 10 yards ahead of me, standing, looking in the opposite direction to mine towards the west. His clothes were on fire.

I rushed and I experienced great difficulty in unfastening his bush shirt belt. His trousers were not so much on fire and it was not necessary to take them off. He was not wearing the sweater. He was wearing khaki drill. I laid him down on the ground and noticed a very deep cut on his head, probably on the left side. His face had been scorched by heat and his hair had also

caught fire and singed. The cut in his head was a long one, about four inches. [13]

Exhausted Rahman collapsed next to Bose. He looked around and saw the crashed plane on fire. Another survivor was sitting on a boulder and moaning. This place was 1-2 miles outside the field in an open land with no habitation in sight. Rahman looked at Bose. His carbonised skin was hanging off him in shreds. He was in terrible pain but still composed.

Just then, Netaji enquired from me in Hindustani: "Aap ko zada to nahin lagi?" (Hope you have not been hurt badly.) I replied, "I feel that I will be alright." About himself, he said that he felt that he would not survive. I replied, "Oh! God will spare you. I am sure you will be alright." He said, "No, don't think so." He used these words: "When you go back to the country, tell the people that up to the last I have been fighting for the liberation of my country; they should continue to struggle, and I am sure India will be free before long. Nobody can keep India in bondage now." [14]

Minutes later, Bose was shifted to a lorry which took him and Rahman to Nanmon (South Gate) military hospital, a small branch of the main hospital. The aerodrome staff had already sounded the hospital. At around 3pm the victims were rushed in.

As soon as we were taken to the hospital, the doctor came to dress me because I was still in uniform. I told him to attend to Netaji at once. [15]

This was Capt Taneyoshi Yoshimi, the in charge of the Nanmon hospital. His initial observations revealed that badly burnt Bose's temperature was 39 centigrade and the pulse rate 120 per minute.

When he was laid on the bed, I personally cleaned his injuries with oils.... He was suffering from extensive burns over the whole of his body, though the most serious were those on his head. There was very little left on his head in the way of hair or other identification marks. [16]

Yoshimi's colleague Dr Tsuruta Toyoshi applied white zinc ointment and bandaged Bose all over. According to Rahman, who remained throughout by the side of his leader, Bose

was taken to the operation theatre room. There the doctor gave him a white transfusion which I think was camphor. I enquired of the doctor later on. He said that it was a very deep injury [on Bose's head] and his heart was affected by the burns. [17]

To aid Bose's stressed heart pumping thick, burnt blood, Yoshimi let out 200 cc of it and transfused fresh 400 cc. Rahman said after Bose was brought to the ward from the operation theatre, he "did not talk too much" and was semi-conscious. "After about an hour, he fell into complete coma."

The doctor was sanguine in the beginning but after about three hours he was not so hopeful. Once or twice Netaji asked for water. Once he mentioned the name of Hasan. I said, "Hasan is not here" and I gave him my name. He asked for water at that time. Thereafter, I think he was completely unconscious. [18]

English-speaking Juichi Nakamura, who had on previous occasions interpreted for Bose, arrived a little before Bose succumbed to the burn injuries. The end came in the presence of Dr Yoshimi, Rahman, Nakamura and some nurses. It was 9pm Japan time.

On August 19 morning Rahman told Nakamura and a Japanese staff officer that Bose's body should be taken to Singapore. In the afternoon, a coffin box of camphorwood was brought in. "The body was wrapped in a white sheet of cloth with cotton padding underneath and the coffin was nailed... The body was fully dressed and no part of it was visible...." [19] In the evening Nakamura told Rahman that "the Japanese commander was very sorry that they could not arrange for the transportation of the coffin" because it "could not be placed in a bomber". Rahman argued with Nakamura, which was all he could do.

Next morning i.e. on the 20th, the Japanese staff officer from the headquarters, whose name I do not know, came and expressed their inability to help at this juncture for the transportation of the body and said that they had in fact measured the size of the coffin and the space into the plane and they found that the coffin, as it was, could not be put into the plane.

I asked as to why they could not arrange for a bigger plane. But the officer informed that they did not have a bigger plane at that place. Then the officer asked me as to what I wanted to be done with the body. I said, "Can't you arrange for the embalming of the body?" After consultation with the officer commanding the hospital, I was told that they did not have the necessary medicines available with them for this purpose. Finding no alternative it was decided that the body should be cremated. [20]

At that time a photographer arrived.

Then the lid of the coffin was removed and the body was uncovered. ...The head was bandaged; the face was open. It was swollen and disfigured. It was coated with white ointment for burns. ...The face could be recognised by me. ...The photo of his body (excluding the face) was taken at my request. [21]

Rahman was then told that preparation for the cremation had been made. At the crematorium, which was about four miles away from the hospital, the coffin was offloaded from a lorry that had brought it here. A car carrying Rahman, Nakamura and Major Nagatomo pulled up behind it. Inside, the crematorium had two rows of about a dozen incinerators with metallic doors with bolts outside.

The body was taken out of the coffin, laid on a sliding tray and pushed inside. The door of the incinerator was shut by a somber-looking priest holding incense sticks. He held out one to Rahman who somehow grabbed it in his bandaged hand. For about half an hour Rahman stayed there as fire started consuming his leader's body. He returned the next day with Nagatomo and Nakamura. The hood was opened and the sliding tray pulled out. Following Buddhist custom, Major Nagatomo "first picked a bone from the throat with two chopsticks and placed it in the box". He was followed by Rahman.

I saw the ashes of Netaji's body inside it. We had a wooden urn to collect the ashes. We collected some ashes from the head-side, nearest to the door, and placed them in the urn. I remember distinctly that a little piece of gold, which was from the filling of one of Netaji's teeth, was removed and placed in the urn. [22]

The urn containing the ashes was eventually flown to Japan on September 5 by Rahman, Sakai and Tatsuo Hayashida, a young officer posted in Taipei. By September 7 the urn had reached the Imperial HQ in Tokyo and the next day it was handed over to SA Ayer and Munga Ramamurti, a leading member of the Indian community in Japan.

Before this happened, Ayer was told of Bose's death on August 20 by Colonel Tada. Ayer wouldn't believe it then. "Not a single Indian in India or East Asia will believe this story unless you produce conclusive proofs," he told Tada. "I must see Netaji's body with my own eyes. ...Do not tell me afterwards that Netaji's body has been disposed of." [23] Ayer was not taken to Taipei and he never saw Bose's body. But the doubting information minister of Bose was persuaded by the Japanese to co-draft the news of his death. It was then released to the world through the Japanese news agency *Domei* on 23 August 1945. In India the news first appeared in the late editions of some papers on August 24. It fell like a hammer blow in Kolkata:



In its story datelined August 23 from London, the *Times of India* reported:

Mr Bose, head of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind left Singapore on August 16 by air for talks with the Japanese Govt. He was seriously injured when his plane crashed at Taihoku airfield at 2 PM on August 18. [24]

The *Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* on August 25 carried verbatim the statement co-written by Ayer and the Japanese that said that Bose had "left Singapore on August 16 by air for Tokyo".

In Japan too the news made it to all major newspapers. Shidei's wife was devastated. The Quantung Army personnel in Manchuria mourned the death of the general who never joined them. If he had not died, Shidei would have been there when his superior General Otozo Yamada surrendered to General Alexander Vasilevski of the Red Army in the Manchurian capital on 22 August 1945. Ironically on the same day, the news of his death was announced.

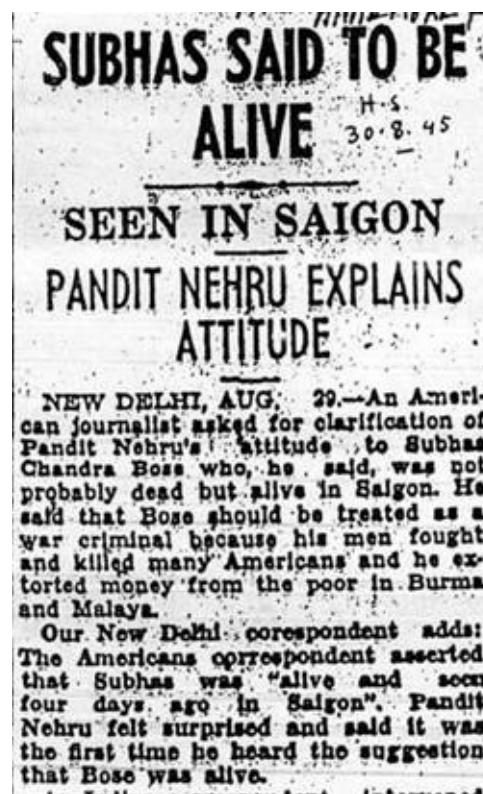
In Poona, Gandhi was informed. He made his first public appearance during the regular evening prayer. Looking grave, he told Congress volunteers to bring the Congress flag down and said nothing. Nehru broke down after being informed by the Press reporters in Abbottabad. "A mixed feeling of deepest sorrow and relief enveloped my soul for the present—sorrow because the great selfless leader passed away and relief because the brave man met with a brave and sudden death." [25]

"Now he belongs to history. And yet there will be deepest sorrow and gloom in every house in India," said Congress leader Kiran Shankar Roy in Kolkata, where students organised several condolence meetings on the streets. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 25th gave an overview of all India reaction: In Amritsar, all major markets did not open the previous day, a shut-down was to be observed in Ahmedabad on the 25th; in Karachi people were called upon to observe 26th as "Subhas Bose Day". *Hindustan Times* had the details of the immediate reaction from the West.

The death of Mr Subhas Chandra Bose reported by the Japanese has—if true—relieved the British authorities of a difficult problem, but has undoubtedly caused new pain in the heart of millions of Indians, writes Preston Groer, Associated Press of America staff correspondent.... At the same time many questioned whether the Japanese had co-operated in giving him an opportunity to "go-underground" and escape punishment for opposing Allied forces. [26]

Not just average people, the timing and inordinate delay in relaying of news had raised suspicions at the highest level in India. Viceroy Field Marshal Archibald Wavell recorded his disbelief in the Japanese announcement in his diary. "I suspect it very much, it is just what should be given out if he meant to go underground." [27]

For the Indian leadership the Bose mystery truly began on 29 August 1945 in New Delhi. The first spotting of Bose after his death was reported not by a gullible Indian but an American journalist embedded with the US army. Alfred Wagg, a stringer for the *Chicago Tribune*, rudely interrupted a press conference of Jawaharlal Nehru. He claimed Bose was "alive and seen in Saigon four days ago".



On September 1, London's *Sunday Observer* picked up Wagg's claim and added that the Japanese report was "not believed in British and American military circles". Wagg would repeat his claim to many top Indian leaders, Gandhi downwards. On September 11 in Jhansi, Nehru himself told a gathering that he did not believe in Bose's reported death: "Yes, I have received a number of reports which have raised in me grave doubts and I disbelieve the authenticity of the news." [28]

From late 1945 to early 1946, Mahatma Gandhi was chief promoter of the Bose mystery. "If

someone shows me ashes even then I will not believe that Subhas is not alive," he told jailed associates of Bose on 30 December 1945. His January 1946 statement made headlines world over. The *New York Times* on January 6 reported "Gandhi as declaring in a speech that he believed Subhas Chandra Bose was still alive and awaiting a propitious time to reappear".

All this had a ripple effect and, from villagers in India's remote corners to the expats in Southeast Asia, all took a fancy to the idea that Bose was "in hiding" and would "come to India as the free President of a free country".

Bose's family swung from despair to hope. Sarat, his elder brother and closest associate in politics, shook off early sense of devastation. He undertook a tour of Europe and learnt that the Allies had thrown discredit on the Taipei crash. "I am led to believe that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is alive," he briefed the *United Press* in July 1946. "The story of the plane crash connected with his death is a myth."

Was it? At the official level—and in complete secrecy—multilayered, overlapping inquiries into Subhas Bose's death were carried out, right up to the time Sarat spoke. Setting the ball rolling was the Intelligence Assault Unit of SEATIC—the signal-based South East Asia Translation and Interrogation Centre (SEATIC) under Louis Mountbatten's South East Asia Command. Then followed the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the US army. South East Asia Command's SACSEA Commission No 1—whose mandate was to lay hands on enemy Japanese—took pitched in. Several officers of the Intelligence Bureau dissected the all-source intelligence.

And when Rahman and others were brought to India, they were interrogated by the CSDIC, Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre, a division of the War Office that ran interrogation centres around the world. All inputs were regularly fed to the Combined Section at the Military Intelligence Directorate in the GHQ, India. That's not all. All the while, GSQ(i), psychological warfare section of India Command; American military intelligence service G-2 and the concerned governments were also kept in the loop.

Behind the confusing abbreviations were faceless officers. Leading the pack was Combined Section head and IB Deputy Director W McK Wright. He was assisted by fellow IB Deputy Director WNP Jenkin. Other prominent names were of top Bengal cop and IB Assistant Director Phillip Finney, who led the field inquiries in Bangkok in tandem with Assistant Director WFM Davies, who went to Saigon. Under them were a couple of Indians. Only one was senior and trusted enough to work with them on equal terms: "Rai Bahadur" Bakshi Badrinath of the Intelligence Bureau.

GD Anderson headed the CSDIC, India. From CSDIC's "S Section" in Southeast Asia was reporting Major Hugh Toye—who would go on to write Bose's first proper, almost laudatory, biography in the 1950s. In Japan, Lt Col John Figges was the point man. He was a staff officer attached to Lt Gen Gairdner, the British representative at General Douglas MacArthur's HQ in Tokyo.

Soon after the *Domei* announcement, the South East Asia and India Command HQ of Admiral Mountbatten communicated to the General HQ for the Allied Powers in Tokyo that the "GHQ India is vitally interested in obtaining confirmation of the reported death of Subhas Chandra Bose". On 30 August 1945, the office of Allied Land Forces, Southwest Pacific Area, told the Japanese government that "it would be appreciated if inquiries could be made as to the veracity of the report." GHQ India also wanted Rahman to "be flown to India for interrogation". The Japanese government by mid-September had sent a bare to the bone "interim report based on information so far available". It contained a date and time-wise chart of Bose's last movements and a short, grossly insufficient account of his death.

An outline of the result of the investigations is as follows:

1. Movements of Mr. Bose

August 17,	8 a.m.	left Bangkok
"	11 a.m.	arrived at Saigon
"	5 p.m.	left Saigon
"	7:30 p.m.	arrived at Tourane
August 18,	7 a.m.	left Tourane
"	0.30 p.m.	arrived at Taipei
"	1.50 p.m.	left Taipei

Immediately after taking off, the airplane in which he rode fell to the ground, and he was wounded.

August 18, about 3.00 p.m. he entered the Nanmon Branch of Taipei Army Hospital.

P

7.00 p.m. he died.

It would seem that the Japanese government did not have much to say; or given the exigencies of the time, it was not in a position to do so. In any case, the British were out to make their own inquiries.

In fact, before the Japanese government report reached Delhi, a Military Intelligence note of September 14 from the South East Asia Command had analysed the "reactions to Bose's death and the INA problem". It noted—just as Bose had foreseen—that the nationalist Press in India had "risen in defence of the INA". The news of Bose's death had been "received in most quarters in India with sympathy". But in Bengal it was "generally believed that Bose has gone underground to reappear at the correct psychological moment". Alfred Wagg's claim quite obviously had created a flutter among the leaders. "Political circles in the province have been greatly interested in the recent news item which alleged that Bose had been seen alive in Saigon after the aircraft accident." [29]

In his first report sent from Bangkok on 5 October 1945, Finney threw light on several aspects, including the likely place Bose could have escaped to. "The general opinion among Indians here is that Bose is not dead but has probably managed to evade Japanese control and has made his way to some place occupied by the Russians."

However, Finney's two informants ruled this out, insisting that Bose died while on his way to Tokyo. General Isoda, who by that time had given a statement to the British, took the same position. One informant, who had seen Bose off at Bangkok airport, told Finney that the Indian leader "did not confide in anyone what his intentions were". Finney was unwilling to believe the informant on this point:

It is more than likely that the informant is deliberately concealing this information. He does however say that he thought Bose was on his way to Tokyo to discuss final arrangements for an attempt on his part to get permission to go to Manchuria where he could contact the Russians. This informant says that Bose had been trying to persuade the Japs to allow him to go to Moscow since October '44, when he told them that they had no chance of invading India through Burma, and that accordingly he would prefer to try another road to Delhi via Moscow. [30]

Finney referred to another circumstance which contradicted the line taken by the Japanese and Rahman that Bose was going to Tokyo to discuss surrender and was to return to Singapore. "Bose took with him four iron boxes of gold. The weight of each is not known, but was probably in the region of 50 lbs. Bose and his staff took a formal farewell of everybody, and indicated that they were not likely to come back to this part of the world."

Finney also found Isoda's presence around this time suspicious. "At the time Bose arrived in Saigon, General Isoda was also there, and this fact may be significant if there was any plan on the part of the Hikari Kikan to allow Bose to escape, and to publish a false story regarding his death. This would have been the ideal place for Isoda to put into operation any such plan." [31]

Enclosed with Finney's first report was a record of the translated text of secret telegrams exchanged between Isoda's Hikari Kikan in Bangkok and the Southern Army in Saigon. Their originals had been found on September 24 "in their proper place" by the Intelligence Assault Unit (IAU) of the 7th Division of Allied Land Forces in Burma. These were the only Japanese records referring to Bose's flight to Tokyo and the subsequent air crash.

Lt D Mithaell of IAU interrogated a Hikari Kikan major to understand their true import, but the Japanese officer "knew no more than was given out in the *Domei* report". He had seen "neither the photographs nor other proofs of the accident" mentioned in the telegrams. As per one telegram, they were taken to Tokyo by Colonel Tada. Mithaell's conclusion was that the "proof, if any, might be in Saigon". [32]

Finney felt suspicious about the telegrams as well. "If they are part of a colossal and well-executed deception manoeuvre, this file of telegrams, along with numerous other documents, must have been purposely left where the British would find them." In conclusion, Finney felt that "although at this stage one cannot rule out the possibility of Bose being still alive, and of these telegrams being a part of deception plan regarding himself, (particularly in view of his previous intentions of escaping to Russia), the general impression from the study of these documents and the talk with Isoda and my informant is that Bose did actually die as stated".

To root out the doubts coming in the way of accepting the finality of Bose's death in Taiwan, Finney suggested a line of action involving tracing of Hikari records in Saigon as well as the photographs and remains of Bose, finding both Tada and Rahman and re-examining Isoda. He ended his report with an advice which was most sensible at that time. Continuing rumours of Bose being alive were further boosting the morale of everyone who wanted the end of the Raj.

Considerable time is being spent on these inquiries, and it is therefore requested that any conclusive information, one way or the other, should be circulated as soon as possible. [33]

There is evidence that thereafter Finney told fellow IB officials that the death news was probably true. And all the while inputs contrary to the Japanese claim kept coming.

On 8 October 1945 the GHQ received a letter from John Figges in Tokyo. The colonel enclosed what was the first report on the examination of Habibur Rahman, carried out by CIC officer Lt Carl Grob in Tokyo. Rahman reiterated to the CIC that he had "accompanied Bose on a proposed trip to Tokyo, Japan, to negotiate with the Japanese government as to the disposition of the Indian National Army" but the plane they were travelling in "crashed at the end of the airfield". Figges observed that overall details given in CIC's September 25 report tallied with those provided by the Japanese government earlier. "But unfortunately the evidence cannot be regarded as conclusive," [34] Figges noted, since the Japanese version was more or less based on Rahman's statement.

On October 10 Finney despatched to the IB and the Combined Section a report that WFM Davies had sent to him from Saigon three days earlier. Davies reported largely on the basis of what some unnamed local Indians and Japanese air force officer Capt Yoshida had told him. The Indians could only confirm that Bose had arrived and left Saigon on August 17. Yoshida disclosed that the "records of aircraft arrivals and departures have been destroyed". He could, however, confirm that Bose, Shidei and others had flown to Tokyo on that day. Davis's conclusion was that "the ultimate confirmation will be available only in Formosa or beyond". [35]

On October 10 only, Bakshi Badrinath was told to join Finney's team in Bangkok. His personal diary shows that on October 14 he met Finney in Bangkok. Also touching base with him there were

Davis and inspectors Nagina Singh, Pritam Singh and HK Roy. The next day Finney gave Badrinath a low-down on the case. According to the diary, Badrinath, for a start, interrogated Bose's confidential secretary Major Bhaskaran Menon from October 17 onwards.

Two days later the IB in Delhi received an extract from Menon's interrogation report. Menon had stated in it that on August 17 morning "Bose called the members of his personal staff and made some small presents to them. He was deeply moved and was in tears all the time". Menon confirmed a previous report that "four iron boxes containing golden ornaments were brought from Rangoon and these were taken along by Mr Bose when he left". [36]

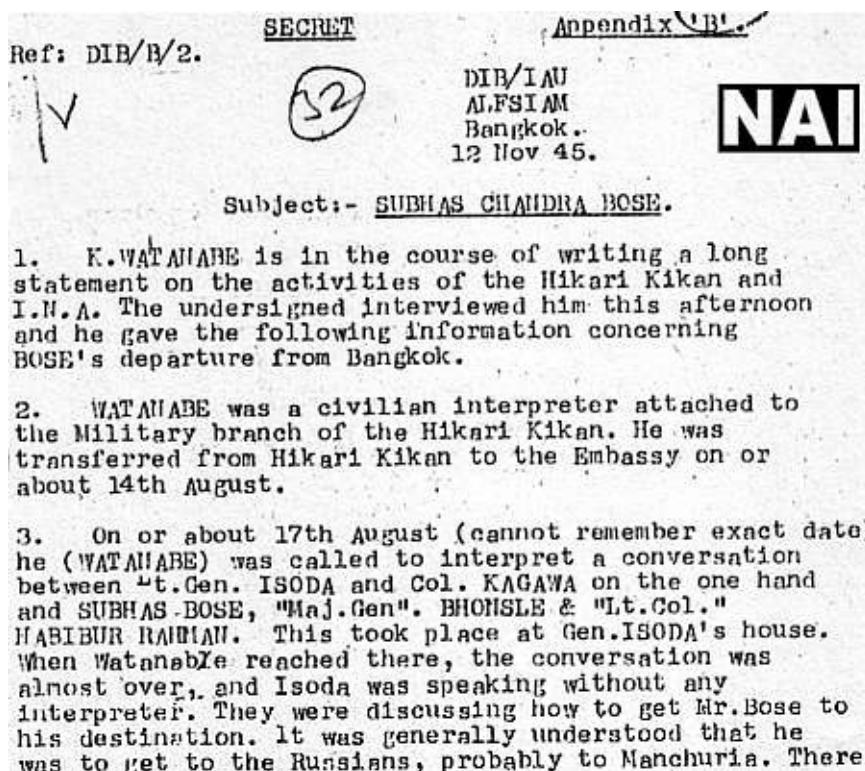
On November 6, SACSEA Commission No 1 circulated a most incisive report based on information provided by the officers at the Japanese Army HQ at Saigon. While the officers believed the death news, they did not have any doubts that he had for long been working on a Plan B in the event of Japan's defeat:

Bose wanted to go to Manchuria from where he thought he would be able to get in touch with the Russian forces and obtain necessary admission independently. It was in view of this that SC Bose had left Singapore on August 16. [37]

The report noted that the belief in Bose's death was "growing stronger" though no substantial proof "by way of details or documentary evidence" could be obtained from Southern Army HQ. Therefore, the commission's investigations were on to locate and interrogate Tada, cross check Rahman's statement and find pictures which would "probably furnish best proof" of Bose's death.

A day before he left Bangkok for Kolkata, Finney blew the lid off the centerpiece of the official Japanese version. He was able to locate a person who had attended the secret meeting between Bose, Rahman, Isoda, Tada and others in Bangkok on August 16. Contrary to what Rahman and others had claimed, interpreter Kinji Watanabe told Finney on November 12 that he heard Isoda and others talk about Bose's escape:

They were discussing how to get Mr Bose to his destination. It was generally understood that he was to get to the Russians, probably to Manchuria. ...With regard to Bose's going to Russia, it was an understood thing in the embassy and in the Hikari Kikan.... [38]



In his written statement, Watanabe provided further details about Bose's post-war plans:

From the very beginning Bose's standpoint was very clear: He was ever ready to accept any assistance from any nation if only it desired India to be independent. No doubt he wished to get nearer to Soviet Russia after the telling blow was inflicted upon Japan and his troops, which made him almost give up hope to advance into India from Burma. [39]

He wrote that "Bose was quite sure that in the not-distant future there would be differences between Britain and Russia and that by taking advantages of this opportunity India could proceed

further in the independence movement".

The much awaited pictures taken by the Japanese at Taipei soon after the crash and Bose's death arrived in New Delhi in the second half of November. Figgis made no comment while forwarding them from Tokyo. Because none of the five pictures showed the clincher—Bose's body. One showed Rahman sitting, bandaged, the other a shrouded corpse and the rest had shots of a mangled plane wreck in front of a hilltop.



On November 22 Saigon Control Commission, SEAC forwarded a "further report on the subject of SC Bose's intentions and death". The view from Saigon was that "there is still no proof of Bose's death though it is assumed". [40] The enclosed report was based on the information provided by JK Bhonsle, who insisted that Bose had "left for Tokyo" on August 17.

In December, CSDIC (India) took custody of Rahman after he had been brought to Delhi by a US military plane on November 23. Throughout that month, Rahman was put through several rounds of interrogations. The outcome was CSDIC Section Report No 1156 of 31 December 1945. On 7 January 1946, Anderson wrote to the Combined Section, IB and others that "the facts of the crash at Taihoku as given in the CSDIC Report No 1156 are considered to establish beyond any doubt that SC Bose did in fact succumb to injuries and burns received in the crash". [41]

Anderson was confident that Rahman was "sincere in his protestations" and suggested that "for the final and positive proof, a British investigation team would need to be sent up to Formosa from Saigon and Hanoi to examine the hospital records at Taihoku". [42]

And just when it seemed that an end to the mystery was in sight, Anderson was forced to do a rethink.

Major Toye informed him on January 15 that Pritam, Gulzara, Hasan, Sahay, Thivy and Chatterji "have no positive information either on the death of or on the last intentions of Bose" but still called into question Rahman's claim.

The choice of persons to accompany Bose is, however, we think, strange if Habib's story be accepted that Bose was merely going to arrange a separate surrender. Bose first calls Chatterji and Swami to his side: these two are held up and do not reach him. He then takes Gulzara and Pritam—both Kamkazi boys, Hassn, who knows more about his activities (1941-1944) than any man alive, Ayer, his main confidant and secretary on all Top Secret matters at any rate recently, Debnath, the man closest to him after Ayer and with more experience of political underground than any. Our question is "to what end this wealth of talent if Bose was only going on a routine INA job which Bhonsle or Kiani could have done just as well?" [43]

On 19 February McK Wright sent Major Courtenay Young of CICB, Intelligence Division, HQ, SACSEA in Singapore the first the analyses of the available evidence and leads by the Intelligence Bureau. "The result", the IB deputy director opined, "is not entirely satisfactory for it reveals many discrepancies". [44] He described as "unsatisfactory" Habibur Rahman's CSDIC report due to "the multitude of discrepancies in account of the actual crash, as given first to CIC in Tokyo and later to CSDIC". [45]

There indeed were irreconcilable details in Rahman's versions. He told CIC that after the plane crashed, "he had no knowledge of how Bose escaped or was removed from the plane".

He stated that upon alighting from the plane he noticed his own coat afire. He removed it immediately and then saw Bose lying by the plane with his clothing afire, whereupon Rahman went to the aid of Bose and removed his burning clothing. [46]

But to his CSDIC interrogators he said that the crash impact burst open the celluloid cover above

the cockpit and “crawling through it” Bose “dropped to the ground”. Rahman said when he too crawled out, he noticed that his “clothes were not on fire” [47] and Bose was “standing” and trying to remove his clothes.

McK Wright found it intriguing that Shidei should have been travelling to Manchuria when the crash happened. “In view of reports...that Bose himself was going to the Russians was this coincidence or intention?” he asked and recommended that Isoda should be “severely re-interrogated” now that Watanabe had confirmed that Bose too was Manchuria-bound.

As on that date, McK Wright determined that “our examination so far only permits us to say that, unless there was a very cleverly contrived and executed deception plot involving a very few of the highest Japanese officials, Bose is almost certainly dead. Any assistance you can give in clearing up the remaining element of doubt would be greatly appreciated”. [48] As an afterthought, McK Wright wrote another letter on February 19 itself to Young about Bose’s Russian connection.

Such information as we have on record about this seems to establish that Bose was definitely interested in the possibility of transferring himself, and perhaps even some of the personnel of his movement, to territory under Russian control, with the collapse of the Japanese in the Far East. ...Our belief is that this motive lay behind his last journey, during which he is reported to have been killed. The question arises, of course, as to whether there is any evidence of reciprocated Russian interest in Bose and his movement. About this we so far know nothing. [49]

McK Wright named the persons who could prove to be “fruitful sources” on further interrogation. Like NG Swami and Bhaskaran Menon, and “though possibly more difficult to arrange...Field Marshal Terauchi, his chief of staff, senior officers of the Hikari Kikan and officials of the foreign ministry”. [50]

“So far as the Russian angle is concerned I am afraid I can offer you nothing,” Young wrote back on 1 March 1946. Enumerating the numerous suspicions SACSEA on its part had about the veracity of the air crash story, Young concluded that

if it is a deception plan it is one which has been extremely carefully and ingeniously organised. All evidence available to us to the efficiency of the Japanese intelligence organisations indicate that their efforts are comparatively amateurish.... In conclusion it can be said definitely that Bose left Saigon and probably that there was a plane crash at the take-off in Taihoku. It is possible that Bose escaped from the crash unhurt and either hid in Formosa on his own initiative or was hidden by local authorities.... [51]

Young thought that the only “worthwhile move” which could be made to crack the mystery was “to get hold of Tada”.

At the same time he shared intelligence with Young, McK Wright spoke to Anderson over the phone. On 19 February 1946 Anderson was formally intimated that there were “discrepancies in the various accounts” of Bose’s death which he could help clear up “by strict interrogation of those sources available to you”. [52]

Nine days later Anderson and McK Wright received an eye-opener of a report from Toye. It contained a piece of information which in one swoop falsified the statements of all those whom Bose confided in during his last known days.

Despite severe interrogations, Isoda, Rahman, Gulzara, Pritam, Hasan, Thivy and Chatterji had so far either feigned ignorance about Bose’s future plans or claimed he was heading to Tokyo to talk of surrender. Anand Mohan Sahay broke the ranks to talk freely and laid bare Bose’s intentions. Sahay sang before the S Section that Bose had raised the issue of his transfer to Russia with the Japanese foreign minister in late 1944 and that it was confirmed to him by Bose personally and also by Isoda. Sahay compromised his colleagues by telling the section that when Hasan, Ayer, Gulzara and Pritam met him at Hanoi on August 20, “they told him that Bose was bound for Manchuria”. Toye drew the obvious inference:

At all events, the story told by Habib ur Rahman (B1269) in CSDIC 2 Sec Report 1156 that Bose was merely going to arrange a separate surrender for the INA and that he would have returned to Singapore, may be categorically rejected, and it may be accepted that B1269 himself probably knows the truth. [53]

5. It has previously been accepted that for various reasons connected with their recent separations from BOSE, none of the members of this party interrogated by S Section knew what BOSE's aim was. H/1459, however, says that when (b), (d), (f) and (g) above reached HANOI they told him that BOSE was bound for MANCHURIA whence he hoped to make his way to RUSSIA. None of them will, even now, admit this knowledge. All the events the story told by HABIB UR REHMAN (B1269) in CSDIC 2 Sec Report 1156 that BOSE was merely going to arrange a separate surrender for the INA and that he would have returned to SINGAPORE, may be categorically rejected, and it may be accepted that B1269 himself knows the truth.

John Lowe

NAI

Major,
Comd S Section CSDIC(I).

On February 27 Badrinath informed McK Wright that he had "barely started the re-interrogation" of Rahman when he was asked to take care of the trouble arising out of the RIN Naval Mutiny in Mumbai. He suggested that JK Bhonsle be "specially interrogated...to discover from him the truth regarding the meeting in Bangkok". [54] This was conveyed to Anderson by McK Wright through his March 9 letter dealing with what he now termed as the "alleged" death of Bose.

The Rai Bahadur has suggested, and I agree, that one more useful line of investigation would be to have Capt. J.K. Bhonsle specially interrogated by the best officer you can put on the job, to discover from him the truth regarding the meeting in Bangkok between Bose, Bhonsle and Habib-ur-Rahman on one side and ISUDA and another Hikari Kikan Japanese on the other, as related by WATANABE of the Hikari Kikan and the Bangkok Embassy (See para. 3 of Appdx B to my u.o. of 19/2/46).

We would be grateful if you could have this arranged.

12582-

CSDIC

C.S.U.O. No. C-5/CS, dated the

NAI

11 MAR 1946

(W.McK.Wright)

O.C.

On March 21 Anderson apprised McK Wright of the results obtained by interrogator Major Hyat Khan. Still "not anxious to provide further information" on his previous stand that Bose had "left for Tokyo" on August 17, Bhonsle eventually conceded that the Bangkok meeting was about "how to get Bose to his destination". [55]

NAI**SECRET.**

No. 1300/SE
O.S.D.I.C.
Red Fort, Delhi
21 March 1946.

Comb Sec. (Mr. McK Wright).

(21)

P27

Subject: Last Plans of S.G. Bose.

Ref. Your O-5/O.S. of 19 Feb. 46
Your O-5/O.S. of 9 March 46
Our 1300/SE of 16 March (Para 3).

INTRODUCTION.

Maj. J.K. Bhonsle (B1189) has been reinterrogated at H.Q. Jumna Area regarding the meeting in Bangkok. B1189, as anticipated, was not anxious to provide further information. The notes made by Maj. Hyat Khan are however reproduced verbatim below :-

1. B1189 confirms that the meeting at Bangkok on/about 17 Aug 45 between Lt.Gen. ISQDA and Col. KAGAWA on the one hand and S.G. Bose, "Maj.Genl" Bhonsle and "Lt.Col." Habib-ur-Rahman on the other, was to discuss how to get Bose to his destination. B1189 also confirms that it was Boses intention to try to find his way into Russia.

...it was Bose's intention to try to find his way into Russia. Bose was certain that once the Russians agreed to take him, they would give him all the necessary protection. He also thought that in the event of an Anglo-American split with Russia, which he definitely foresaw, he might be of some service to the Russians and thus further the cause of his own country. [56]

Hyat Khan noted after the interrogation that Bhonsle "gave the impression that he—and some others—had some idea of Bose's plans in Russia, but refused to commit himself".

He evaded all questions relevant to this subject, merely saying that "if Bose's exact plans were known by his trusted henchmen, none of the latter would ever reveal them now". [57]

This was enough for Anderson to deduce and convey to McK Wright that as Rahman was present at the Bangkok meeting "it is obvious that he must know as much, if not more, about Bose's plans". And since Rahman was continuing to make "bland denials of any such knowledge...a final attempt will now be made to extract the truth from him". [58] This attempt was made by Hyat Khan. On receipt of his report on March 25, Anderson wrote to McK Wright that Rahman had still "adhered to his earlier attitude of ingenuous denial". [59]

NAI**SECRET.**

No. 1400/23/SE
O.S.D.I.C.
Red Fort, Delhi
25 March 1946.

(15)

Comb. Sec. (Mr. McK Wright).

Subject: Last Plans of S.G. Bose.

Ref. Para 8 of our 1300/SE of 21 March 46.

GENERAL.

1. Habib-ur-Rehman (B1269) has been questioned again on his knowledge of Boses plans. He has adhered to his earlier attitude of ingenuous denial. A verbatim report by Maj. Hyat

Rahman repeated that during the Bangkok meeting "the main subject under discussion was the separate surrender of the PGAH [Provisional Government of Azad Hind] and INA". He admitted that during the meeting, "they discussed the possibility of his transfer to Russia, but thought that in view of the strained Russo/Japanese relations the Japanese government/army were not in a position to negotiate with Russia". [60]

Rahman described as "purely hearsay" the claims of others that "after the INA withdrawal from

Burma, the members of the PGAH and some other senior INA officers had discussed at Bangkok the possibility of approaching Russia for assistance in order to prolong their struggle". He said he was "himself not present at any such talk" and that Bose "confided in him in so far as matters relating to the armed forces were concerned, but that he (Bose) did not discuss his political plans" with him.

Hyat did not take Rahman's word for it. He reckoned in his hand written report—available in the National Archives in New Delhi—that even if Rahman "was in the know of Bose's plans, he would not disclose them. His manner is not very convincing. He talks in a secretive way even if no one is about". [61]

Anderson emphasised in his 25 March 1946 letter to McK Wright that Rahman's "equanimity could only be shaken if positive facts could be adduced to disprove his account of Bose's death at Taihoku" and wondered if the proofs—hospital records that he had earlier specified—"have been obtained from local sources or inquiry at Taihoku". [62]

6. It is considered that even if Bl269 was in the know of Booses plans, he would not disclose them. His manner is not very convincing. He talks in a secretive way even if no one is about

(Statement ends).

7. It is felt that Bl269's equanimity could only be shaken if positive facts could be adduced to disprove his account of Booses death at Taihoku. It is not known at C.S.D.I.C. whether any proofs on the lines of Para 6 of our 310/Bl269 dated 7 Jan 1946 have been obtained from local sources or enquiry at Taihoku.

NAI

Lt. Col.
for Comdt. C.S.D.I.C.

Hyat's report on Rahman prompted the IB to raise a series of questions. On 2 April 1946, Jenkin listed out 19 of them to Anderson and sought a re-interrogation.

Reference C.S.D.I.C. (I) No.2 Section Report No.1156 dated 31.12.45 regarding Captain Habib-ur-Rehman Khan (CSDIC (I) B.1269)

2. More information is required to help with the investigations into the death of Subhas Chandra Bose. Will you kindly question Habib-ur-Rehman again on the points contained in the attached note and let us know the results?

3. An early reply would be appreciated.

(W.H.P. Jenkin)
Deputy Director

C.S.D.I.C. (I), Red Fort, Delhi.
DIB u/o No. SAI/661 dated 2-4-46. R. 1519

Some eight months after the reported air crash, the inquiry into Bose's fate seemed to be leading up a blind alley. In the early months of 1946, Sir Norman Smith, the IB Director, visited London and "mentioned the receipt from various places in India of information to the effect that Subhas Bose was alive in Russia". Some circumstantial evidence was forthcoming and consequently Smith was "not more than 90% sure that Subhas is dead". He was made aware of and recognised the possibility that the Russians were themselves "circulating the story for reasons of their own". [63]

But that possibility had been precluded by the officers in India. Finney and others sat down for a meeting on 9 April 1946 to ponder over the intelligence pooled in from several independent sources in the last few months. Helping the discussion was a three-page note from the Combined Section summarising the case so far. It noted at the very start that it was "clear that Bose and his staff were trying to make a getaway to Russia" and that "Habibur Rahman, Pritam Singh, Gulzara Singh and Hasan have all...appear to have lied, or withheld their knowledge, about the reasons for the journey which was being made". Inputs received by the intelligence organisations from Congressman revealed that Gandhi's claim about Bose being alive was not based on his "inner voice" as he had said, but "a secret information which he has received". [64]

The note highlighted—just as Anderson had done earlier—the need for carrying out "the fullest investigation" in Taiwan because "such investigations as have been carried out at Taihoku and elsewhere do not appear to have been as thorough as could be wished". [65] Puzzling information coming from outside was also making it difficult to accept the air crash theory.

In December a report said that the Governor of the Afghan province of Khost had been informed by the Russian Ambassador in Kabul that there were many Congress refugees in Moscow and Bose was included in their number. There is little reason for such persons to bring Bose into fabricated stories. The view that Russian officials are disclosing or alleging that Bose is in Moscow is supplied in a report received from Tehran. This states that Moradoff, the Russian Vice Consul-General, disclosed in March that Bose was in Russia. [66]

had been coupling a live Bose with Russia and in December a report said that the Governor of the Afghan Province of Khost had been informed by the Russian Ambassador in Kabul that there were many congress refugees in Moscow and Bose was included in their number. There is little reason for such persons to bring Bose into fabricated stories. At the same time the view that Russian officials are disclosing or alleging that Bose is in Moscow is supplied in a report received from Teheran. This states that Moradoff, the Russian Vice Consul-General disclosed in March that Bose was in Russia where he was secretly organizing a group of Russians and Indians to work on the same lines as the I.M.A. for the freedom of India.

Taihoku, Congress, and Russian representatives in Teheran and Kabul are the most important objectives in this case as it stands now.

NAI

sd/-
8.4.46.

Summing up, the note said that "Taihoku, Congress and Russian representatives in Tehran and Kabul are the most important objectives in this case as it stands now". [67]

The outcome of the April 9 meeting attended by Finney and certain Wagstaffe is not known. The file which contained the related papers is not available and was probably destroyed—but what comes through clear is that the case was far from closed. On April 10, Anderson informed Jenkin about the outcome of Habibur Rahman's re-interrogation. It had been carried out by Capt Habibullah Malik, who personally briefed Jenkin about Rahman's response and his "reactions to further interrogation

etc.". [68] Malik had observed in his report that "throughout the protracted questioning, resentment was visible from B1269's face and he made no bones about it". [69]

SECRET.

NAI

Re-interrogation of Capt. Habib-ur-Rehman.
O.S.D.I.C.(I) No. B1269.

(6)

Capt. Habib-ur-Rehman, O.S.D.I.C. No. B1269 has been reinterrogated on the lines indicated in the questionnaire enclosed with DIB u.o. No. 5A/661 dt. 2.4.46. The results obtained are far from satisfactory and do not take us much further from the original position. Habib-ur-Rehman has shown little co-operation during the course of this re-interrogation and when in answer to his attitude of ingenuous denials under the cloak of forgetfulness and the undue advantage that he appeared to be taking of his stuttering habit, his interrogator put him a direct question, whether he was prepared to allow himself to be taken to Taihoku and point out all the relevant places, he thought for a moment and then replied in the negative with a retort, saying :

The results obtained are far from satisfactory and do not take us much further from the original position. Habibur-Rahman has shown little cooperation during the course of this re-interrogation and when in answer to his attitude of ingenuous denials under the cloak of forgetfulness and the undue advantage that he appeared to be taking of his stuttering habit, his interrogator put him a direct question whether he was prepared to allow himself to be taken to Taihoku and point out all relevant places, he thought for moment and then replied in the negative with a retort saying: "I have volunteered all the information that was in my possession.... I have satisfied Mr Gandhi, who came to see me the other day, that SC Bose is dead and reiterate whatever I have stated already in Tokyo and at CSDIC." [70]

Gandhi had by that time gone public with his revised stand. Writing in *Harijan* in April 1946, he appealed to "everyone to forget what I have said and ...reconcile themselves to the fact that Netaji has left us".

I had nothing but my instinct to tell me that Netaji was alive. No reliance can be placed on such unsupported feeling. On the other hand, there is strong evidence to counteract the feeling. The British government is party to that evidence. Capt Habibur Rahman has said, he was present at the time of Netaji's death and has brought back his charred wrist watch. [71]

The British were obviously not convinced. On May 16 the South East Asia Command directed Col Figges in Tokyo to make a fresh inquiry. At the same time, and in an apparent coordinated move, Lt Col Hannessy, the head of Military Intelligence in Bombay, raised the issue with William Donovan, the American Consulate General. Hannessy, who had met Badrinath in March, told Donovan that in August 1945 he was himself in a Taipei prison camp, "which overlooked the airfield where Bose's plane is reported to have crashed". He said that "Bose must have been treated in a hospital by some physician; that if he died there must be people who had first-hand knowledge of his death and that there might conceivably be some record of his death; and that further, in the event of his death, there must be person alive today who had some knowledge of his cremation". [72]

Donovan obliged Hannessy by writing to the State Department. "If the Department could furnish any information on this subject, it would be most helpful to this Consulate General in its contacts with British Military Intelligence at Bombay. Positive proof of some kind that Bose is dead would be most interesting," [73] his telegram of 23 May 1946 stated. The State Department conferred with the War Department in the Pentagon and in June 1946 reverted to the Consulate: "A search of our files in the Intelligence Division reveals that there is no direct evidence that Subhas Chandra Bose was killed in an airplane crash at Taihoku [sic], Formosa, despite the public statements of the Japanese to that effect. Nor is there any evidence available to the Intelligence Division which would indicate that Bose is still alive." [74]

Department of State

A-78

CONFIDENTIAL

Washington,

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AMERICAN CONSUL

BOMBAY (INDIA)

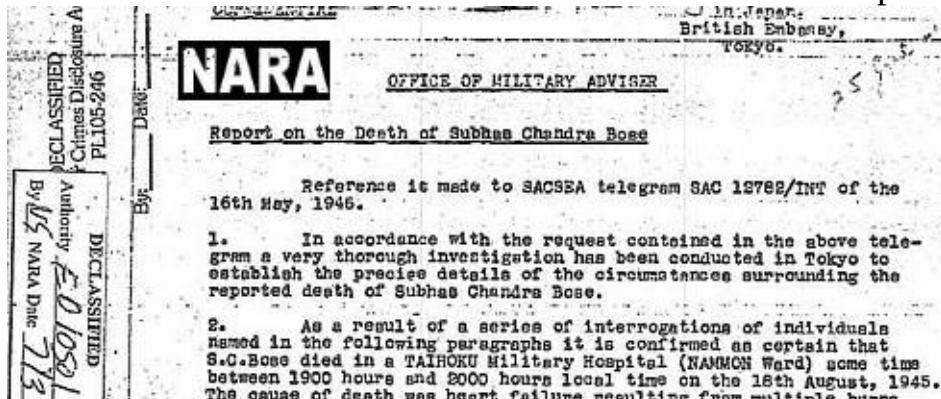
June 26, 1946 3011

Your A-175, May 23, 1946.

NARA

War, Military Intelligence Service, advises under date of June 20, 1946 that a search of the files in the Intelligence Division reveals that there is no direct evidence that Subhas Chandra Bose was killed in an airplane crash at Taihoku, Formosa, despite the public statement of the Japanese to that effect. Nor is there any evidence available to Intelligence Division which would indicate that Bose is still alive.

The Department advised that the British Military Intelligence should approach G-2, the intelligence agency under Supreme Commander Allied Powers, Tokyo, for further information. It is not known whether the British intelligence sought any details from G-2. What is known, thanks to declassified records, is that by July 25 Colonel Figges was ready with his report. This time he had managed to examine two survivors of the crash—Nonogaki and Arai; three Taiwan army officials who had some personal knowledge of the events and most importantly Sub Lt Dr Toyoshi Tsuruta. To Figges their accounts appear to have tallied “both in substance and detail at all points where the knowledge of the subjects could have been deemed to be based on common experience”. [75]



Nonogaki recalled the air crash and that out of 15 passengers in all, three engineers, a wireless operator, Takizawa and Shidei died instantly. Dr Tsuruta said he supervised Bose's treatment after he was brought to the hospital at 3pm, but despite his best efforts he passed away around 7pm. Later that evening, Tsuruta, Rahman and Lt Col Shibuya Masanori of the Taiwan Army HQ and another officer discussed “the possibility of embalming the body and taking it on to Tokyo” but Tsuruta “expressed doubts about his ability to ensure preservation in the extreme heat”.

Towards midnight a hastily made coffin arrived from the headquarters of the Taiwan Army and the body was placed in the coffin and covered with a sheet. The following morning the coffin was taken away and Tsuruta understands that it was cremated although he was not an eyewitness of the process. The death certificate which was issued by Tsuruta showed death to be due to heart failure resulting from multiple burns and shock. [76]

Three months after Figges believed what he had been told, Dr Yoshimi made a statement contradicting his junior on some vital points. While being held up in a jail in Hong Kong, Yoshimi told Alfred Turner of the British military that he was in charge of Bose's treatment, that it was he who had issued his death certificate. His version was that around 5pm the crash survivors were brought at the hospital and Bose died at about 11pm. Yoshimi said that he had been informed that the plane crash killed Shidei and two others who were “unable to escape and were burned with the plane”. He said Takizawa reached hospital alive and was under his care for a few days before he shifted him to

another hospital where he died.

"For some unknown reason", Bose's body "could not be taken to Japan, and was to be sent to the crematorium for cremation," Yoshimi added. "I therefore made out a death certificate, stating the cause of death to be extensive burning and shock." [77]

Warrant Officer NISHI. W.O. Nishi returned later and informed me that the body for some unknown reason, could not be taken to Japan, and was to be sent to the crematorium for cremation. I therefore made out a death certificate, stating the causes of death to be extensive burning and shock. The orders for NAI this change of plan came from the Adjutant's Dept, Taiwan Army.

The death certificate issued by either Yoshimi or Tsuruta would have filled in the most crucial slot in the puzzle and convinced the officers in India, at least Anderson, that Habibur Rahman and other witnesses had, after all, told the truth. But both the doctors only talked of issuing the certificate; they did not produce it. Where was the elusive certificate?

Figges' report stated that Aoyagi's death at Taihoku's Hokuto hospital on 29 September 1945 "from the effect of the injuries sustained in the air crash" was "finally established" as the "proof of death was furnished in the form of a death certificate signed by Medical Officer Koike Tetsuo of the Japanese army". [78] If he had found one for Bose, he would have appended to his report, just as he attached a sketch drawn by Nonogaki showing the sitting arrangement of the passengers in the ill-fated Sally bomber.

Yet another effort to find the truth about the Taipei crash was made in the late 1940s. Some of the Japanese officers connected to it—Nonogaki, Hayashida, Shibuya and Kono—were questioned again at the behest of the British authorities. Lt-Colonel Shibuya later recalled having been "called by the British embassy once and also by the GHQ of the Occupation Forces once" some "three or four years after" the incident. Nonogaki said his statement, and that of Kono, was recorded at the British embassy at around 1950. "I was called through the Japanese foreign office. I got a letter from the foreign office and I went." Hayashida said that in 1948 some ten persons including him were "examined by the Welfare Ministry authorities of the Japanese government". Thereafter Hayashida was summoned by "the prefectural police in Fukuoka city...on the request of the American and British intelligence services". [79]

With India becoming free in August 1947, the Bose mystery was put on the back-burner in the face of urgent and far bigger challenges. Migration of Habibur Rahman to Pakistan dealt a blow to all those who were hoping to extract more out of a man they thought was bound by oath to tell only as much Bose had told him to.

Before he was assassinated in 1948, Gandhi—a senior journalist told me—rebuked Nehru and Patel for not being able to reign in the partition madness and wished that his "other son [Subhas] was here!" Reminded by a Congressman, who had witnessed the dressing down, that Bose was dead and he had himself come to hold that belief, Gandhi shot back: "He's in Russia".

Forget what he announced after meeting Rahman, in his private conversations Gandhi continued to be confident that Bose was alive. For decades his unpublicised remarks—such as "Rahman gave me a soldier's statement"—remained unsubstantiated. That held good till the early 1990s when Seeley G Mudd Manuscript Library at the Princeton University revealed a proof. Personal papers of pro-India American journalist and Gandhi's biographer Louis Fischer yielded a letter, written subsequent to his meeting Gandhi on 20 July 1946. On behalf of Gandhi, his secretary and granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, Khurshed Naoroji, warned Fischer on July 22 that "if Bose comes with the help of Russia neither Gandhiji nor the Congress will be able to reason with the country". [80]

In November 1946 Louis Fischer visited Moscow and met the Italian Ambassador there. Pietro Quaroni had been a lifesaver for Bose in Kabul in 1941. He remembered Bose over a dinner with Fischer at Hotel Plaza. There Ambassador Quaroni gave out his own assessment that "it is possible that Bose is alive". Fischer's note of the meeting, also kept at the library, says that "Q says that B might have been on his way to China and might have got there but did not want the British to look for him so the false rumor of his death was circulated. Q says Bose may be biding his time for a return to India." [81]

As the 1940s closed, the controversy about Bose's reported death remained alive as a strong undercurrent. The spectre of Bose's coming back from the dead still troubled the establishment. Many in India today will deny this fact out of ignorance, prejudice or conceit. "I know it all...I never heard of it...It is completely baseless," that sort of thing.

To those with an inflated sense of importance, here is something to ponder over. True or false, the whispers of Bose being alive were loud enough to be heard by the Central Intelligence Agency. In November 1950, a highly-placed agent in India reported that "it is now currently rumoured in the Delhi area that the 'Netaji', which is Bose's nickname, is alive and is in Siberia, where he is waiting for a chance to make a big comeback". [82]

It is now currently rumored in the Delhi area that the "Netaji," which is Bose's nickname, is alive and is in Siberia, where he is waiting for a chance to make a big comeback. Officially, Bose was declared "lost," when the ship he was on was sunk en route from Burma to Japan. However, his body was never found and there are no known

[CIA document obtained under the FOIA]

2. Big brother watching

It was a new day in newly independent India. Two men walked briskly amid a green oasis dotted with magnificent old tombs of certain forgotten Delhi kings. This was Lady Willingdon Park, one of the Raj's gifts to the capital city, an English-style landscaped garden that is now called the Lodi Gardens. On the curvy walkway the older of the two was panting from exertion, and the younger from excitement. Journalist Harin Shah was getting to share his experience of a lifetime with Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel. By the time they went around the park, Shah had brought a turnaround in the Government of India's position on Subhas Bose's reported death.

From now on, Patel would never revert to those uneasy sounding, cryptic one-liners. Is Bose dead or alive? What does the evidence with the Government say, Ahmed Jaffer asked Patel on 3 October 1946 in the Council of States. "No," Patel replied. Mangal Singh intervened and asked if the Interim Government had made any inquiry whether Subhas Bose was dead or not. "No," Patel said, adding unhelpfully, "Government are not in a position to make any authoritative statement on the subject." Mangal Singh would not let the Sardar go that easily: "A few days ago the hon'ble Leader of the House [Jawaharlal Nehru] made a statement that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is dead. Is that the view of the Government of India or his personal view?"

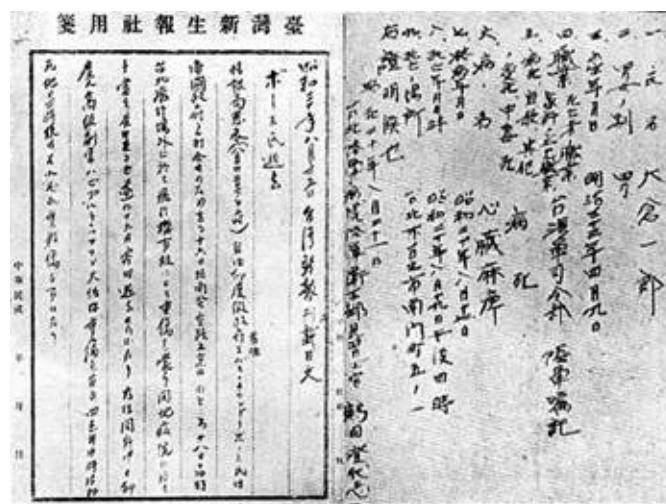
"The Government of India have no view, either way," Patel yielded.

Thanks to Shah, the Government came to have a clear view. In December 1949 Patel would announce that certain inquiries "pointed to the conclusion that Subhas Bose died in an air crash". [1]

Harin Shah's "investigative journalism" had begun on the last day of August 1946 when he landed in Taipei to find out about Bose's death. After making a breakthrough, Shah flew to Nanking and reported his findings not to his editor but the "friendly and most considerate" Indian ambassador. KPS Menon promptly relayed Shah's account to New Delhi through the diplomatic channel.

Shah had managed to trace and interview local Taiwanese who knew of the mishap. Most told him only what they had heard of or read in a local Japanese newspaper *Taiwan Nichi Nichi Shimbun*. But some of them had a direct knowledge of the Indian leader's death and the disposal of what was said to be his body. Nurse Tsan Pi Sha claimed Bose had died in her presence, and Chu Tsang said he cremated his body.

Shah learnt from Li Chin Qui and Chen Chih Chi, the two clerks at Taipei Municipal Bureau of Health, how they had themselves checked the body at the bureau in order to verify the genuineness of request for permission to cremate the body as per existing rules. They even traced out for him the copies of the cremation permit and two mandatory reports filed by the hospital authorities seeking permission for the cremation of the body they were told was of Bose.



[Doctor's report and cremation permit said to be issued for Bose]

Harin Shah returned to India a year later. He met Habibur Rahman, went around personally convincing people of the veracity of what he had found. In short, Shah did everything a good journalist should have—except that he did not publish his findings. In a strange coincidence, in late November 1946, a story based on Tsan Pi Sha's claim came to be circulated through the Chinese Central News Agency. The nurse also said that “the ashes of Subhas Chandra Bose could be found in the army cemetery in the suburbs of Taipeh”. [2]

In India of the early 1950s Subhas Bose's reported death was officially projected as a foregone conclusion. It would have been established as such had it not been for some spirited contesting of the government line by a handful of Bose's admirers. Heading the quest for truth in Parliament was Hari Vishnu Kamath, Constituent Assembly member, former Forward Bloc general secretary and the second Indian after Bose to have chosen to serve the people rather than lord over them as an ICS officer. On 19 April 1951 HV Kamath sought to know about “the various communications and reports the Government have received so far about Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's death or about his being alive”. [3]

Deputy Minister for External Affairs BV Keskar replied that “after due inquiry and the collection of whatever evidence it was possible to gather, the Prime Minister made a statement on 12 October 1946 to the effect that there was little doubt that Shri Subhas Chandra Bose died on the 18th August 1945”. Keskar referred to INA veteran JK Bhonsle's March 1951 letter expressing his belief that Bose's ashes were enshrined in Renkoji temple in Tokyo. “Government are unable to furnish the dates and sources of various communications they have received regarding this matter,” [4] he calmly added.

What Dr Keskar really meant was that the intelligence inquiries and Harin Shah's report had substantiated the news of Bose's death.

More of the official responses illustrated how far the Government had dug in its heel over the finality of its stand. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself spoke out many times in favour of the Taipeh air crash theory. Invariably, Kamath would be at the receiving end of his ripostes. “I have no doubt in my mind—I did not have it then and I have no doubt today of the fact of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's death” [5] was Nehru's quote for the day, 5 March 1952 that is.

Such mulish talk was bound to stoke the fire of resentment. On 6 August 1952, legislators in the Congress-dominated West Bengal Assembly exploded with rage while discussing a resolution seeking an inquiry. It had been moved by Dr Kanai Lala Bhattacharya, but the day belonged to former revolutionary Dr Atindra Nath Bose, who called the demand “a very faint echo of the national desire which is surging in the heart of Bengal”.

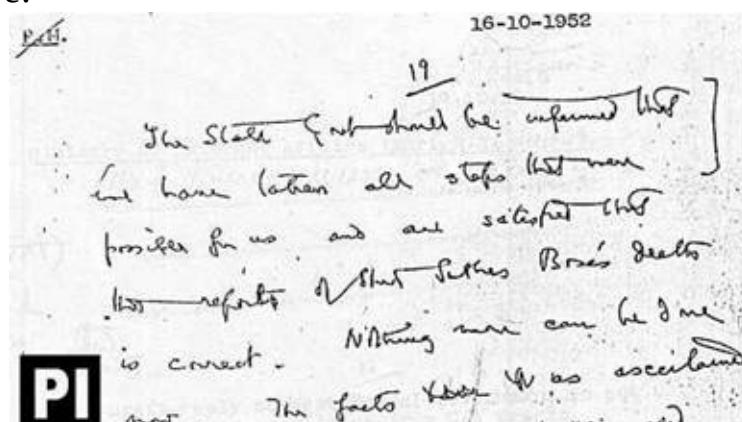
Dubbing the Taipeh death theory a fabrication “circulated by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose himself to hoodwink his enemies”, Atindra asserted that Bose had flown “to an unknown destination in the

USSR". He fulminated that the only people who believed in Bose's death were "his erstwhile colleagues who cannot hear his name". Then he launched into a furious diatribe against New Delhi: "Is there any free government in any part of this world which can get rid of their national hero in such a disgraceful, in such an unsympathetic and unseemly fashion? Could you imagine a more wretched instance of such jealousy, meanness and ingratitude?"

The shrill voices from Bengal Assembly proceedings rang out across the nation and were heard in the Capital. By now the central government officials were veterans in containing such outbursts of emotions. A 1952 file noting mentioned with a sneer that "questions on Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's death are asked in Parliament practically every session!" The authorities had in fact been successful in muzzling quite a few of them. An October 1952 Lok Sabha record listed questions disallowed and withdrawn. "Inquiry about death of Netaji" figured along with the sensitive questions on Geneva Conference on Kashmir, Churchill's reference to Mahatma Gandhi's fast, shrines and temples in India, Pakistan, oppression of Hindus in East Bengal etc.

The Bengal assembly resolution requesting the Government of India to "take all necessary steps for ascertaining the real efforts about the alleged death" of Bose was handled without much alarm by the Ministry of External Affairs. "The state government wishes to know what actions we are taking in this matter," read a noting by the Foreign Secretary. "It is not very easy to carry out a more detailed investigation after so many years, but I shall ask Mr Rauf to check up on the facts and to get some more information, if possible," he further commented. Dr Mohammed Rauf was the Indian Ambassador to Japan at that time.

But the Prime Minister was not OK with any such move. Below the Foreign Secretary's note, he hastily scribbled this directive:



PI 19
The state government should be informed that we have taken all steps that was possible for us and we are satisfied that the reports of Shri Subhas Bose's death is correct. Nothing more can be done. The facts ascertained have been made public and Parliament has been informed. There is no point in referring this matter to Dr Rauf for this purpose.

The Prime Minister would repeat his stand over and over. His February 1953 PM Secretariat note [6] for Dr Keskar did it with absolute certitude:

PRIME MINISTER'S SECRETARIAT



I have read Kamath's letter. I believe we are answering a question on this subject in Parliament.

2. I am quite clear in my own mind that all the enquiries we could make have been made and the result is a conviction that Shri Subhas Chandra Bose died as has been stated. There is an abundance of evidence on this, which I consider convincing. In the circumstances, I see absolutely no justification for appointing a Commission to make further enquiries.

Nehru's confidence stemmed from the finding of a hush-hush enquiry conducted in Japan by SA Ayer, former information minister in the Azad Hind Government and then publicity director for the Bombay state (now Maharashtra) government. Six years after he had helped the Japanese military personnel in drafting the story of Bose's death, Ayer returned to authenticate it on a mission that had the tacit backing of the Ministry of External Affairs. It was all devised in a queer way. A letter dated 11 May 1951 was issued by the Chief Secretary of Bombay, then a state comprising present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat, requesting Ayer on behalf of the Foreign Secretary to find out about Bose's presumed ashes.

Ayer did not think it wise to consult any of his former INA colleagues, except JK Bhonsle, by then a central minister who had come to share the government view. Ayer's enquiry in Japan was financed and virtually overseen by his friend Munga Ramamurti, former head of Indian Independence League in Tokyo.

The Indian community in Japan alleged—and the Government of India secretly concurred—that Ramamurti and Ayer had made off with the INA treasure, missing since Bose's disappearance. (See Appendix I: The loot of the INA treasure) The moment Ayer landed in Tokyo, a rattled head of the Indian Liaison Mission there forewarned New Delhi: "I hope you are not seeking Ayer's assistance with regard to the disposal of Netaji Subhas Bose's ashes now lying in a Tokyo temple, as it is most undesirable that he should, in view of the suspicion surrounding him, be associated in any manner with the taking over of these relics."

The mission head had no inkling that Ayer was on a government-backed mission to do precisely that.

Ayer went on to weave an account of Bose's death on the basis of his talks with former Japanese military officers and others. Japanese-speaking Ramamurti acted as the interpreter and an old written statement of Habibur Rahman's came handy. On his return to India in June, Ayer somehow met Harin Shah and collected his papers. He kept his findings to himself until he met the Prime Minister in September with a stack of papers containing the material he had gathered. The Prime Minister, who was also the External Affairs Minister, asked Ayer to "write out a full report about this". Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt was directed to go through the papers submitted by Ayer.

Dutt scanned the records and something caught his eyes. Ayer had been able to locate a hitherto unknown statement of Habibur Rahman with "significant reference to 'Bose's intention' to get out of the plane at Dairen" in Manchuria. There was also a mention of "the intention of the Japanese authorities to let him cross over to the Russian-held territory". Dutt found it politically explosive.

Habibur Rahman's is the really important evidence, and those who still cherish the belief that Netaji Bose is alive and is somewhere in Russian-held territory, will seize upon any piece of evidence in support of their theory.

As directed by the PM, Ayer wrote a report. Dated 24 September 1951, Churchgate, Mumbai, it was loaded with his own assumptions, sitting well with the official view.

I called at the house of General Tojo on June 3, and the next day Mrs Tojo and family were my guests at a dinner at the Tokyo hotel. I did not ask the Japanese journalists or Mrs Tojo and family any direct questions about Netaji's death but I must say I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that the report of the crash is hundred per cent correct. It was obvious that the Japanese journalists and General Tojo's family assumed that I had no doubt whatsoever about Netaji's fatal air crash.

The Prime Minister was mighty impressed with the former *Reuters'* and *Associated Press* correspondent's investigation. On 1 March 1952 he sent a personal letter to the West Bengal Chief Minister and Bose's old political rival Dr BC Roy, saying he had "no reason to doubt the correctness of the report". [7] The streak of conviction in him over this point was put on a public display when he informed the nation about Ayer's findings. In the Lok Sabha on March 5, Nehru read out aloud the conclusion reached by Ayer: "I [Ayer] have not the faintest doubt in my mind that the ashes that are enshrined in the Renkoji temple are Netaji's."

As the news of Ayer's furtive enquiry became public, his former colleagues and Bose's followers

convulsed with rage. Bose's nephew Aurobindo told mediapersons on March 6 that Ayer's report was a prelude to bringing his uncle's assumed ashes to India and end the controversy. Such apprehensions were further stoked by a story in *Osaka Mainichi* on 27 January 1953 that the ashes of Bose "may soon be sent back to India after more than seven years of 'secret keeping' in a Japanese temple in Tokyo". The newspaper story also alluded to the rumours in Japan about missing Indian Independence League fortune and the INA treasure. A former secretary of the league, VB Sheth, told the newspaper that the needle of suspicion flickered on his former IIL colleague who had been recently arrested along with his Japanese wife for customs violation and "freed on bail, pending trial, fled to India".

In March 1953 Debnath Das, who was living in Thailand, came out with his own report as the ex-general secretary of the Indian Independence League. Explaining his long silence, he wrote that "some allowance" had to be made for "Japan's extremely delicate position", "war criminals' trials", "other international complications" and "the disguised hostility of the powers that be in India towards Netaji". Das rued the "complete disintegration of the INA", "beggarly conditions" of its veterans and "somersault of some of our colleagues"—which was a swipe at SA Ayer, JK Bhonsle, AM Sahay and others who had taken up plump government positions. Ayer came in for further attack over his enquiry.

Why did the Government choose to send just one man (Sri SA Ayer) to Japan for the said investigation—a man who had been in Japan just for a month or so and did not know the language and country well and had to yield to a conducted tour? Why should he choose to keep his findings secret from us who are all pilgrims to that 'journey's end'?

Significantly, Das recalled the Japanese themselves telling him that the announcement of air crash was a smokescreen.

On the 26th August just a week after the reported death of Netaji, the chief of Japanese military intelligence department met me at Hanoi together with a military officer from Towloon—the seat of Marshal Terauchi's headquarters and told me: "Netaji no hikoki ochiru kotown shinio shimasan...." Don't believe the plane crash as a real crash....

Frustrated over Bose's non-appearance, Das vent his anger on the Japanese officers who had handled his last flight.

Contact or no contact, we believe Netaji should naturally remain alive, but if Netaji is no more, we equally believe there is some foul play somewhere and that some heinous crime must have been perpetrated in our darkest moment of history. This is our charge. And the responsibility lies on those Japanese military officers who took charge of Netaji. Those officers who are living today can not shirk that responsibility.

The allusion was to General Isoda. The events of 16 and 17 August had left Das confused and distrustful. "After reaching Saigon only, the Japanese military authorities separated Netaji from the rest of us on the ground that there was no accommodation in the plane. Not only that, we were informed for the first time that he was to be taken towards Tokyo...."

In his mind, conflicting thoughts were criss-crossing. Bose telling him in Saigon—"They are changing the plan, I don't know why." And Isoda comforting him later—"So long as I live, I would keep him safe". Towards the end of his report, Das qualified his declamation with a sentimental appeal:

As one who knows Japan for the last twenty years and has worked with brave Japanese people in the making of that glorious history under the banner of Netaji, my grateful heart goes to the Japanese people for all they did for us. INA's history will not be complete without references to Japan's contribution, service and sacrifice, which will remain written in golden letters. It is with such a feeling that I would appeal to the Japanese government and its people to see that their fair name be not marred with stigma in their relations with the INA and the Leader before posterity. Hence I appeal to them in fairness to their love towards India to allow such inquiries vis-à-vis the reported plane crash in Taihoku....[8]

Das would have shed some of his suspicions against the Japanese and blown his top over India's approach if he had by some chance glanced through Ayer's complete report. The report that the PM had tabled in Parliament was a sanitised version of the original. Expunged from it—in deference to Subimal Dutt's advice—was the portion where Ayer had referred to a secret, high-level Japanese plan to "drop Netaji and General Shidei at Dairen" in Manchuria.

The intention was that General Shidei would look after Netaji in Dairen as long he remained there. Then Netaji would disappear with a view to crossing over to Russian-held territory and thereafter the Japanese would announce to the world that

Netaji had disappeared.

The more disturbing part was that the Prime Minister completely hid from the nation an explanatory handwritten note on the plan as narrated to Ayer by Colonel Tada, the former staff officer of Terauchi's HQ who was party to working out Bose's last known movement.

Tada's perspective of the ensuing incidents in August 1945 was of vital importance. It was he who had told Ayer of Bose's death. He had briefed the HQ in Tokyo. His inputs had formed the crux of official Domei news agency story that Bose died while on his way to Tokyo. Tada's surfacing along with Isoda just before Bose's "death" had made British intelligence officers suspicious. One report suggested that the duo could have turned up to execute a "deception plan". As early as October 1945, Finney had emphasised the need to trace Tada. In March 1946, Mck Wright was told by Major Young that "our only worthwhile move is to get hold of Tada".

What Tada told Ayer in 1951, and what Ayer conveyed to Nehru in the handwritten note, proved that the intelligence about deception was right. Tada let out to Ayer that all the Japanese manoeuvrings in August 1945 were directed at sending Subhas Bose to the Russians. In his secret note—which doesn't exist any longer officially—Ayer mentioned that Tada "filled certain important gap" in his information

Soon Netaji & party (including myself) landed at the Saigon airport from two planes from Bangkok at about 10am on 17.8.45. Col Tada flew to Dalat, contacted Field Marshal Terauchi, Commander-in-Chief, Southern Command (starting from Burma to China and Manchuria) and conveyed Netaji's request for facilities to fly to Russian occupied territory in Manchuria to enable him ultimately to reach Moscow. Netaji had been making this request to Tokyo ever since March or April 1945 and had been perusing it since the collapse of Germany.... Field Marshal took the responsibility on his own shoulders and without referring the question to the Imperial (Military) Headquarters in Tokyo, told Col Tada to tell Netaji that all facilities would be given to him to reach Russian-held territory.

Count Terauchi had great respect and affection for Netaji and wished to let Netaji have his wish and do whatever he liked on his own responsibility, whatever the consequences might be. A plane was leaving for Diren and to Tokyo, Gen Shidei who had been ordered to proceed forthwith to Diren to take charge as Vice-Chief of Staff was going by that plane. Netaji could take the only seat they could spare and Gen Shidei would look after Netaji up to Diren. Thereafter Netaji would fall back on his own resources to contact the Russians....

Japanese would announce to the world that Netaji on his way to Japan had disappeared from Diren. That would absolve them of all responsibility for the safety of Netaji's person in the eyes of the Allies. Col Tada, on his return from Dalat at about 2 or 3pm conveyed this message to Netaji in a secret conference.... Count Terauchi had told Col Tada that if Tokyo asked him about Terauchi's decision to help Netaji to reach Russian-held territory, Col Tada was to tell Tokyo that Terauchi had done so on his own responsibility.

Terauchi couldn't care less about Tokyo's reaction. Terminally ill in August 1945, this 65-year-old son of a former prime minister knew that death would get him before the Allied "justice". He passed away in 1946 while in custody. Tada slipped out and successfully evaded the Allied dragnet. He died prematurely in September 1951, around the same time Ayer's report reached the PM.

Ayer's personal letters to Prime Minister at that time reeked of obsequiousness. But much as he addressed the PM as "revered Panditji" and described himself as his "most obedient servant" in the old-fashioned way, Ayer was kept at an arm's length by the Prime Minister. In a letter to BC Roy, Nehru disparagingly described him as "one Ayer [who] was Publicity Adviser to Subhas Chandra Bose". [9]

Ayer's findings as presented in Parliament were followed by his magnum opus *Unto him a witness*. Published in December 1951, the book contained some rare pictures of Bose. Ayer made deferential observations about Bose's persona and leadership and drew an outline of the death mystery. But the readers never knew that his manuscript had been vetted by the Ministry of External Affairs. In a secret note, Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt wished it was "arranged in a more effective manner".

Unto him a witness mentioned nothing that Tada had told Ayer—who later on, ironically, served on the censor board—showing a strange lapse of memory in an otherwise minutely detailed book. He discussed and ruled out the possibility of Bose being alive in a chapter which was barely three and a half pages long.

Major Abid Hasan, Ayer wrote, “refused to believe Habib’s story” and was “sure that Netaji must have safely crossed over to the Russian-occupied Zone in Manchuria”. Then he mentioned—in just one line—that he visited Japan in May 1951 and met the crash survivors before abruptly giving his opinion that he was “convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt” that what Colonel Habibur Rahman had said was true. He missed telling the readers that Bose’s men were capable of concealing things. Elsewhere, in some other context, he recounted how Hasan had given him only a “scrappy account” of his 90-day submarine voyage with Bose. He put it rhetorically that there was no power on earth which could have detained Bose against his will.

If Bose were alive, Ayer argued, he would have come back, or at least contacted the person closest to him—his elder brother Sarat Chandra Bose. He painted a “what if” scenario and ventured out to suggest that if Bose had returned, he would have gladly accepted the defence portfolio “if invited by Nehru” to join his Cabinet. [10]

The purpose of Ayer’s enquiry report and the book was defeated as they only ended up giving impetus to the rising tide of the controversy. More and more people now yearned for a resolution. Former Bengal minister and lawyer Niharendu Dutt-Mazumdar mooted the idea of a “special fact-finding commission” in a January 1954 letter to Nehru. [11] The Prime Minister’s January 21 response was of a man hassled:

I really do not understand what more the Government of India can possibly do about finding facts in regards to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. We have done everything possible within our ken and got all the facts that were available. I have no doubt in my mind about them. [12]

Six months later the issue simmered yet again in a meeting of Berhampur municipality commissioners. Giving in to public sentiments, the municipality adopted an extraordinary resolution urging the central government to carry out a “thorough inquiry in order to ascertain the truth and to dispel misgivings and misunderstanding”. [13] A copy of the resolution reached Teen Murti Bhawan, the Prime Minister’s palatial residence-cum-office. This time it was PM’s Private Secretary who slammed the door with the evident Nehruspeak:

All the inquiries that the Government of India could make have been made and result is conviction that Shri Bose died in the fatal air crash. No further inquiries in the matter are considered necessary. [14]

Secret official correspondence of the time shows the Government’s unshakeable belief in the Taipei air crash theory. When the Renkoji temple priest decided to hold first memorial service to mark ten years of Bose’s reported death, Indian Ambassador BR Sen scrambled to reach the South Block. His 26 July 1955 telegram began with the ritualistic, politically right phrase “late Subhas Chandra Bose”, which every top government official recited in those days.

Chief Priest of Renkoji Buddhist temple who has all along had the custody of ashes proposes holding for first time formally a memorial service on the 18th August. Temple authorities ask Embassy approval for this and request presence of Ambassador and others at the occasion. Please advise action desired.

The Ministry of External Affairs asked Sen to elaborate his views, asking him to refer to a June 1954 communiqué of his predecessor. Ambassador Rauf had written:

Opinion of Indians here is divided. Any recognition, therefore, would be a source of controversy. It would not be so much matter about the Indians locally, but the opinion in Bengal refuses to accept the fact of Netaji’s death and, therefore, of the genuineness of the ashes. I would, therefore, suggest that so long as we call, we should try and keep things as they are until opinion in Bengal changes to accept the fact of his death.

“My views generally same as Rauf’s,” Sen’s return telegram read. “Main question is whether Government are in a position to publicly accept fact of death. If they are then there could be no objection to Embassy participating in memorial services here.” Sen’s views were conveyed to the Prime Minister, who swiftly issued the following instruction:

PRIME MINISTER'S SECRETARIAT

I suggest you send the following reply to the attached telegram from Tokyo:

"Your telegram 73, July 29th.
We think that our Embassy should participate in Memorial Services for Subhas Chandra Bose. Prime Minister stated in Parliament two years ago that in the circumstances we had to accept fact of death. Therefore, there is no difficulty in our taking up this position publicly."

PI

J. Nehru

(J. Nehru)
20.7.55.

The services were held and in attendance was AK Dar, First Secretary at the Embassy, who had been taking keen interest in the Bose matter.

Either by coincidence or some unknown design, Bose's fate became a hot topic both in Japan and India in the September of 1955. Renkoji temple priest's decision to hold second memorial service for Bose on September 18 as per a Japanese custom and the Japanese government's September 17 offer to send the ashes to India sparked off a huge controversy. The Indians in Japan demanded a full-fledged investigation into the death as well as missing INA treasure.

"Alive or murdered? Indians seek truth about Chandra Bose" screamed a *Nippon Times* headline on 18 September 1955. "A treasure in gold and jewels donated by Indians all over Asia to finance the fiery Bengali leader's fight for Indian independence was reported to have been in the plane with Bose, but nothing has been seen of it since," said the story. Two days later, the same paper reported what clearly was an officially-backed attempt to cool down the simmering cauldron in Japan and India. News agency *Domei*, now called *Kyodo*, organised an extraordinary press conference where it paraded three former army officers who vouched for Bose's death: Lt Gen Haruki Isayama, former chief of staff of the Japanese forces in Formosa, Capt Yoshimi, the doctor who had treated dying Bose and Col Morio Takakura of the Imperial Staff Headquarters in Tokyo. According to the newspaper, *Kyodo*

produced the men after cries went up from the Indian community here this month insisting that Japanese authorities tear aside the veil of secrecy that has surrounded the death of their leader for the past decade and give an account of the missing treasure. ...Many still insist he is alive. Others believe he is dead but think he was murdered for the treasure. [15]

Takakura's statement to media took that charge by its horn. He turned the spotlight on Ramamurti recalling that he had "personally delivered Bose's ashes and a fortune in gold and jewels to an official of the Indian independence movement in Tokyo".

"The fortune belonging to the Bose movement has since vanished." [16]

To further counter the conspiracy theory about Bose's "murder" the officers were compelled to jettison the original *Domei* claim that Bose had died enroute to a trip to Tokyo. The Japanese finally accepted what the British intelligence had uncovered in 1945:

According to the former army men quoted by Kyodo, Bose was being transported from Singapore to Russia to escape prosecution by the Allies. A Lt Gen Shidei, a Russian expert who was being transferred to the Manchurian theatre, was to see that Bose got to the Soviets. [17]

Totally blind to the revelation about Russia, the Indian embassy saw the Japanese government hand behind the blitz. Dar noted on September 20 that "the Gaimusho [Japanese foreign ministry] are

interested in having the ashes sent to India in order to close the still lurking suspicion in their mind that the Indians somehow hold the Imperial Japanese Government responsible for some negligence in not safeguarding the life of Netaji and the property of the INA which he was carrying". On September 22, he sent a long telegram to New Delhi. "We suspect that Japanese are somehow anxious for transfer of the ashes and have therefore encouraged controversial publicity now."

At home, the Government's stonewalling tactics was driving Bose's supporters up the wall. It was a showdown in Kolkata on 6 September 1955 at a meeting of Netaji memorial committee, attended by the Red Fort trial hero Shah Nawaz Khan. Now a *pucca* Congressman, Shah Nawaz himself inadvertently triggered a backlash against the Government by telling the gathering that the Prime Minister was not ready for any official probe. It resulted in the adoption of a resolution envisioning a public-funded inquiry into the mystery.

If it had come into being, this civil society-led unofficial committee would have had for its head Justice Radha Binod Pal, the only Asian judge at the Tokyo war crimes trials. Pal's pro-Japan judgment had been banned by the miffed Allies. Nevertheless, the Indian to occupy the highest position in Japanese esteem thereafter would be Pal. The judge already had some idea about the Bose death issue. He had been dramatically informed by a fellow American judge that the Taipei crash was "possibly a myth". Pal discussed it publicly more than once. Writing to Japan-based freedom fighter AM Nair in 1953, he had rooted for a proper inquiry: "The whole thing demands a thorough investigation. Statements by individuals made here and there will not convince me as to the truth of the story given out. I have reasons to doubt its correctness."

In pursuance of the Kolkata resolution, Shah Nawaz Khan met Subhas's eldest surviving brother Suresh Bose. Sarat had passed away in 1950. Shah Nawaz said he would take up the issue with the Prime Minister and seek official support for the civil society committee. He promised to be back soon with the plan of holding a big meeting of Bose's supporters.

He never did. Shah Nawaz was never seen again by the side of those who doubted the crash theory. The man who had once told a friend that a senior Japanese officer had confidentially told him not to worry about Bose as he was "safe", gone to the other side. Several years later, a note in a Rajiv Gandhi-era file by Pulok Chatterji—the Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh at present—gave a testimonial to this incredible change of heart. "Shah Nawaz had himself declared on several occasions that Netaji is alive."

The Nehru government suddenly realised Shah Nawaz's importance. There was a shift in the official position, which as late as 29 September 1955 remained stridently opposed to a proper probe. When Kamath asked Prime Minister Nehru in Parliament if the Government would welcome "a proposal for a joint Indo-Japanese commission," he replied:

I have said that the question of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's death is, I think, settled beyond doubt. There can be no inquiry about that. But so far as to the exact circumstances, possibly if there's an inquiry held, it may be that some additional facts may come to notice.

On 13 October 1955, Nehru made a note for the information and action of his Foreign Secretary. He minuted that in consultation with BR Sen and Dr BC Roy he had decided to set up a team of three people to inquire into the matter. The team would comprise one representative each from the Government, INA and Bose family. The PM was inclined to nominate Amiya Nath Bose, son of Sarat Bose, but did not "think it necessary" to "consult Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's wife in Vienna". He defined the task before the proposed panel:

The purpose of the inquiry will be to find the circumstances of the death and how far the ashes kept in a temple in Tokyo are Shri Subhas Bose's ashes.

The Foreign Secretary recorded his response two days later, suggesting that "an officer of the embassy should be associated with the committee but not as a member". This was going to be AK Dar. A subsequent note by the PM said:

I met Shri BR Sen, our Ambassador in Tokyo, in Calcutta this evening. I asked him to inform the Japanese Government informally that, in view of the great interest in India in regard to the circumstances of the death of the Shri Subhas Chandra Bose and in his ashes, it would be desirable to have some kind of an investigation in this matter so as to remove any doubts from people's mind, about these circumstances.... If they are agreeable, as we hope they will be, then we propose to send a team of three persons who will place themselves at the disposal of the Japanese government and conduct an inquiry in Japan in cooperation with the Japanese government.

...it is our intention to request Shri Amiya Bose, son of Shri Sarat Chandra Bose, and Shri Shah Nawaz Khan, Parliamentary Secretary and previously of the INA, to be two members of this team. The third should be an official either from the Government of India or West Bengal Government. The inquiry should be carried out without too much fuss or publicity.

Prime Minister Nehru announced in Parliament on 3 December 1955 the setting up of Netaji Inquiry Committee (NIC) under the chairmanship of Shah Nawaz Khan.



Shah Nawaz was to be assisted by ICS officer Shankar Maitra, who had been handpicked by the Bengal Chief Minister after his Home Secretary Ranjit Mitra, his first choice, declined the offer. Suresh Bose, a former Bihar Executive Service officer, came to represent his family. His nephew Amiya was unwilling and Shah Nawaz did not want him on the panel. According to a prime ministerial minute, Shah Nawaz suggested that the "right person to go as a member of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's family was his eldest living brother". "He did not at all like the idea of Amiya Bose being sent and thought that this would be an unpopular choice."

Amiya's inclusion would have been disastrous for the Government. This fiery, London-educated barrister would have been of far greater nuisance to them than his sexagenarian, mild-mannered uncle turned out to be.

From the start, the unseen hand of the Ministry of External Affairs worked the Shah Nawaz Committee from behind like a puppet. A secret letter of October 18 discloses the names of two prominent string pullers: TN Kaul and AK Dar. Writing to Ambassador Sen in Tokyo, Kaul made it clear that Dar would "guide" the committee during its all-important Japan visit.



(46)

D.O.No.2463-NGO/SS
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
NEW DELHI

10th October, 1955.



My dear Ambassador,

I enclose copy of a minute recorded by the Prime Minister, in Calcutta, regarding the late Shri Subash Chandra Bose. We should be grateful if you would kindly let us know the result of your approach to the Japanese Government on the subject.

2. In addition to the three members of the Committee, I am desired to suggest that your First Secretary might be attached to the Committee for help and guidance.

Yours sincerely,

(T. N. Kaul)



Shri B. R. Sen, ICS,
Ambassador of India in Japan,
TOKYO.

Dar had already held secret parleys with the Gaimusho. In ordinary circumstances, the Japanese would not have done anything to revive ghosts from a past they had severed most connections with. But this circumstance was extraordinary. They were facing the wild allegations of murdering Bose and the tightlipped Japanese embassy staffers in India were giving rise to all sorts of misapprehensions.

Even after a decade of Bose's reported death, the Japanese ambassadors in India at that time—T Nishiyama and Sejiro Yoshizawa—would turn stoic every time mediapersons questioned them. The only thing common between the Japan of 1945 and the Japan of 1955 was that same man was the foreign minister. Mamoru Shigemitsu had been convicted of "war crimes" but was dealt with less harshly for his peaceful overtures to the Allies during the war. He spent seven years in jail and then made a most remarkable comeback.

The Director of Asian Affairs Division at the Gaimusho told Dar that the Indian government proposal to inquire into Bose's death was "acceptable to the Government of Japan in the terms in which the proposal was made by the Indian Ambassador to the Foreign Minister [of Japan]" at the specific instruction of Prime Minister Nehru. Dar's note for New Delhi threw further light on "the terms" and their implied meaning:

Mr Nakagawa added that the Government of Japan hopes there would be no departure from the main objective in view and extraneous inquiries and aside researches would not be made.

To ensure that there was "no departure from the main objective in view", the terms of reference for the inquiry committee came preloaded with the assumption that Bose had died following an air crash. Shah Nawaz's original draft of the committee's basic term of reference—"to inquire into the departure of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose from Bangkok on or about 16th August and the subsequent events leading to his disappearance"—had been okayed by MEA Deputy Secretary AJ Kidwai. "This appears to be a sufficiently elastic formulation and the word 'disappearance' is more appropriate than the word 'death' which we have used so far," he noted. Not for Kaul. "I would suggest 'alleged death' instead of 'disappearance'," he countered. The final text approved by Foreign Secretary Dutt made the aircraft accident a foregone conclusion. The dotted lines were drawn.

J.S(E) I would suggest "alleged death".
instead of "disappearance" and
and as you will "and submit
a report to Govt. of India with
their findings and recommendations".

—Inland
26.1.58

F.S.

53

I would formulate the terms of reference as follows:-
"To enquire into and to report to the Government of India
on the circumstances concerning the departure of Netaji Subhas
Chandra Bose from Bangkok about the 16th August 1945, - his
alleged death as a result of an aircraft accident and subsequent
developments connected therewith."

True to the spirit that no "extraneous inquiries and aside researches" should be made, Shah Nawaz conducted an inquiry which has come to be labelled as his "command performance" for the Prime Minister. On the face of it, that sort of disparaging description doesn't appear to do justice to a sleek report with six concise, neatly narrated chapters spread across 78 pages interspersed with images of the plane wreck, covered body of Bose, a bandaged Habibur Rahman, Renkoji temple and the ash container lying next to an image of Bose.

The first chapter—Last plans of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose—downplays the Russian connection to the extent that it virtually stands dismissed. It twists Bose's long-standing plan to create the impression that it was a knee-jerk reaction, and the idea of contacting the Russians occurred to him at the eleventh hour:

There were a number of reasons for Netaji to go to Tokyo, although his ultimate goal was Russia via Manchuria. ... There was no time then to contact Russian authorities or to make out detailed plans ahead. [18]

The best person to clarify the matter pertaining to Bose's plan about Russia would have been Foreign Minister Shigemitsu. With so many people and records referring to him, it was in the fitness of things to invite him to give evidence to the committee probing the fate of a man he had regarded as a friend. It wasn't.

The next three chapters of the NIC report are graphic and draw from the testimonies of six of the seven survivors, doctors and other witnesses. One after another, the survivors of the crash and witnesses to Bose's death at hospital recount the horrific details. "There is absolutely no reason why they should come and depose to something which they know to be untrue," [19] the report says and gives illustration of how some Japanese witnesses greatly inconvenienced themselves just to tell the committee of Bose's death:

Mr J Nakamura, who was an interpreter, and was present at Netaji's death-bed, although 70 years of age, came on his own all the way from Kyushu, about 1,200 kilometres from Tokyo. [20]

Dr Yoshimi, who owns a medical clinic at Miyasakiken in Kyushu Island, had to close down his clinic for several days and come to Tokyo, a distance about 1,200 kilometres from his place. [21]

The Japanese clearly went out of the way to support the official view. Shutting down his clinic for several days was too big a gesture for Bose by Dr Yoshimi, who had never known him. His only association with the severely burnt man identified to him as "His Excellency Chandra Bose" began and ended on 18 August 1945. And yet, the doctor became overtly mushy while describing the final

moments of “Bose”. The report says that “describing this poignant scene before the committee, Dr Yoshimi himself broke down and sobbed audibly”. [22]

Pakistan government official Habibur Rahman’s deposition before the committee in New Delhi marked his first and last appearance in India since Partition. He was expected to make a long statement. A comprehensive one he did make. The record of Rahman’s statement continues to be security classified and therefore is not available to the researchers in any archive or library. Anyhow, flipping through a copy, this is what one would read Rahman narrating about the topography of Matsuyama aerodrome and the crash:

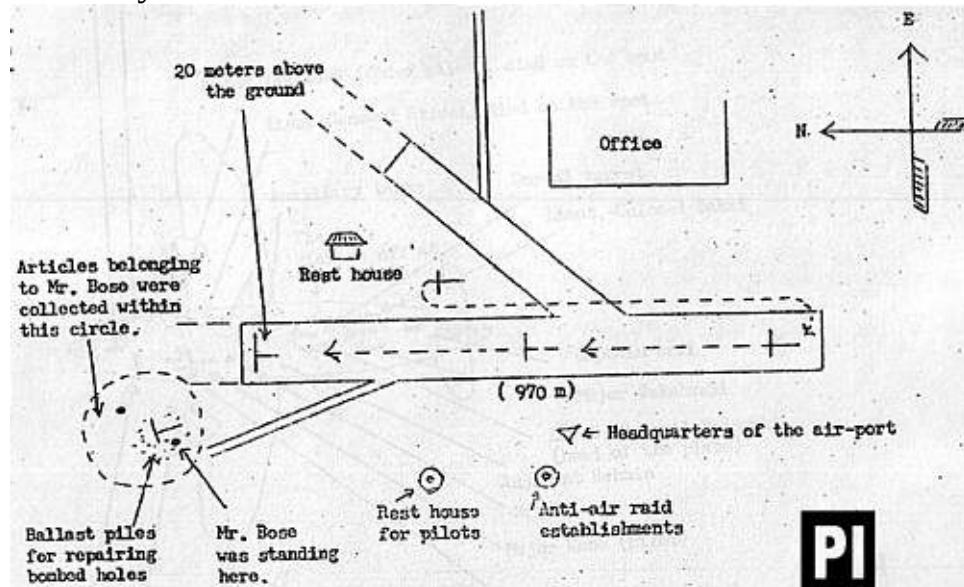
The direction of the runway was north to south. The runway is in flat country with mountains to its north and north-east at a distance of about eight to 10 miles. ...After taking off, the plane circled over the airfield at a few hundred feet height and then it turned north or north-east. We were no more five or six minutes in the air and the plane was still gaining height, when suddenly I heard a deafening noise as if some shell had hit the starboard side of the plane.

At the end of the statement, Rahman was put a few questions by Suresh Bose and Shah Nawaz. One of Suresh Bose’s pertained to the exact site of the crash:

Q: You have stated that the crash took place about one and a half or two miles from the boundaries of the airport. Did it crash against the side of a hillock?

A: Yes. No, it crashed on plain ground.

Some time before Rahman gave evidence to the committee, the Gaimusho presented to the Indian embassy its own report titled “Investigation on the cause of death and other matters of the late Subhas Chandra Bose”. An enclosure attached to it contained four sketches showing sitting arrangement in the plane which had carried Bose and others and the hospital ward and room where he was treated following the crash. The sketch-map of the Matsuyama aerodrome depicted the plane as having gone “20 metres above the ground” before crash landing not one-two miles away from the boundary walls but just at the end of the runway itself.



Something was terribly wrong with Habib’s statement. This was not a sort of discrepancy which could be glossed over, but it was. The NIC report admitted that “some witnesses, like Lt Col Nonogaki, have stated that the plane crashed on the concrete runway; on the other extreme, Col Habibur Rahman has said that the crash took place one or two miles outside the aerodrome” and then placed its faith in the version of ground engineer Capt Nakamura, who said that “the plane crashed about 100 meters beyond the concrete runway”. [23]

But when the same Capt Nakamura was found to be making a statement about his rescuing Bose while Rahman watched from afar—something that wouldn’t fit in the official narrative of the death story—the report brazened it out that it “may perhaps be put down to confused recollection after such a lapse of time”. [24]

Can a witness be both credible and confused at the same time? So, this was the trick. Shah Nawaz

cherry picked the “right” pieces of evidence from a jumble of contradictory statements. That’s why several slips showed in the “made-to-order” NIC report. Sample a few quotes:

* Different witnesses have given the time of halt at Taihoku airfield from half an hour to two hours. [Page 17 of the NIC report]

* Witnesses inside the plane have given different estimates of the heights.... [P 19]

* According to Col Habibur Rahman, the plane split in the front portion, while Capt Nakamura alias Yamamoto is positive that the plane was intact and the body was not broken. [P 19]...the statement of Lt Col Nonogaki [is] that the two split parts went in different direction on the ground. [P 20]

* Maj Takahashi gives a somewhat different version. He says that he saw Netaji getting out from the left front portion of the plane. His clothes were on fire and he was trying to take off his coat. Then he says that he went up to Netaji and made him roll on the ground and managed to put out the fire from his clothes. He says that Col Habibur Rahman was there, but assigns him a passive role. [P 23]

* There is some doubt about the fate of the two pilots and some of the crew who were initially trapped inside the plane. Capt Nakamura alias Yamamoto definitely says that Pilot Takizawa and Co-Pilot Ayoagi perished along with General Shidei, and he helped to bury their entrails and put their ashes in three boxes... The two doctors, Yoshimi and Tsuruta, definitely say that they had treated Co-Pilot Ayoagi who died later in the hospital. [P 23]

* According to Col Habibur Rahman, Netaji was taken to the “operation theatre,” and given a white transfusion which he thought was camphor. The Japanese doctors did not refer to the operation theatre. [P 29]

* Dr Yoshimi has stated that in the case of severe burns of third degree, the blood gets thicker, and there is high pressure on the heart. In order to relieve this pressure, blood is usually let out and new blood given in its place. Approximately 200 cc of Netaji’s blood was let out and a blood transfusion to the extent of 400 cc was given to him. ...A more serious discrepancy is the statement of Dr Tsuruta, who attended on Netaji, that no blood transfusion was given. Col Rahman who was also in the same ward room could not remember if any blood transfusion was given to Netaji. There is no way of reconciling these different statements and they must remain as they are. [P 29]

* Col Habibur Rahman has said that Netaji had a cut on his head four inches long which was bleeding. This is a discrepancy. [P 27]

* There is some discrepancy between the witnesses as to who were in the same ward with Netaji. [P 28]

* The evidence of the fellow injured persons does not help to establish the correct hour. ...So, the time of death cannot be established with accuracy; it could be any time between 8pm and midnight on the 18th August 1945. [P 30]

* And although Lt Col Nonogaki has stated that, on informing the headquarters some staff officers came while Netaji was alive, the staff officers themselves, namely, Col Miyata and Maj Nagatomo, say that they arrived after Netaji had died. [P 43]

* Apparently, no particular interest was taken by the local army command as to what happened to Netaji’s body. [P 43]

* One would have at least expected a formal inquiry into the air crash, which is more or less a routine matter. More so, as the plane carried distinguished persons like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Lt Gen Shidei. But no such inquiry was held. [Pp 43-44]

* For reasons not very clear, the Japanese authorities maintained a great deal of secrecy about it. [P 30]

* J Nakamura says that the news about Netaji’s death was kept a secret and known only to high-ranking military officers. [P 31]

The other side of the story was how Suresh Bose saw it. Shah Nawaz’s inquiry had hit a rough patch from the word go. His personal relations with Shah Nawaz aside, Suresh Bose could never reconcile with his occupying the position he thought should have gone to Radha Binod Pal.

On 1 April 1955—day one of the committee’s work—Subhas Bose’s friend and Forward Bloc leader Muthuramalingam Thevar appeared as the witness No 1. His arguments sent Suresh Bose and the Government on a collision course. Thevar charged that the terms of reference of the committee reflected a foregone conclusion. He gave Shah Nawaz a piece of his mind and then held a press conference in Delhi on April 3. Making a most unbelievable claim that he had met Bose in China recently, Thevar told the media that “he would furnish conclusive proof” that Bose was alive if the inquiry committee was reconstituted. Thevar called the committee “an eyewash”, when it had barely started functioning. “Dr Radha Binod Pal should be invited to function as the chairman. The Government must make it known categorically to the public whether Netaji’s name is still in the list of war criminals and if not, when it was removed and how?”

Thevar’s bizarre claims did not have any takers except Suresh Bose. In a letter to the PM on April 2, Suresh wrote: “With due respect to Shri Shah Nawaz Khan, I am of opinion that as this inquiry is more or less of a judicial nature and...it requires mature deliberations and sound judgment. As such, it is my humble opinion that Dr Radha Binod Pal be requested and persuaded to join the committee and lead it.”

The next morning Suresh ran into the Prime Minister and reiterated his litany of complaints and

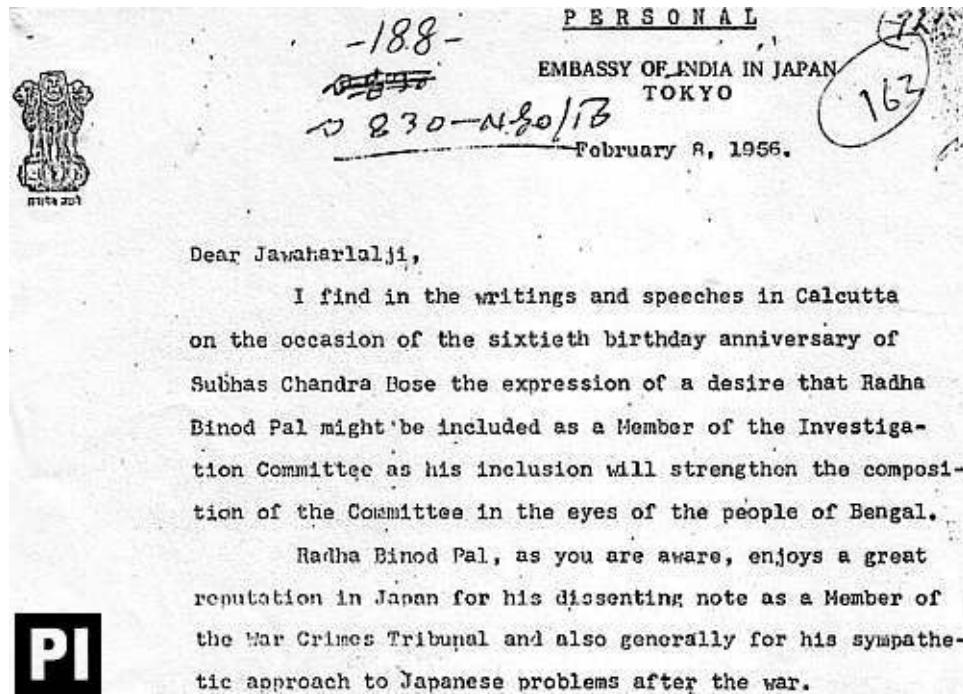
demands. The Prime Minister quietly listened when he should have rebuked Suresh for attaching importance to the war criminal absurdity. By evening, his official reaction had been recorded:

Our effort should be to get as many facts as possible about Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's last days—the disappearance or death or whatever it was. Apart from direct evidence which we have thus far received and which may further be obtained, it seems to me almost inconceivable that Netaji should be alive. Over ten years have passed since the aircraft accident. Even if he had escaped then I cannot conceive how he could possibly remain silent during all these years when it was very easy for him to communicate in various ways with India....

Nehru further minuted that he had pointed out to Suresh that Radha Binod Pal's appointment to the committee "was not suitable because of the part he played in the war criminals' trial".

He is, of course, a very eminent criminal jurist and is well known in Japan and elsewhere. But, in the circumstances, his functioning in this committee might not be liked by some foreign countries like the USA....

Digging deeper into secret files reveals that the Prime Minister was imagining things. The part Dr Pal played in the Tokyo trial—where many of the people facing "war crime" charges had aided the Indian freedom struggle—actually made him the best person for the job. The Japanese had come to regard him as a moral giant. A decade after the end of the war, the Americans couldn't have any issue with any inquiry over Bose's death in Japan. In a personal letter dated 8 February 1956, Ambassador BR Sen—the Indian ear on the ground in Japan—in fact rooted for the judge, saying he could "see no objection whatever from this end".



Radha Binod Pal, as you are aware, enjoys a great reputation in Japan for his dissenting note as a Member of the War Crimes Tribunal and also generally for his sympathetic approach to Japanese problems after the war. I have not discussed this matter with anyone here either in the Japanese Government or outside. ...If you think inclusion of Radha Binod Pal as a Member of the Committee will help to satisfy public opinion in Bengal, I can see no objection whatever from this end. In fact, I feel...his inclusion may give a certain stability and realism to the work of this Committee, which it may—I have no specific reason to say so—otherwise lack.

The Prime Minister saw the letter and dictated his firm stand to Foreign Secretary Dutt.

PRIME MINISTER'S SECRETARIAT

I have already spoken to you about this matter. I do not think that Radha Binod Pal will be suitable.

gulbros

(J. Nehru)
21-2-1956.

F.S.

7/1

Issue letter dictated.

S. D. N.
21-2-1956

PI

After failing to get Justice Pal on board, Suresh Bose tried to turn the spotlight on Shah Nawaz's conduct. He wrote to the PM: "As the public and the Press have not been allowed to be present during the deliberations of the committee, I was taken aback when I first saw a report of the deliberations of the committee in the newspapers. On asking Sri Shah Nawaz Khan about this publication, he said that some persons enquired of him in the lobby of Parliament and he had told them something about the matter. There have been some other irregularities, and I think your instructions are very necessary for our guidance."

The PM had them ready the same day. He offered a nugget of advice: Keep media out. "It is desirable that members of the committee should not give any interviews or make any statements to the Press. They should avoid even informal talks on this subject with others who might give the information to the Press." [25] Then he rapped Shah Nawaz on the knuckles in a letter to him. "Suresh babu also says that something appeared in the Press, apparently because you had had a talk with someone in the lobby. I think this should also be avoided." [26]

Some time before the committee visited Japan, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* carried an "investigative" story "How Netaji met with plane crash" with "graphic details of Netaji's fateful journey from Saigon". This was a major scoop, carrying the sketch of the sitting arrangement of the passengers in the ill-fated plane.

1. Name of paper ...
2. Published at ...
3. Dated ...

Pakistan Times

Lahore

PI

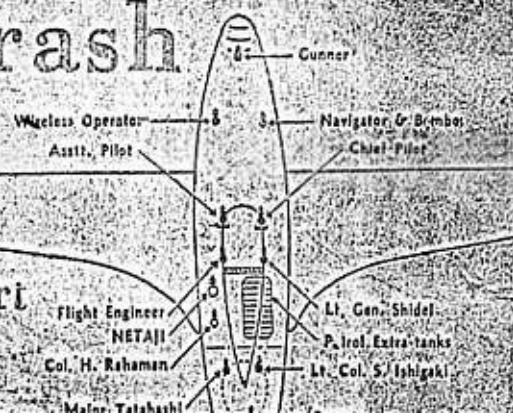
A. B. Patnaik (Allerton)

April 25, 1956

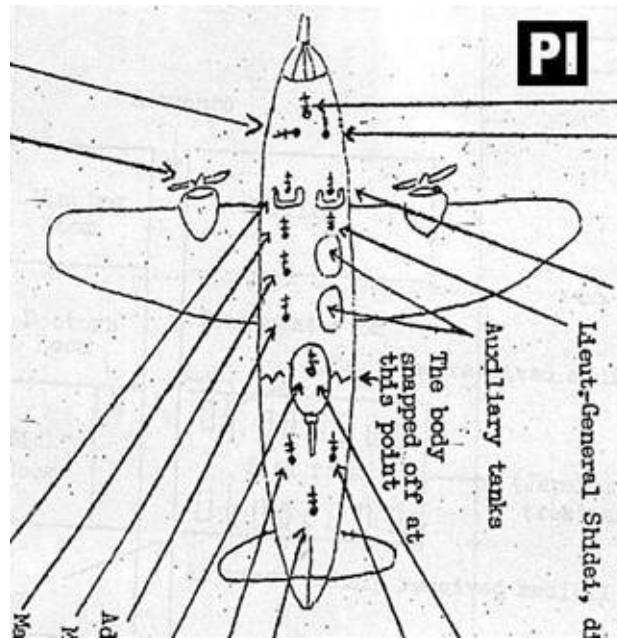
How Netaji Met Wit Plane Crash

An Hitherto Untold Story Of The Fatal Flight From Saigon Airport

A Flying Officer of the Japanese Air Force, who travelled in the same plane with Netaji from Saigon, gives the following account of the air crash and the subsequent happenings of which he was a witness.



The sketch was clearly a refurbished version of the one appearing in the secret Gaimusho report.



So how did reporters Hiren Singha and Deven Das lay their hands on the sketch and the other details? According to the paper, they had been “working for some time to unravel the mystery of Netaji’s disappearance”. But the two never really figured in the annals of the Bose mystery either before or since. Theirs was a “special appearance”, which bespoke of their being the beneficiaries of an obvious leak. But from where? Delhi or Tokyo? This was a local job. A clipping of the newspaper article was pasted on the Press Information Bureau sheet and kept in a secret file as a memento. Attached was a telltale note. “With the compliments of AR Vyas, Dy Information Officer, EA Ministry.” TN Kaul also sent the clipping to Shah Nawaz saying it would be “of interest to you”. When a government is gloating over a leak, you can be sure who is behind it.

On the eve of his crucial visit to Japan, Shah Nawaz frostily told Suresh Bose that as ordered by the Prime Minister he would examine a few witnesses and write the report. The committee members arrived in Tokyo in May 1956. Arriving in Tokyo in May 1956, Suresh Bose heard Shah Nawaz

telling journalists that his “mission is mainly to interview people who might offer direct evidence on Subhas Bose’s death”.

Suresh Bose later charged that Shah Nawaz and Shankar Maitra “both connected with the Government” manipulated evidence “so that it could easily conform with the Prime Minister’s statements” that Bose had died in Taipei. He alleged that Shah Nawaz considered *Unto him a witness* as an “authoritative book” and

put leading questions to some witnesses from relevant portions of that book and at times allowed a few of them to peruse the book during their examination. Whenever any witness made a statement that did not fit in with his opinion, he would make a suggestion to him as to whether he remembered it definitely, as the incident took place about eleven years ago or would put other questions or suggestions to him to confuse him and to make him modify his answer or change his definite statement to a vague one. [27]

By mid-1956 Shah Nawaz had made up his mind what the NIC report would conclude. On June 23 he asked Suresh Bose what his findings were. “It’s like putting the cart before the horse,” Suresh replied. Jittery Shah Nawaz persisted that he needed to know Suresh’s mind beforehand. Suresh insisted that it would be possible for him to reach some conclusion only after he had evaluated the evidence on record.

On June 30 the three committee members met. Both Shah Nawaz and Suresh Bose took notes for personal references. Suresh’s note mostly recorded the views of the other two members for he “knew what my suggestions were”. Shah Nawaz set the tone by asserting that they were dealing with three issues: Bose’s death, his cremation and his ashes and “the last two would go a long way in proving the first one”. Suresh objected to his line of thinking. The ashes were not identifiable; they could be of someone else, he countered.

I suggested that it would be essential to record the suggestions for the draft report, which should be started with Netaji’s plan of going to Manchuria for continuing his activities for the independence of India in Russian territory.... [28]

This became point 1 of Suresh Bose’s note: “Since October 1944, when Netaji visited Tokyo, he carried out these intentions of his and attempted to contact the Russian Ambassador, and finally decided to go to Manchuria with that purpose in view”. [29]

Shah Nawaz and Maitra backed the air crash theory. Suresh duly noted it in points 2 and 3.

Whether the plane crash did take place: The plane carrying Netaji did crash. There is no other evidence to the contrary; the evidence should be considered carefully in details. [30]

Whether Netaji met his death as a result of this accident: There is no reason why they should be disbelieved. After a lapse of about 10 years, these witnesses, who belong to different walks of life and to different nationalities—Habib, an Indian and subsequently a Pakistani, and the others, who are Japanese, who are mostly unconnected with one another and no longer in the service of their government, and Japan not being a totalitarian state—would not be expected to state what was not true.... [31]

Point 7 again reflected Suresh Bose’s own ideas and belief. “Shri Thevar’s statements and statements of Shri Goswami. Their statements should be discussed while dealing with Netaji’s death or otherwise and a little more in detail separately later on.” [32]

After the discussion got over, the government nominee Maitra—who would ghost write the report for Shah Nawaz—played a trick. He asked Suresh Bose for a copy of his note on the pretext that he had not taken any himself.

He then had typed copies made of the same and requested me [Suresh Bose] to sign on them and both of them signed on my manuscript note. I did not object to any of these requests.

Suresh Bose would pay a heavy price for this. The copy of the note signed by the three was subsequently given a headline “Principal points agreed to for draft report, dated 30.6.56”. Shankar Maitra, Shah Nawaz Khan, Subimal Dutt, Jawaharlal Nehru all then brandished it as a trump card against Suresh Bose’s dissent; the proof of his suddenly changing his mind. This officially sponsored hoax continues to be floated in our times. Shivraj Patil repeated it in the Lok Sabha in 2006. In a sense, it’s reminiscent of an old Bollywood plot: A village moneylender takes thumbprint of an unsuspecting farmer on a dubious document and the farmer spends his lifetime in meeting the mortgage payments.

But the truth is that Suresh Bose’s stand before and after July 1956 was the same. He was quite

vocal about his belief in Subhas's continuing existence, and the Government knows it too well. By parroting the Nehruvian line, Shivraj Patil merely misled the nation like others before him. This is one unfair deal; the Government sits on all records and throws selective bits at us. A fair one would require it to place all Bose-related records in the public domain and let the people see for themselves how tangled the web of deceit really is.

On 5 May 1956, a good two months before Suresh Bose is alleged by the conspiracy theory mongers to have agreed with the findings of his colleagues, a secret letter was sent by Anand Mohan Sahay to Jawaharlal Nehru. An ex aide of Subhas Bose, and India's Consul-General in Hanoi at that time, Sahay had no compunction in spying on his former leader's brother, who thought very highly of him, and badmouthing him to the PM:

I am sorry to inform you that I found Shri Suresh Chandra Bose, a member of the committee and brother of Netaji, having a very peculiar way of approach. It was very clear from his talks with me that he has gone with the preconceived ideas and is making all possible efforts to discredit the work of the Committee itself. I doubt if he is going to sign the joint report. He may, perhaps, submit a separate report based on his own fantastic ideas. ...He is bent on proving that Netaji is alive....

SECRET. 2224 - N-8013-172- (1)
Hanoi,
the 5th May, 1956.

PI

As desired by the Government, I visited Saigon for four days, from 30th April to 3rd May, to meet the Netaji Enquiry Committee and to give them all informations that they wanted and that I could give.

Having discussed the things with the members of the Committee collectively as well as individually and having collected some informations about their views, I feel that I must inform you about my feelings regarding the work of the Committee. I am sorry to inform you that I found Shri Suresh Chandra Bose, a member of the Committee and brother of Netaji, having a very peculiar way of approach. It was very clear from his talks with me that he has gone with pre-conceived ideas and is making all possible efforts to discredit the work of the Committee itself.

I doubt if he is going to sign the joint report. He may, perhaps, submit a separate report based on his own fantastic ideas. He is bitterly

A quick reading of this letter would make it clear to anyone that the Government was informed of Suresh Bose's straying away from the guided path much before he was accused of doing it—that is after July 1956. Any doubts about the Government ignoring Sahay's high value intelligence or not understanding its import must be removed because the PM saw this letter and asked TN Kaul to reply to Sahay on his behalf:

PRIME MINISTER'S SECRETARIAT

98

ML

I am sorry to read the attached letter. When this Committee was here, Shri Suresh Chandra Bose met me and was not satisfied with Shah Nawaz. He wanted Binod Pal to be the Chairman of the Committee. I told him that this was not feasible. Subsequently, he complained to me about some very minor matters against Shaw Nawaz. I thought all this was rather trivial. But, what Anand Mohan Sahay writes is really extraordinary.

2. You might acknowledge this letter.

J. Nehru

(J. Nehru)
23. 5.1956

S.G.

F.S.

??



Shah and Mr. Sahay's list.

"We are aware of this problem and can only hope that the gentleman concerned will express a fair, unbiased and impartial opinion on the subject," TN Kaul pontificated to Sahay in his May 26 letter.

Expressing his opinion fairly and squarely was Suresh Bose when the committee members met on 10 July 1956 in New Delhi. He enumerated a number of discrepancies and contradictions he had detected concerning the air crash and Bose's death. Five days later he formally rested his case, saying he was veering towards the conclusion that there had been no plane crash at all. Shah Nawaz told Suresh Bose that in that case he would have to write a separate dissenting report. Suresh demanded that the copies of the draft report, relevant papers, exhibits and photographs be given to him.

The last meeting Suresh Bose had with Shah Nawaz as a member of the Netaji Inquiry Committee was on July 16. Shah Nawaz frowned and asked him to vacate the committee's office. "Spoilsport" Suresh was now at the receiving end of the government officer's tantrums. As per his account, he was humiliated, compelled to leave Delhi and "not a single piece of important and relevant paper or exhibit from the record"[33] was provided to him for writing his report.

On July 29 Suresh Bose received a communication from Shah Nawaz demanding he should submit his dissenting report in two days. He saw the Government's hand behind the pressure tactics. A few days later the Shah Nawaz-Maitra findings were leaked out to a Kolkata newspaper. Suresh immediately sent a letter to Shah Nawaz with a copy to the Prime Minister. The PM's August 13 reply brought him little comfort. Nehru wrote that the leak "was some kind of an intelligent guess by some reporter or some clerk in our office here. Obviously, the chairman of the inquiry committee had nothing to do with it". [34]

Suresh Bose reacted angrily. In his response, he termed government officials as "callous, non-obliging and indifferent" over the way they had treated him and accused Shah Nawaz of "making diabolical false statements".

When the chairman curtly turned down my request for relevant papers, I suspected that without inspiration from higher

ups, he would not have had the audacity to decline the legitimate request of his colleague. My opinion has now been confirmed. [35]

Pandit Nehru did not respond to this scathing attack accusing his government of trying to muffle Suresh's views. A controversy at this stage had to be avoided. After some gap, Bengal Chief Minister Dr BC Roy started backchannel manoeuvrs. Those were rainy days for Dwijendra Bose, son of Satish Chandra Bose, the eldest among the Bose siblings. The Chief Minister spoke to him over the phone.

"Hello! Dwijendra, I am in search of you. Why are you afraid of seeing me? Come to my office, my dear!"

The discussion continued in the Chief Minister's office.

"What are you doing in this business, earning a thousand here or a thousand there? How will you keep your family prestige with this paltry income? I will give you business."

Dwijendra wasn't averse to the idea. "You are a friend of the family. Rather you were—in the 30s and in the 20s. If you are in love with the family again, I am here, you may give me business. I will take it."

"You get the report of Shah Nawaz signed by Suresh and I will give you whatever business you want," Roy proposed.

"Not at that cost! I will never ask my uncle. And for argument's sake, why would he listen to me?" Dwijendra said resenting.

Roy then had Suresh Bose come over to the Writers' Building. As he entered his chamber, Roy confronted him. "Subhas is dead. How come you are stating to the contrary?"

"Who told you that Subhas is dead?" Suresh shot back.

Roy recounted the statements of some witnesses and Suresh discounted them citing the findings of intelligence agencies. Thereafter, Roy asked Suresh if he would like to be a Governor. This led to a fresh exchange of heated words. [36] Suresh Bose recalled a few years later that if he had signed the official report, his "reward would have been the Governorship of Bengal". [37]

On 3 August 1956, the Shah Nawaz-Shankar Maitra report was handed over to the Prime Minister. It concluded that "Bose met his death in an air crash, and that the ashes now at Renkoji temple, Tokyo, are his ashes". [38] One major reasoning behind this finding was that "the evidence given by witnesses before us as to Netaji's death is corroborated by the findings of British and American intelligence organisations...and the conclusions of an unofficial enquiry conducted a year later by an Indian journalist [Harin Shah]". [39] The report recommended that the ashes should be "brought to India with due honour, and a memorial erected over them at a suitable place". [40]

Three days later a copy of the report was sent to Dr BC Roy. The accompanying letter by Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt in part connoted a sort of "mission accomplished" feeling. Dutt wrote the report was "quite interesting" and Roy "might find it worthwhile to glance through it". Most of the letter reviled Suresh Bose—as a matter of government policy perhaps. The contents of the letter are going to offend Suresh Bose's daughter Shiela Sengupta & the son of his other daughter—West Bengal Finance Minister Dr Amit Mitra.

We had also reports from our Ambassador in Tokyo, Shri BR Sen, that Suresh Babu behaved rather queerly when he was in Tokyo. For example, he used to meet people without the knowledge of the other members of the committee and made a little too much of his connection with Netaji. Simultaneously he used to pay visits to the Japanese foreign office and contact junior officers there to explore possibilities of establishing trade connections, apparently on his private account, with the Japanese.

The Union Cabinet approved the majority report on September 9. According to an official record, "the Cabinet also decided that 'question of bringing over Netaji's ashes to India might be left for future consideration'".

On September 11, a reassured Prime Minister placed the report before Parliament. Newspapers the world over carried the news prominently the next day. "Anti-British Indian dead, inquiry finds," was the *New York Times* headline. At home, the *Hindu* lead story was: "Death of Netaji established:

Overwhelming evidence obtained.” In the Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister adroitly fended off the few discontented lawmakers. “Mr Nehru said the Government felt that the evidence put forth in the report was adequate and no reasonable person who read it could come to any other conclusion. If a person had an unreasonable mind, it was difficult to reason with him.”

The Government also managed to block out with considerable ease the voices of criticism against the committee’s not visiting Taiwan to make local inquiries and ascertaining whether or not Bose had died there following an air crash and his body cremated. Shah Nawaz would go on to claim that

the matter was discussed amongst the members of the committee and it was decided not to go there. It was not under any pressure from our Government.... It was decided that no useful purpose would be served by going there after such a long time. [41]

It’s all about transparency. Shah Nawaz could not be hauled up for perpetuating a lie for no records whatsoever were in the public domain then. The situation is much the same even today and one cannot know the complete truth about the committee’s abortive Taipei trip. The concerned records remain confined within the impenetrable walls of the South Block, as if someone had wished them to remain there till eternity.

More than a month before he visited Japan, Shah Nawaz made a wish—quite obvious in the circumstances—that he should be allowed to visit Taiwan (Formosa). Hearing this, FS (Foreign Secretary) Dutt had a fit of paranoia. His FS/407 dated 18 April 1956 read:

As you are aware, we have no diplomatic relations with the Formosan government, nor do we recognise them. It is unlikely that they will give any facilities to our inquiry committee appointed by the Government of India in this matter. It is even possible that they would put obstacles in the way of the committee, and create difficulties and complications which would hinder rather than help the work of the committee. In these circumstances, we do not think it would be practical or advisable for the committee to go to Formosa.

Read “PM” for “we” in “we do not think” because the man really worried was not FS but PM. The following self-explanatory letter also dated April 18 issued by Joint Secretary TN Kaul was despatched by the diplomatic bag to Ambassador BR Sen in Tokyo.

SECRET

18th April 1956.

Dear Mr. Sen,

The Netaji Enquiry Committee will be arriving in Tokyo on 4th May 1956. They wanted to visit Formosa in order to see the various sites (i.e. Taihoku, where the plane said to have carried Netaji crashed, etc.) and to examine some witnesses. The matter was referred to the Prime Minister and he has directed that it would be neither practicable nor advisable for them to go to Formosa as we do not recognise that Government and they are likely to put obstacles in the way of the Committee and even create difficulties and embarrassments.

2. The Committee are, however, likely to raise the issue with you again, and I suggest that, unless you see any strong reasons to the contrary, you may dissuade them from visiting Formosa.

Yours sincerely,


(T.N. Kaul)

Shri B.R. Sen, I.C.S.,
Ambassador of India in Japan,
TOKYO.



Raise the matter again he did, Shah Nawaz. As anticipated by Kaul, he wrote to Ambassador Sen on 18 May 1956. It was elementary that an on-the-spot inquiry in Taiwan was going to serve a most useful purpose in a matter warranting scraping the bottom of the barrel to scrub out the last vestige of doubts.

The Netaji Inquiry Committee has before it some evidence that the aeroplane carrying Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose crashed at Taihoku airfield in Taiwan (Formosa) and that his body was cremated there. In order to examine Formosan witnesses and to visit the alleged place of occurrence, the committee had before leaving Delhi enquired about the possibility of visiting Formosa and had written to Shri Dutt, Foreign Secretary. His reply dated 18 April was not very favourable. Since then, the committee has examined a number of witnesses in Japan and feel that it would be very desirable to pay a visit to Formosa, if it is at all possible.

Shah Nawaz exuded confidence that the Japanese "would be helpful if a proposal for the committee's visit to Formosa is made to them". He related a meeting with Hisaji Hattori, chief, Section 4 of Asian Affairs Bureau in the Gaimusho who gave him "to understand that such a request if made to them, they would be willing to use their good offices with the Taiwan authorities".

"The committee has another 2 weeks in Japan and would be obliged if the possibility of paying a visit to Formosa is further examined to enable them to do so during this time," Shah Nawaz beseeched.

Next day, Sen sent a telegram to the Foreign Secretary. Conveying Shah Nawaz's thoughts, he added:

I feel that if approach by the committee is peremptorily dismissed the committee will have a grievance which may make

their whole report infructuous in the eyes of some sections of our people. In my view therefore the committee should be permitted to approach Japanese government for their good offices in the matter even if embassy keeps out of it. Please place the matter before Prime Minister.

It was. Telegram No 28407 in File No 2(64)/56-PM, Volume I has New Delhi's response issued by Kaul on May 22:

TELEGRAM SECRET
From : Foreign, New Delhi.
To : Embassy, Tokyo.



DTG MAY 221400

IMMEDIATE

No. 28407. *S4A*

Ambassador from Kaul.

Your telegram No. 44 May 19. Matter has been placed before Prime Minister. We had made it clear to Committee in Delhi that it would not be practicable or advisable for them to visit Formosa. The only possible advantage of going there might have been to see entries in hospital registers. At that time the hospital was run by the

Matter has been placed before Prime Minister. We had to make it clear to committee in Delhi that it would not be practicable or advisable for them to visit Formosa. The only possible advantage of going there might have been to see entries in hospital registers. ...We have considered the matter again and are not in favour of the committee visiting Formosa. Japanese good offices may enable committee to land there but it is unlikely that the Formosan government will give any facilities. In fact they may put obstacles and suggest degrading conditions. Apart from this, politically this will be very embarrassing for us and might lead to complicating situation. [42]

Kaul's telegram also informed the embassy that the Government had opened another channel to obtain relevant evidence from Taiwan.

At the committee's request we had approached UK High Commissioner here to get this information for us but have not had a reply yet. The Japanese Ambassador in Formosa would be in a better position to handle this matter than the British who have only a Consul.

Kaul was proven wrong in an instant. The British proceeded expeditiously. Through their good offices they approached the Taiwanese authorities and requested for an inquiry along the line specified by the Government of India on the basis of Harin Shah's claims.

"Indian official concerned was obviously embarrassed at making this request. Nevertheless I think there is some advantage in trying to establish the facts in this case and to put a stop to legends about Bose's survival," [43] the High Commissioner wrote to the British Consul in Tamsui, Taiwan, on 3 May 1956. On May 24 Kaul informed the Tokyo embassy that the

UK High Commission have just informed us that their Consul in Taipeh has telegraphed that Formosan authorities are willing to allow five Chinese whose names were given by committee to be examined by British Consul in the presence of Formosan officials. They are however not prepared to let them to go to Hong Kong to appear before our committee. [44]

The Government of India did not view this as a positive development. The Taiwanese government's decision not to let their people appear before a panel appointed by a government which did not recognise it made New Delhi smell a conspiracy. "Formosan authorities' refusal to allow witnesses to go to Hong Kong is significant," Kaul wrote and conjectured that "it is possible that they may possess their witnesses and make them give wrong statements which may only complicate the work of the committee. Our opinion therefore that committee should not visit Formosa is confirmed". These thoughts were relayed to Shah Nawaz by AK Dar. On May 26, Dar submitted:

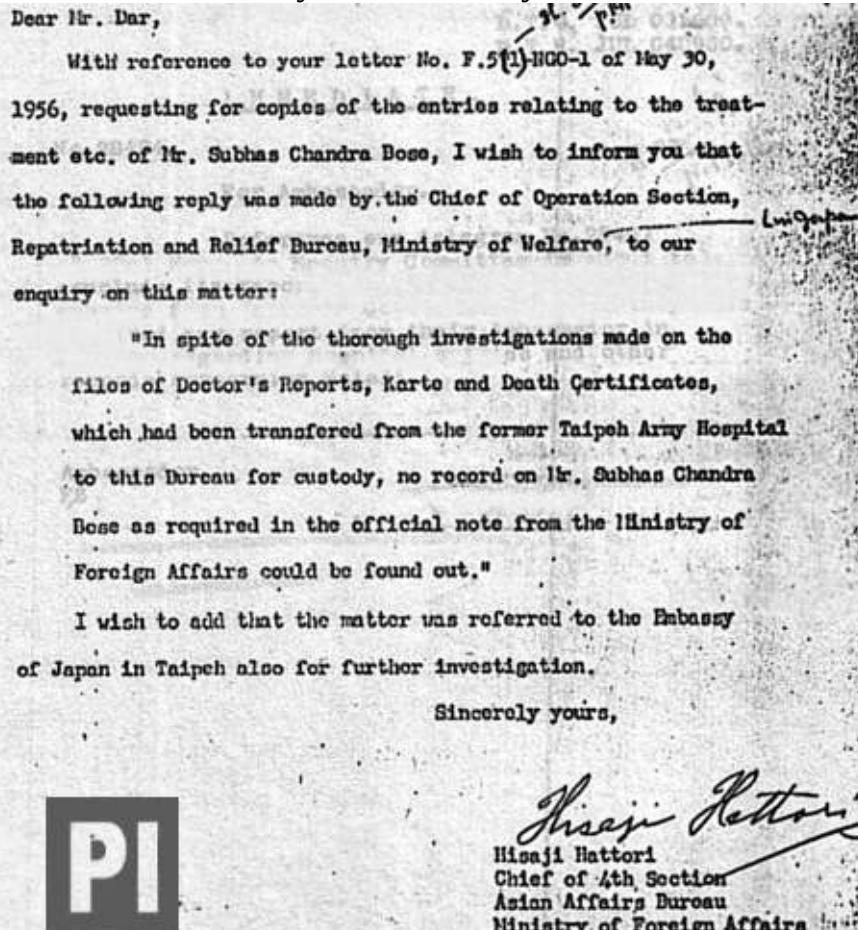
I am to say further that the Government of India have not heard as yet from the UK authorities about the entries in the crematorium register and the British Consul at Formosa is being reminded in the matter. The Government of India feel, I am to add, that this attitude of the Formosan authorities in refusing the Chinese witnesses to give evidence to the committee directly at Hong Kong is indicative of what may be expected. However, if the committee would like the British Consul at Formosa to record the evidence of the relevant witnesses under the conditions stipulated by the Formosan authorities the Government of India would consider arranging for the same.

His May 28 communication repeated New Delhi's conspiracy theory that the Taiwanese wouldn't cooperate with the inquiry, put obstacles and stipulate degrading conditions and all this would be

politically embarrassing and might lead to complicating situations.

Shah Nawaz gave in. In his confidential letter to Dar on May 29 he conceded that the "committee has no option but to agree to only method by which evidence of Formosan witnesses is likely to be obtained". Making demands for the crucial cremation permit and doctor's report for Bose and other related information, Shah Nawaz requested that the "arrangements may please be made to have the statements of Formosan witnesses recorded, as suggested by the British Consul General and make them available to the committee either during their return to India, care of the Ministry of External Affairs".

Dar sounded out the Counselor at British Embassy, RW Selby, as well as Hisaji Hattori of the Gaimusho. On June 14, Hattori informed Dar that his government was unable to trace the records sought by the Indian government despite "thorough investigations made on the files of doctors' reports, Karte and death certificates, which had been transferred from the former Taipei army hospital to...[the Ministry of Welfare in Tokyo] for custody".



This was strange. Because Dr Yoshimi testified before the committee that he had issued the doctor's report in the name of "Chandra Bose" only.

An apprehensive Ministry of External Affairs in a secret telegram nudged the Embassy in Japan on July 3 that it should "enquire from Japanese government whether they have received any report from their Ambassador in Formosa regarding hospital entries and other records concerning Netaji".

200 - 1931 (196)

INCOMING

TELEGRAM: SECRET.

FROM: FOREIGN, NEW DELHI.

TO: INDEMBASSY, TOKYO.



SECRET

D.T.O. JUL 031600.
D.T.R. JUL 040930.

IMMEDIATE.

No.28424

For Ambassador.

SL. 72
P. 130/L

Ambassador
FB

SECRET

PI

Reference our telegram No.28407 of 22nd May. As Enquiry Committee is about to conclude its report grateful if you would kindly enquire from Japanese Government whether they have received any report from their Ambassador in Formosa regarding hospital entries and other records concerning Netaji.

2. The Gaimusho have mentioned verbally in addition that they have been unable to trace any further records whether in their custody or in Formosa.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

(A.K.Dar)

Shri T.N. Kaul, ICS,
Joint Secretary,
Ministry of External Affairs,
New Delhi.

PI

Kaul would take half a month to acknowledge Dar's forwarding him the Japanese discovery. During this period the committee report had been submitted to the Prime Minister and the matter was closed. Neither the committee nor the ministry waited for the findings of the British/Taiwanese inquiry. But arrive they did and were duly shared with the Ministry of External Affairs at the same time Kaul wrote to Dar.

The specific queries of the Indian government to the British had been forwarded to the Chairman of Taiwan Provincial Government. CK Yen, in turn, ordered the Department of Health to carry out an investigation. The findings of official Kang Fu Chaing, who supervised all crematoria on the island,

were reported back to the British High Commissioner on 4 July 1956. There was no real proof of Bose's death. Harin Shah had evidently cooked up characters and fictitious details to make his account appear more credible. There was no evidence that a nurse by the name of Tsan Pi Sha ever worked in the hospital where Bose had reportedly died.

A Franklin, the British Consul in Tamsui, Taiwan, reported to the Foreign Office in London on July 10 that "it will be seen that most of the witnesses the Indian authorities requested us to obtain evidence from, have either died, disappeared or know nothing". [45] The old Japanese records said to be for Bose turned out to be for a soldier, as Hattori had already informed Dar. The Taiwanese traced the municipal bureau clerks who had met Harin Shah. Chen Chih Chi and Li Chin Qui, who were in charge of the issue of cremation permit in 1945, said: "We were not acquainted with Bose in his lifetime; it therefore follows that we could not identify him after his death." [46]

Kaul must have seen the British/Taiwanese report and it must have brought his eyebrows closer as well. Far from proving Bose's death, it had put a big question mark against it. And then those who were imputing trickery to the Taiwanese, wished away the British/Taiwanese report. It was officially never spoken of or ever heard of in India. Just like SA Ayer's secret handwritten report.

Suresh Bose came out with his *Dissentient report* in November 1956. With neither the Government nor any private publisher willing to publish it, he went on his own. As a result, the report never became widely available and with no editor ever simplifying its convoluted sentences, it was anything but lucid. *Dissentient report* sank, but released ripples of disbelief crashing against the Netaji Inquiry Committee report, eroding its legitimacy.

Rewinding Suresh Bose's observations is a far more illuminating experience today than it was fifty-five years back—when there was no such a thing as investigative journalism and consequently no way to access secret government records in the larger public good:

* [Shah Nawaz] continued calling for new witnesses and examining them not with the intention of arriving at the truth, but to fill up the gaps in the evidence and for explaining and reconciling discrepant and contradictory statements that stood in the way of his coming to the conclusion that the plane had crashed and that Netaji had died.

* The evidence does not justify the finding that the plane crash took place and that Netaji died therefrom. I, therefore, feel it my duty, not merely out of respect for Netaji, but in the national interest and in deference to truth and candour, to record my considered verdict....

* Netaji's plan of going to Russia via Manchuria, after his failure in his armed struggle against the Anglo-Americans in Southeast Asia, was not a cursory suggestion, but was a carefully-thought-of well-matured plan, which, as a matter of fact, was the only alternative left to him, as he did not want to surrender himself to the Anglo-Americans and thereby be instrumental in not only finishing himself, but also bringing to an end his only cherished goal in life, viz. the independence of his mother country.

* It would have been an act of extreme meanness and downright treachery on the part of the Japanese government to have handed over Netaji, their erstwhile friend and collaborator, to the Anglo-Americans and of this they were incapable, as a self-respecting and a cultured nation. The only other alternative, therefore, was to broadcast his death after he had left, and continue to support it with what manufactured and tutored evidence.... They could not very well say that Netaji had escaped from their territory to an unknown destination, as they would have been accused of aiding and abetting the flight of a man who, in the eyes of the Anglo-Americans, was a war criminal.

* The conduct of the Japanese, in offering only one seat to Netaji, could reasonably be surmised to be the outcome of their and Netaji's agreed plan of removing him as secretly as possible and with the minimum of publicity, so that their conduct would not be exposed to the Anglo-Americans to whom they had surrendered.... They were taking a great risk and it involved great danger to themselves, if their plan was found out by their victors.

* Taihoku was nearest to and only one stop from Dairen, without any Indian national there and very far from Saigon, which was practically the easternmost end of Netaji's area of activities and where a large number of Indians lived. As the Japanese could not possibly announce that Netaji's plane had met with an accident in Manchuria, so Taihoku would be the most suitable place for a plane accident.

* If Netaji had received injuries and burns, as a result of that plane crash and had been treated in a hospital and he had actually died there and if his dead body had been cremated, the Japanese government, for warding off any calumny or treachery, that may have been suggested against them, if not for anything else, would have decidedly taken pains to maintain correct and detailed photographic records of the true incident for the satisfaction of the Indian people....

* As Netaji did not die, his dead body was not available for being photographed.

* The evidence regarding Netaji's injuries, his treatment in the hospital and his death there...is so discrepant and contradictory, that no reliance can be placed on the same.... Narration of a true incident, even after a lapse of ten years could not be so discrepant and contradictory. ...such worthless evidence only proves that those alleged incidents did not take place, such stories were

concocted to support the secret plan of the Japanese as well as of Netaji to announce that Netaji had died.

* [Bose's nephews Dwijendra Nath Bose and Aurobindo Bose] have stated before us that, though they helped Netaji in leaving Calcutta secretly on 16-1-41, they declared his departure on 26-1-41, after they received information that he had crossed the Indian frontier and had entered Afghanistan and this was in accordance with the instructions Netaji had left with them. They also stated that the Japanese government had also done the same....

* Col Rahman was selected by Netaji from the last six of his trusted and loyal followers.... It, therefore, naturally follows that Netaji considered him to be his most reliable follower, in whom he could repose his trust, confidence and secrets, who would not disclose them under all trials and tribulations, who would implicitly obey all his commands and instructions and who would ever remain loyal to him.

* The statements made by the colonel, whatever they are, are in accordance with the instructions, which, I am convinced, he had secretly received from and with the sole intention of protecting his "Beloved Leader" in his escape to a safe zone, which was beyond the reach of the victorious Anglo-Americans....

* [The other] witnesses are citizens of Japan, and whose unbound patriotism is probably unique in the world. They have made statements to different authorities at different times, supporting the aforesaid plan of their government. As such, I consider it an impossibility for them to go beyond their previously recorded statements and thereby disgrace themselves as well as their government, who, after all, had done a magnanimous act by giving succour to their friend and ally "Mr Chandra Bose".



[Suresh Bose, right, is seen with Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu in this 1956 picture taken from his Dissentient report]

Suresh Bose concluded his report with an "appeal to my countrymen". His demand for transparency in the matter was an impossible act to follow then, but is not today. He called on the people not to accept either his or Shah Nawaz-Shankar Maitra report and instead

make a demand to our Government to place at their disposal, the whole evidence that was made available to the committee and...form their own opinion after a careful perusal and consideration of the same, and, if the general opinion be that the aircraft accident did not take place and that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose did not die, as alleged, to demand an impeachment of all those, who have taken part in this nefarious game. [47]

Just like a real-life incident based movie setting off the end with a brief foresight into the post-event lives of main characters, the saga of Netaji Inquiry Committee would be incomplete without a fitting postscript.

Shah Nawaz and SN Maitra were allegedly "rewarded" for their good work. One became a deputy minister and the other flew out on a plump diplomatic assignment. Shah Nawaz remained in limelight as minister and head of several government entities for the rest of his life. Throughout he received barbs from Bose's near and dear ones for his "betrayal". "Kya bhaijan, deputy ministership ke liye aapne Netaji ko maar diyya!" (Brother, you killed Netaji for deputy ministership!) Shiela Sengupta taunted him once. HV Kamath took him straight on: "Suppose a murder takes place and the police investigate the case without going to the place where the murder took place, what will be the credibility of their investigation?" [48]

A minuscule view also grew that Shah Nawaz Khan—whose adopted daughter's son is actor Shah Rukh Khan—had been "forced" to profess what he really did not believe in. A former INA buddy, Colonel AB Singh, was to paint him as a repentant man. Both were at the dining table in the early 1980s and persistent questioning made Shah Nawaz teary and say that he had "made the blunder of my life as chairman of Netaji Inquiry Committee"—whatever that meant.

Shah Nawaz died in December 1983. His funeral was attended by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv. The Prime Minister hailed him as an embodiment of "truth, integrity and patriotism" that was "seldom surpassed in the history India". Maitra outlived Shah Nawaz by more

than a decade or so, spending his last years in Shantiniketan.

As for the others, AK Dar moved up the ladder and became an ambassador eventually. TN Kaul would have the distinction to serve as India's Ambassador to the USSR and the United States both and also the Foreign Secretary. Subimal Dutt preceded Kaul as the Ambassador in Moscow. A botched up operation there led to his son's death and he, a relative of his told me, was completely shattered. But the old ICS picked up threads and lived till 1995, never talking about Bose publicly.

Prime Minister Nehru continued to blow hot and cold on the mystery. While holding up the Shah Nawaz report publicly, he nevertheless kept up his ante for any rumour or claim about Bose's fate or his continued existence. He noted Muthuramalingam Thevar's statement which had been laughed away by most. On 26 November 1957 he asked Foreign Secretary Dutt to find out from then Indian Ambassador in Japan, CS Jha, about the activities of Amiya Nath Bose there. It was quite an unusual step for the democrat Prime Minister, who, according to the memoirs of his intelligence chief, was reluctant to put even the suspected foreign diplomats in New Delhi under surveillance.

2. Just before I left Japan, I heard that Shri Amiya Bose, son of Shri Sarat Chandra Bose, had reached Tokyo. He had previously, when I was in India, informed me that he was going there. I should like you to write to our Ambassador at Tokyo to find out from him what Shri Amiya Bose did in Tokyo. Did he go to our Embassy? Did he visit this Renkoji Temple?

PI

J. Nehru

(J. Nehru)
25.11.1957

ES

(2)-Issue (121-A)

Jha replied that "Amiya Bose did not say that he had come to find out the truth about Netaji's death but when I asked him whether he had any views on that controversial subject he merely said that there were circumstances indicating that Netaji had been preparing to leave for Russia".



701-

EMBASSY OF INDIA IN JAPAN
TOKYO

127

-2-

5. We have no information about Amiya Bose having indulged here in any undesirable activities or expressions of opinion adverse to the Government of India or to its policies. I attach for your information a copy of a news item on him in the Japan Times.

6. As far as we have been able to ascertain, Amiya Bose did not visit the Renkoji Temple.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

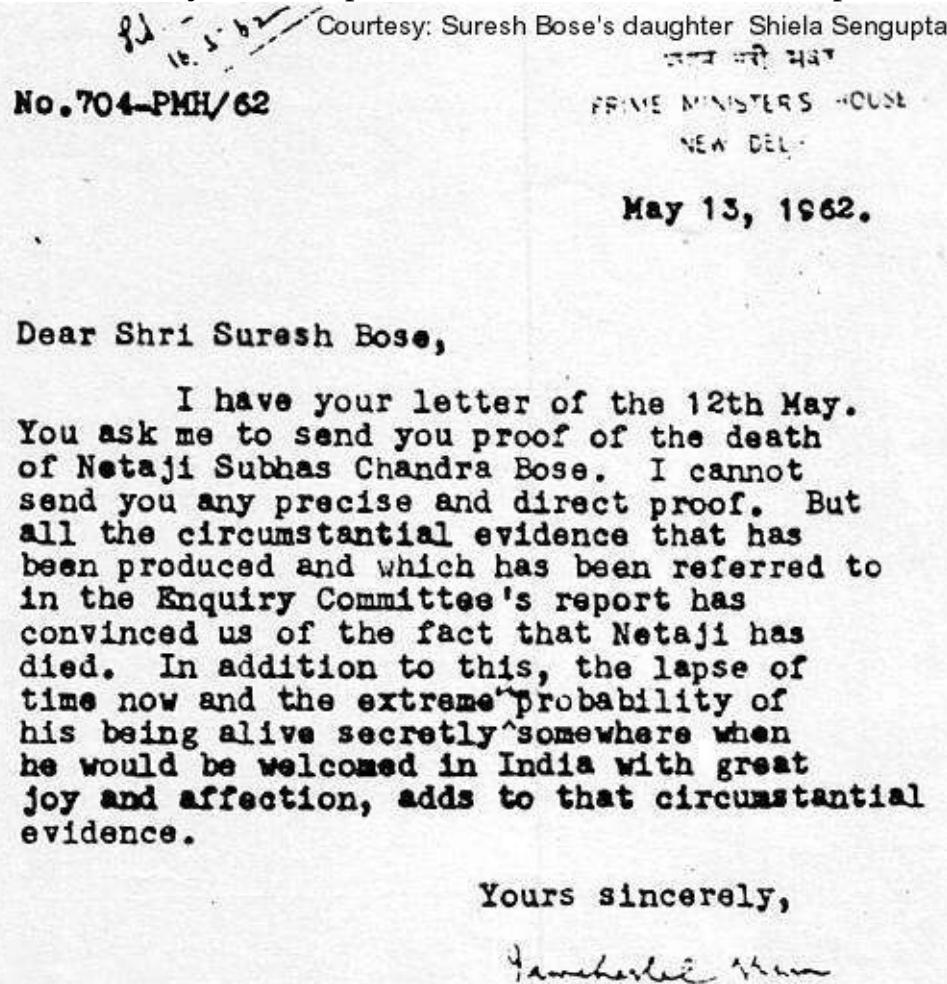
U. S. JHA
(C.S. JHA)

PI

For the Bose family there was no closure, obviously. Suresh Bose slipped into obscurity. Six years after the Shah Nawaz-Shankar Maitra report had been accepted, he got back at the Prime Minister one last time. Irked by the PM's 7 May 1962 statement in the Lok Sabha that "the basic

conclusions reached by the committee have never been seriously questioned" and that the "Government are satisfied that there is no justification on the basis of available facts for the holding of a further inquiry into the question," Suresh Bose wrote Nehru a letter which started a gentlemanly slanging match between the two. His 12 May 1962 letter requested Nehru to furnish the proof of Subhas's death in support of his statement.

The PM in his reply the next day said the proof was circumstantial, not "precise and direct":



To this, Suresh rejoined on 15 June 1962: "Let me know the nature of circumstantial evidence in brief that has convinced you of the fact of the death. I may also be informed of any other proof of his death that may have been in your possession, either through External Affairs Ministry or through our diplomatic missions abroad. This is not only necessary for me, but also for the other members of our family, so that we may know where we stand."

June 26. The PM wrote that Shah Nawaz report "gives a number of facts. Our own information conveyed to us by our Ambassadors has been to confirm the facts stated in the report. In addition to this, the mere lapse of time goes to confirm the conclusion arrived at".

July 19: Suresh Bose asked the PM if he had ever received a letter from Bose in Russia. He was alluding to then classified April 1946 intelligence report. Nehru gave him a terse reply that he "received no letter from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, nor have I received any letter concerning him on the lines you have mentioned. I do not know about the secret report to which you refer either".

On August 8 Suresh Bose wondered what was the information received through diplomatic channels. "As this piece of news, if true, vitally affects all the members of our family, I would respectfully request you to please forward to me the date, place and circumstances under which the alleged death took place as reported to you."

The Prime Minister's 12 August reply took Suresh Bose back to Shah Nawaz-Shankar Maitra's finding, tersely telling him that he "will find the date, place and circumstances mentioned in that

committee's report". "Apart from that report, the length of time that has lapsed is itself confirmatory of the fact of his death." [49]

In April 1964 the Prime Minister received a letter from Amiya Nath Bose. "People did not accept findings of Shah Nawaz Committee because it did not include any person of high judicial standing," he wrote, suggesting that "in the national interest there should be a final judicial" inquiry. "It will be in the fitness of things if the Chief Justice of India will agree to preside over a body of judges and inquire into this question." [50]

Pandit Nehru's response would be his last on the Subhas Bose disappearance issue. He passed away almost a month later, leaving people divided as to what was the actual import of his letter.

No. 293-PMH/64

प्रधान मंत्री भवन
PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE
NEW DELHI

April 22, 1964

My dear Amiya,

I have your letter of the 20th April. I agree with you that something should be done to finalise the question of Netaji's death. But it is not quite clear to me how far it will be proper for me to ask the Chief Justice of India to look into this matter. It may involve visiting Japan, and I am sure I cannot ask the Chief Justice to do so.

I have sent you a brief message already about the Netaji Hall Society.

Yours sincerely,

Jawaharlal Nehru

Shri Amiya Nath Bose,
1, Woodburn Park,
Calcutta 20.

ABF

3. Enter the Shaulmari sadhu

In a scene straight out of a 1950s Indian movie, a mendicant quietly knocked at the door of a house in a remote town and got invited for a free lunch by a gracious family. His name was Saradanand and his host, Ramani Ranjan Das, was a general medical practitioner at Falakata in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. According to an intelligence report, this unexciting event took place in 1959, when India had all but moved away from all mysteries surrounding Subhas Chandra Bose.

The ensuing developments were not movie-like. Saradanand entered Dr Das's home, never to part from him. Overruling his aged father's protests, Dr Das donated all his assets to help Saradanand open an ashram (spiritual hermitage) in the obscure Shaulmari, or Shoulmari, pocket. He quit his practice and his wife and two young daughters joined him in his complete devotion to Saradanand, now also called Shaulmari *sadhu* (holy man). By 1960, Shaulmari *sadhu* had become the talk of the nation. He smoked expensive cigarettes and conversed in Bangla and English. Getting an access to him was tough as the ashram administration insisted on tardy bureaucratic procedures. Rumours spread thick and fast that Saradanand was actually Subhas Bose in disguise.

The state government's response to the development was that of panic. As and when the numerous secret files on "Shoulmari ashram" kept in the office of the Director, Intelligence Branch, Lord Sinha Road, Kolkata, are made public, it would be observed by even casual researchers that nowhere did any one of the IPS officers chasing the Shaulmari mystique question the *raison d'être* of inquiring if Saradanand was indeed Subhas Bose. It would seem that all of them had discounted the Government of India's stand that Bose had died in 1945 and, therefore, there was no way he could be in Shaulmari.

One of the earliest inquiries into the Shaulmari episode began in September 1961. JK Lahiri, Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar, wrote to MM Basu, ICS, Secretary, Home Department, Bengal government that a

careful watch has been kept by the police on the ashram, but so far it has not been possible for the police to locate and identify the sadhu. The police is still at it. I may point out at this stage that the ashram is not much in the news.

But soon it was. So much so that one Radhey Shyam Jaiswal, a school teacher, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister. Jaiswal accused Shaulmari *sadhu* of spreading rumours that he was Subhas Bose and that his ashram was actually a den of foreign agents. In December Lahiri further informed Basu that

it has so far not been possible to find out the identity of the sadhu. The source of finance of the ashram has also not been located. It may be seen from the report of the Superintendent of Police that two important persons are now associated with the ashram; one is Shri SC Mukherji, a retired civilian, and the other is Shri Niharendu Dutta Majumdar.

SC Mukherjee was a former ICS officer and Niharendu the same former state law minister who had requested Nehru to inquire into the Bose death issue in 1954.

February 1962 was the apogee of the Shaulmari episode. In a press conference on February 13, Satya Gupta, a former revolutionary of the group Bengal Volunteers (BV) formed by Subhas Bose, repeatedly harped on Saradanand's "real" identity while offering no clue about his whereabouts since 1945. "There is no mistake in identifying my master and there is no doubt that Shaulmari *sadhuji* is Netaji." [1]

Backing up Satya Gupta's claim were the antics of Haripad Bose or Haripada Basu, joint secretary of the ashram. There was apparently a clamour to draw the Prime Minister's attention to Saradanand. Haripad even sent Pandit Nehru a telegram that his "lost friend" was at Shaulmari. On 19 February

1962 Nishi Katna Banerjee, a former minister in Bose's government jumped on the bandwagon. He claimed that inquiries made by his former INA and Bengal Volunteers colleagues had revealed that "the sadhu baba there mostly resembles not only in looks but also in capacity and spirit—our Supreme Commander, inimitable Netaji".

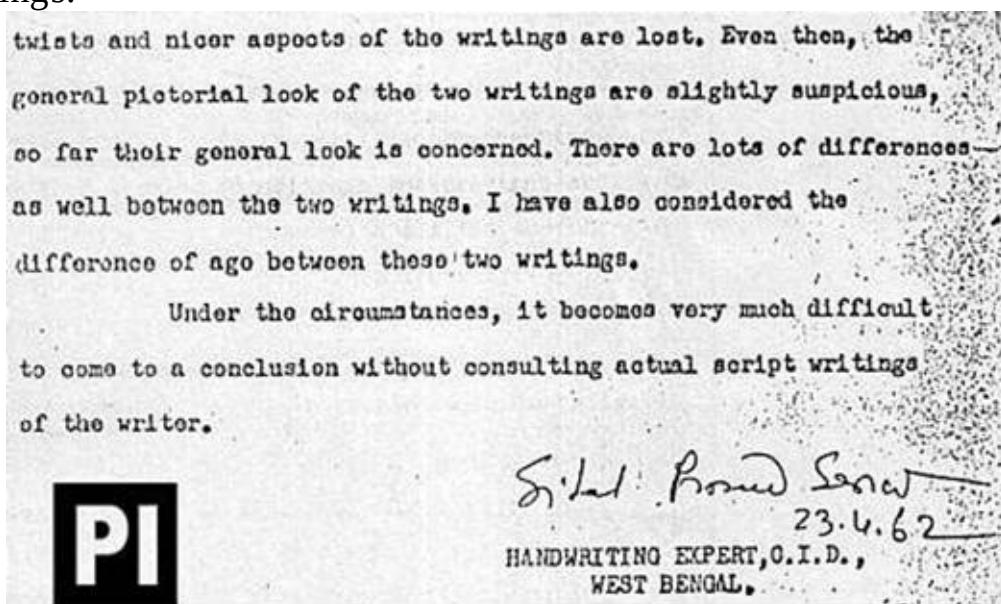
All this forced the ashram to come out with a clarification. Through a "special declaration" on February 27, Ramani Ranjan Das announced that "the founder of Shaulmari ashram is not Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose nor had he any relationship with Shri Netaji". Haripad was sacked from the ashram and Niharendu Dutt-Mazumdar briefed newspapers that Saradanand was "an extraordinary person but not Bose".

In the meanwhile, the cops continued to inquire. On 1 March 1962, KG Bose, Superintendent Government Railway Police sent a "Top Secret" report to PK Basu, Deputy Inspector General of Police, IB, CID, West Bengal. "Railway intelligence officers are collecting further information in pursuance of the above." Two April reports chronicled Haripad's volte-face. The April 2 despatch quoted his speech at Dum Dum in Kolkata, where Haripada declared that Saradanand was Bose.

He further added that a conspiracy was going on for keeping the people in dark about the existence of Netaji. He pointed out that as result of that conspiracy the late Subrata Mukharji [the Indian Air Force chief Subroto Mukherjee] became the victim when he visited Japan and tried to unearth the mystery of the alleged death of Netaji.

However on April 14, the same Haripad declared at a meeting in Falakata that he had now "clearly understood that sadhu baba was not Netaji Subhas". At the same venue, Dutt-Mazumdar slammed the Shah Nawaz Committee report and said he believed that "Netaji is still living in some place". He said he had met Saradanand and while "there were similarities in appearance with Netaji in some respect, he could not recognise this sadhu as Netaji Subhas".

Still, the cops opted for a handwriting test to end the doubts. On April 23, SK Sinha, Special Superintendent of Police, IB, West Bengal, requested J Mukharji, SSP in the CID division to order a handwriting test. He furnished two pages containing Saradanand's Bangla writing in pencil. Since no handwriting samples of Bose were available in police records, a copy of a letter published in a newspaper was forwarded along with these two pages. The expert found the samples, specially of Bose's writing, inadequate, and opined that "under the circumstances, it becomes very much difficult to come to a conclusion without consulting actual script writings". Still, he could spot the differences between the two writings.



Three days later the state government released its first press statement on the Shaulmari episode. A strange one actually. Somehow the state government was not able to bring itself around and assert that since Bose had died in 1945—and the Shah Nawaz Committee had confirmed it—the very question whether or not Saradanand was Subhas was ridiculous.

So far as the Government are concerned, they have had no approach to Srimat Saradanandji and therefore they are not in a position to make any statement themselves... While Government are not in a position to solve this controversy, because of their not having any direct touch with Srimat Saradanandji, they desire to make it clear to everybody that no attempt should be made by any group of people to create a law and order situation in any part of north Bengal over this issue, as this might lead to various complications afterwards.

On April 26 the IGP of West Bengal was informed through a secret report that one of the visitors to Shaulmari was, lo, Shah Nawaz Khan himself:

Two persons, whose names I am unable to disclose now, showed me photographs of Shah Nawaz and Saigal, both formerly of the INA, who had recently visited the house of one Dutta in the vicinity of Shaulmari. According to them, Shri Ashrafuddin Ahmed, who was the Secretary of the BPCC when Netaji was the president of BPCC, had visited Shaulmari area recently.

The intelligence reports continued to trickle in. Interestingly, one of the young IPS officers trying to clear the air was Nirupam Som, grandson of Subhas Bose's elder sister. On 2 May 1962, Som—later the Police Commissioner of Kolkata—sent an account of his meeting with Satya Gupta. Nirupam was not convinced by Satya Gupta's deposition. "I must confess that he talked in a most incoherent manner and the reasons put forward by him appeared to be simply childish," he wrote. Som wondered where Saradanand had been since 1945. But Gupta "avoided this question and merely stated that he had discussed everything with Netaji and was not prepared to reveal his discussion outside".

In July another chapter was added with Uttam Chand Malhotra, someone who had played a prominent role in Bose's escape in 1941, taking up the place vacated by Satya Gupta and Haripad. Meeting Saradanand convinced Malhotra that he was Bose and he began a decade-long propaganda under the aegis of a group called Subhasbadi Janata. Teaming up with Malhotra was another former Bengal Volunteers activist Hira Lal Dixit. Saradanand despised Uttam Chand and others of his ilk for whatever they propagated. A 17 November 1962 radiogram sent to the head of West Bengal intelligence by the Superintendent of Police, DIB, Jalpaiguri, Nirupam Som, reported that a day earlier Saradanand "came out and proceeded along the national highway in a taxi" and "at the sight of the sadhu on the way some members of Subhasbadi Janata applauded him shouting *Netaji zindabad* but the sadhu abused them in filthy language".

In 1963, the matter was being agitated in New Delhi. Atal Bihari Vajpayee drew the PM's attention in the Rajya Sabha on August 22 over the "propaganda carried on by some self-appointed persons and organisations" and asked "whether any inquiry has been made?"

"We are aware of such propaganda which was carried on. It has faded now more or less," Nehru replied. "But such inquiries we have made and the Government of West Bengal have made have conclusively established that Swami Saradanand is not Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, and he himself denies it absolutely."

One such inquiry had been carried out by Rajya Sabha MP Surendra Mohan Ghose, in association with Jalpaiguri MP NR Ghosh, after Prime Minister Nehru personally directed him to do so. Surendra Ghose went to Shaulmari ashram on 11 September 1962 and met Saradanand face to face. Ghose asked Saradanand who he was before he renounced the world. "I cannot give my identity of *purbashram*. But why should people make such mistake? You can see for yourself that I am not Netaji," he said. "Can anybody mistake me for Netaji?" Saradanand asked. Ghose replied: "Not he, who saw Netaji alive and knew him." Saradanand nodded. "See nobody would deny his own father. I told Satya (Major Satya Gupta of BV) that I was not the son of Janaki Nath Bose."

Ghose was now seeing a Chinese and Communist Party of India hand in the canard. He told Saradanand:

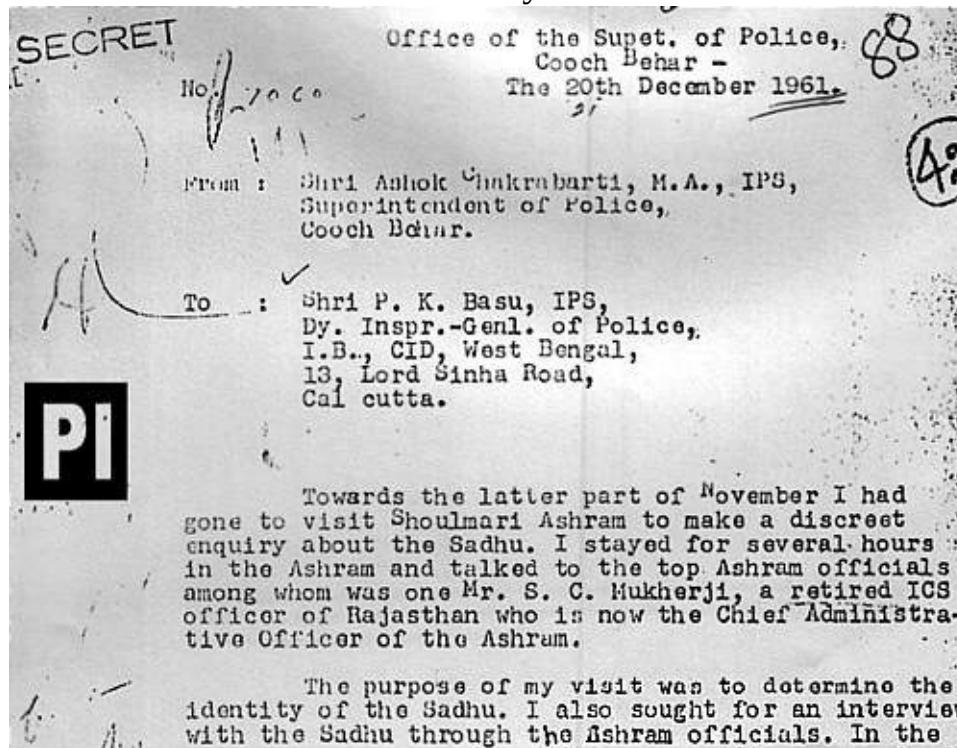
About three years back when you first came here there was some whisper that you were Netaji. As soon as I came to know about it, I alerted all concerned that it might be part of a Chinese plan to spread, with the help of the Indian Communist Party, this rumour and at a psychological moment invade India with her army. [2]

On 4 October 1962 Ghose submitted to the Prime Minister a report—whose flattering introductory letter compared Nehru to Ram, Krishan and Buddha. More germane was his conclusion

at the end the report that

this man is not Subhas Bose. I wonder, how he could be confused with Subhas by people who knew him. ...It would have been much better for the Sadhu himself to disclose his antecedents. However, I have no doubt in my mind that this Sadhu has nothing to do with Subhas Bose. [3]

But who really was Shaulmari sadhu? A still secret file of the West Bengal government has the possible answer. Ashok Chakrabarti, Superintendent of Police, Cooch Behar made a trip to his ashram in December 1961 to uncover Saradanand's real identity.



His findings were subsequently despatched to PK Basu, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Intelligence Branch. "I have got some secret information about the identity of the sadhu," Chakrabarti wrote in a memo, adding that one source

has been able to identify the sadhu as Shri Jatin Chakrabarti of Vigna, Meher near Comilla, Victoria College and was a member of the revolutionary party. He was charged for the murder of Mr Davis, District Magistrate, Comilla and since the [time of the murder] has been absconding. He was clearly related with Anushilan Party and was a chain smoker. We have also got information that the present sadhu of Falakata is a chain smoker. The identifier who was able to recognise him visited the ashram and his recognition was instantaneous. On seeing the sadhu he cried out "Jatinda na" and the sadhu became visibly moved.

He cited several reasons for drawing this conclusion before suggesting that Jatin's picture be shown to those who had seen the sadhu. The SP clearly discounted alternative theory that the sadhu was "not Jatin Chakrabarti but Abhinash Bhattacharji of Anushilan Party".

Physical features of both being in many ways similar, this confusion has arisen. But major part of the evidence available goes to prove that the sadhu of Falakata is Shri Jatin Chakrabarti, a political absconder.

If this was the truth of Shaulmari, what lay behind the intrigue to advertise him as Subhas Bose?

A revolting view was to gain ground that the sadhu had been propped up at the Government's behest to befuddle the public, take their attention away from the Bose mystery and to even discredit it. The biggest proponent of this school of thought was Subhas's nephew and freedom fighter Dwijendra Nath Bose. At Shaulmari ashram, to his utter shock, Dwijendra bumped into persons no less than Director of Intelligence Bureau (DIB) BN Mullik and his officially retired deputy GK Handoo, whose one-time assignment was to catch spies. Dwijendra came to believe that

this is being done to bewilder the people with the names of these sadhus... There are three sadhus today running in the name of Netaji. The people who propagate that these sadhus are Netjis are all financed by the Government. [4]

Backing this point of view was an intrepid reporter. Barun Sengupta's own enquiries led him to believe that Shaulmari sadhu had been set up by the Intelligence Bureau.

I had no belief in this from the very beginning, but as a reporter I had to go and investigate. I went to the local intelligence people, the State Intelligence Bureau as it is called, the intelligence branch of the West Bengal Police. I asked one

of the chief men who was supposed to be dealing with this section, 'What is this about Shaulmari?'

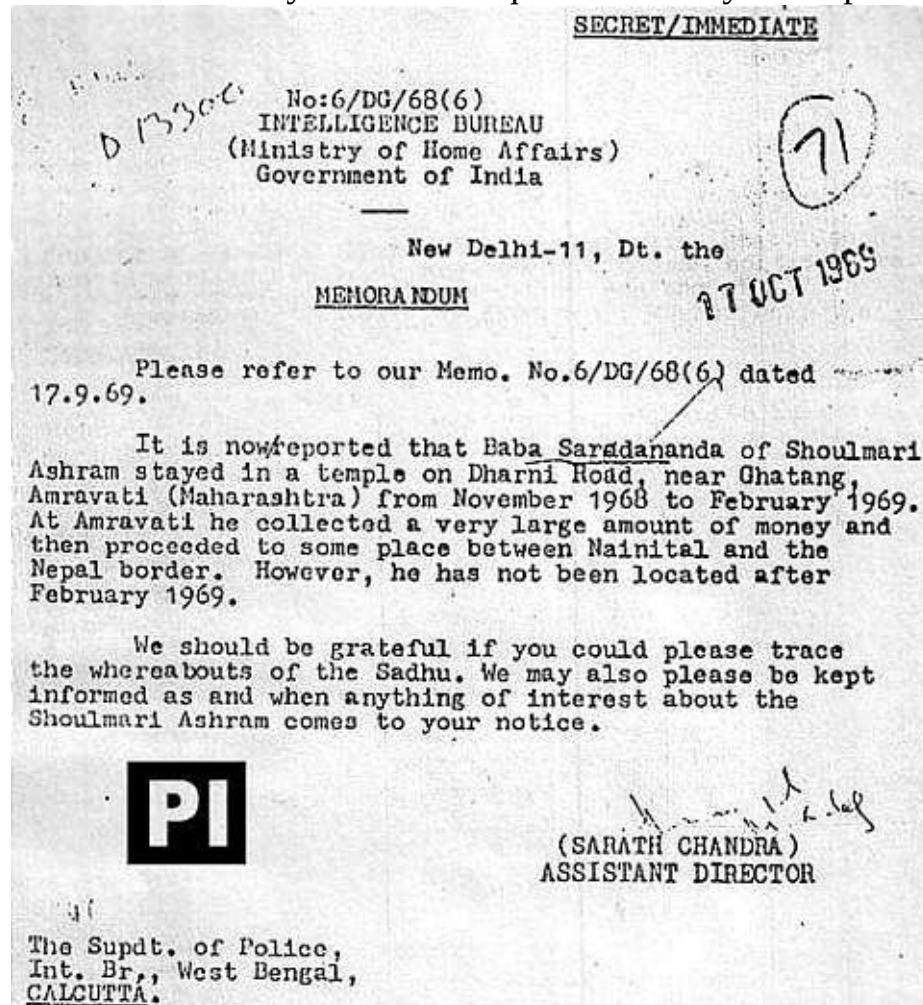
Barun Sengupta was told that BN Mullik was "also entrusted with the Netaji Inquiry affair".

"I was told by so many intelligence officers working in the eastern region of the country that it is Mr Mullik who looks after all these things...I never talked to Mr Mullik and I knew that Mr Mullik will not tell me anything," Sengupta added. "Mr Chaliha, Mr PC Sen and Dr BC Roy knew certain things. There are certain things which do not go beyond the Chief Minister's level."

The crux of Sengupta's enquiry was that the IB knew "fully well...about many saints and monks masquerading as Netaji" and that it was on a constant lookout for "dead" Bose.

Whenever there is a rumour or a story, the central intelligence people and the state intelligence people go and investigate into it. They also come to us [journalists] for further enlightenment and to know whether we have any information. [5]

Barun Sengupta, who died in 2008, made a name for himself as the founder-editor of leading Bengali daily *Bartaman*. Still secret IB records prove him right to an extent. Long after the Shaulmari episode had petered out, the IB at a fairly senior level was still keeping an eye on Shaulmari sadhu. A memorandum dated 18 December 1968 from a joint assistant director says that he was spotted in Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh. Another one from October 1969 gives an update on his movements. The sender, IB Assistant Director Sarat Chandra, informed SP, Intelligence Branch, West Bengal that the IB had lost track of him after February 1969 and requested for any new update.



But what was all that for? Didn't the Intelligence Bureau have anything better to do? Why bother about all those absurdities when Subhas Bose was officially dead?!

4. Shooting star Samar Guha

Hardly had the dust settled in isolated Shaulmari pocket in the mid-1960s when a storm began to brew in faraway Taipei city. In November 1964 former lawmaker Dr Satyanarayan Sinha landed in Taiwan on his personal quest to uncover the truth about Subhas Bose's reported death. Standing at the spectacular Song Shang airport, with a panoramic view of mountains on three sides and the glistening Keelung river nearby, Sinha replayed Bose's fatal air crash in his mind.

It was from here that the bomber had taken off, only to crash, barely able to clear the runway of then Matsuyama military aerodrome. The Shah Nawaz Committee's report had appended pictures of the wreck provided by the Japanese. Twisted metal debris lay strewn near a hill. Sinha strained his eyes; the hills were far away from the end of the enlarged runway.



[Matsuyama aerodrome is seen in this early 1950s image taken from the Taipei Song Shan Airport website]

Sinha frowned. Could the Japanese have fobbed off the Allied investigators with some old pictures from their records to convince them that a crash had taken place on 18 August 1945? He asked around. There were some who surely knew better. "Do you remember any airplane crash during the period of your service?" Pat came the answer from a former firefighter: "Yes, there was one in October 1944." It had taken place up on a hill, he said. "Was there any other accident in August 1945?" Sinha put it specifically. "Never heard of any accident in 1945. If there was one, I could have known about it, because, we from the fire brigade are the people who rush to the site of the accident first."^[1]

Sinha formed the opinion that the reason the committee members were not allowed to visit Taipei was that the Government of India was "afraid of the real truth about Netaji coming out". He returned home to tell the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of his discovering that no air crash had ever taken place in Taipei on 18 August 1945. In 1966 was published his book *Netaji mystery*, which detailed his case with plenty of bombast. Spurred by the inputs from German and even Russian sources, Sinha made a most

startling claim—Bose was “in the Russian prison of Yakutsk in 1950-51”. [2]

The “no-air crash” theory received a further fillip the same year with HV Kamath visiting Taiwan at the invitation of its Varanasi-educated Vice Foreign Minister Dr Sampson P Shein. Taking heed of Kamath’s request, Foreign Minister Chein Hua ordered an informal inquiry. A ministry official Kamath would remember as “Dr Lin” later briefed him that “the evidence do not confirm that Netaji or any Indian for that matter had been killed in an air crash on the 18th.... The people whom he questioned could not tell or remember any crash taking place that day.”

Kamath held further consultations with Hua, who told him: “We have done what we can. ...If your government wants to pursue the matter further we will be only happy to collaborate with the Government of India in this matter.” [3] But the Government of India was not pleased with the development. Questions were raised in both the Houses of Parliament on Kamath’s finding. Each time External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh gave identical answers:

The Government of India have no diplomatic relation with the government in Taiwan and have no connection with any investigation reportedly ordered by that government. It has been stated several times in Parliament that the Government of India have accepted the findings of the Netaji Inquiry Committee headed by Shri Shah Nawaz Khan. [4]

A delegation of nine Indian MPs which followed Kamath to Taiwan heard Dr Lin repeat his finding. The seniormost among them were Mulka Govinda Reddy and Prakash Vir Shastri. The youngest was Dr LM Singhvi, the illustrious father of former Congress spokesman Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Late Dr Singhvi stood out of the ordinary in many ways; as a jurist, diplomat and as a powerful speaker on spiritual matters. Pity that the only thing he never talked about—even though there were occasions when he was supposed to—was his recollection of what Dr Lin had told the delegation about Bose’s not dying in their country. Fortunately, Mulka Govinda Reddy remembered it all and went public with it:

Dr Lin... told us after examining all relevant records, he came to the conclusion that there was no positive evidence to show that Netaji died in that air crash. [5]

The revelation in Taiwan made Prakash Vir Shastri, supported by several MPs, raise questions in the Lok Sabha in July 1967. The reply given was that there was nothing for the Government to do as it "had not received any such intimation from Taiwan government". [6]

When it appeared that the Government had all but weathered the political typhoon with its centre in Taiwan, up came the man of the moment. The year 1967 marked the rise of the big-framed, highly motivated Samar Guha.



A former freedom fighter and chemistry professor, Guha set out the main agenda of his public life—recognition for Bose and resolution of the dispute over his death—with his maiden speech in the Lok Sabha on 3 April 1967. Guha made an issue of the absence of Bose’s portrait in the Central Hall of Parliament among those of the other makers of India. He charged that “it was not an omission but... a deliberate and calculated act on the part of the Congress government to minimise the position of Netaji and relegate him to secondary leadership in the history of national freedom”.

With the Indira Gandhi government unwilling to consider his demands, Guha gathered like-

minded persons—Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Madhu Limaye being the most prominent—in and out of Parliament and formed a “national committee”. Together, they also sought a fresh inquiry into Bose’s fate and found ample support among the MPs from all parties. On 20 December 1967, about 350 lawmakers sent a memorandum to President Zakir Hussain. According to a secret note prepared by then Home Secretary LP Singh, it was discussed at a meeting of secretaries chaired by the Cabinet Secretary on 16 February 1968. “As far as the question of a fresh inquiry was concerned, the meeting was of the view that this was not warranted as no fresh evidence had been brought to light.” The Prime Minister backed this determination in the Lok Sabha on February 21.

But the MPs, powered by Guha’s dynamism, would not give up. As a PMO note records, “44 MPs addressed a letter to the Prime Minister on August 7, requesting for the appointment of a fresh inquiry commission, consisting of retired Supreme Court judges and eminent public men, on the plea that a fresh probe [Jivanlal Kapur Commission] was being conducted in regard to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi”.

The Government’s resolve in not reopening the Bose case began to shake with the Congress party beginning to undergo the throes of a split. On 1 September 1969 LP Singh prepared another note for the Cabinet titled “Disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in 1945”.

COPY NO. _____

S E C R E T



MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

Note for the Cabinet

Subject:- Disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in 1945.

In April 1956, in response to the public demand, Government of India appointed an Enquiry Committee to ascertain the circumstances concerning Netaji's departure from Bangkok on 16.8.1945 and his alleged death in an air-crash. The Committee

It presented to the ministers a linear, dismissive version of the case, running down Suresh Bose's dissent and censoring references to the Russian angle and the new information from Taiwan.

Government having accepted the findings of the [Shah Nawaz] committee, have taken the position that unless fresh evidence or new facts were brought to light a further inquiry was not warranted. Rumours about Netaji's survival and whereabouts etc. have cropped up repeatedly. Each of these, whenever brought to Government's notice, has been investigated and generally found to be baseless. In 1962, rumour was spread that the sanyasi of Shaulmari ashram was in fact Netaji.

...Another claim made by Dr SN Sinha that Netaji was incarcerated in Cell No 46 of the Yakutsk prison in Siberia has not been corroborated by any tangible evidence.

Actually, no worthwhile inquiry had been made by the Government to verify Sinha's allegation. While there was some correspondence with the Indian embassy in Moscow, the embassy never took up the Bose issue with the Soviet government.

The Prime Minister's Secretariat too outlined the issue in a note along the same lines, trotting out that Bose had no plan at all to go to the USSR. According to the note, prepared by Joint Secretary VP Marwaha, Bose had “left Bangkok on the 17th August, 1945 and reached Saigon from where he, along with his colleague Col Habibur Rahman was picked up in a Japanese Air Force bomber for being carried to Tokyo”. The note also foretold the outcome of the Cabinet deliberations:

Any decision to order a re-inquiry would go against Government's repeated stand in the time of three Prime Ministers, turning down such a demand. It will also have the demerit of raising an altogether new excitement over this issue which is believed to be dead except by some followers of Netaji like Samar Guha, with whom it is obviously an obsession. In the

circumstances, it might not therefore be considered desirable to set up a fresh commission of inquiry into Netaji's death. If, however, a decision is taken otherwise, the proposed commission should consist of a single judge of the Supreme Court.

Another PM Secretariat noting dated 27 September 1969 recorded that “the matter was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on September 5. It was appreciated that as a number of MPs were insistent that a further probe into the cause of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s death was necessary, it would not be possible to withstand the pressure.... It was decided that no inquiry would be made now. If there is a consistent demand from a large section of Parliament, the matter can be brought up later”.

Further, in a minute taken by the Cabinet Secretary on September 5, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself observed:

After much discussion, as far as I remember, the final decision was not to go further with the inquiry. My personal view is that we might explain the position to the MPs who have signed. I doubt if many will support Shri Samar Guha once the position is made clear to them. However, if there is a consistent demand, we may consider having the matter informally examined by a competent and impartial person.

Indira Gandhi had misjudged the MPs’ resolve. First Mulka Govinda Reddy wrote to her that the demand for a new inquiry had the support of about 2/3rd Members of Parliament. Then an attempt by the Home Minister to explain the official position to the MPs in a meeting convened on 5 December 1969 backfired.

The Home Minister spoke first; he presented the official line to a group of MPs comprising Mulka Govinda Reddy, Samar Guha, SN Dwivedi, Balraj Madhok, SM Joshi, Amiya Nath Bose, Bakar Ali Mirza, KL Gupta, Tridib Chaudhuri, Era Sozhiyan, Shashi Bhushan and future Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray. The first speaker to articulate the MPs’ views was Amiya Nath Bose. Subhas Bose’s favourite nephew actually stole the Home Minister’s thunder with his exposition of the case. He recalled that Justice Radha Binod Pal had learnt from an American colleague on the International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo that “the finding of the intelligence party which went from General McArthur’s headquarters was that the evidence regarding the air crash was inconclusive”.

According to the minutes of the meeting kept in a secret file, Amiya Nath made a stunning disclosure that Alfred Wagg, the American scribe who had made on-the-spot enquiry in Taiwan in 1945, “had told Gandhiji in his presence that the photograph of the damaged aircraft which was reported to have crashed in Taihoku airport could not have been taken in Taihoku airport”.

Amiya disclosed that “it was on the basis of conversations with this war correspondent that Gandhiji made a statement that Netaji Bose was alive”. He countered the government logic that there was no fresh evidence to warrant a further inquiry saying “there were certain materials in the custody of the Government of India which were not placed before the Shah Nawaz Committee” and, therefore, “it should be treated not so much as a question of fresh evidence, but as the need for a fresh inquiry into the evidence available”.

The Home Minister was rendered speechless. In March 1970 some ministers pointed out during a Cabinet meeting that the “Government should not have given the impression that it was against a fresh inquiry when millions of people were interested” in knowing what had happened to Bose and that the refusal to inquire into the matter was creating an “impression among some people that there was something to hide”. [7] Consequently, on 11 July 1970 orders were issued for the formation of a one-man commission. Nine months later, a former Chief Justice of the Punjab High Court took over as its chairman.

GD Khosla was a newsmaker in his own right. He had graduated from Cambridge and excelled in the judicial branch of the ICS. Seen from the eyes of his best friend Khushwant Singh, the writer, Khosla used to be an archetypal *brown sahib*, who “made it a point to wear a dinner jacket when he sat down to dine”. [8] As a judge, Khosla had already earned a footnote in history as the sentencing judge in the Mahatma Gandhi assassination case.

Beginning 1947, when he moved from Lahore to Shimla, Khosla’s another talent came to light. He

was commissioned by the Government to explain the Indian view of bloody communal riots following the partition of India. The result was *Stern Reckoning*, his first book, his first book, which continues to shocks readers with its graphic description of the darkest period of modern Indian history. Khushwant Singh thought Khosla justified as “legitimate retaliation” the Hindu-Sikh violence against the Muslims. “I was not aware of the anger that he harboured in his person,” [9] he wrote of the negative trait in his friend’s personality. The most infamous instance of this anger spewing out occurred soon after Khosla retired from the Punjab High Court in 1961. Denied ceremonial send-off by the Bar, Khosla gave vent to his frustration by writing a snide newspaper article titled “The snake: A fable for grown-ups”. On target were the unassuming Advocate General of the state SM Sikri and his wife.

Cambridge-educated Sikri asked Khosla to make amends but he refused. Then, on the advice of Attorney General of India MC Setalvad—grandfather of activist Teesta Setalvad—Sikri filed a criminal complaint against Khosla. The former judge reacted by escaping to London. It was a question of his honour, so Sikri wouldn’t give up the chase. “Eventually, Khosla did apologise publicly and the criminal complaint was withdrawn” [10] by Sikri in larger interest of the judiciary. Just the sort of conduct you would expect from a man who became the Chief Justice of India in 1971.

Post-retirement Khosla became a full-time writer, wielding his pen with equal ease with fiction, history, travelogue and mythology interpreted for the modern times. His writing style earned him many admirers, one of them being LK Advani. Above all, Khosla got to share “his literary interests with Jawaharlal Nehru at Manali where they spent a good deal of time together trekking through the forests and hills”. [11] The Prime Minister wrote the foreword for one of his books.

For the proverbial fly in the ointment was the backdrop of a public slight Khosla had endured during his only meeting with Subhas Bose in London in the early 1920s, when both were young ICS aspirants. Young Khosla happened to be passing by when Bose was telling fellow Indian students of his decision to quit the heaven-born service. Khosla thought there was nothing unpatriotic in Indians substituting Englishmen in the service. Bose, in Khosla’s own words, gave him “a withering look of contempt”. [12] Writing in 2001, historian VN Datta commented that this experience “was bound to rankle in Khosla’s heart”. [13]

Khosla was a thorough professional in conducting commissions of inquiry, having previously headed a dozen or so—the maximum by any judge in independent India. His last assignment before taking up the Bose probe was about film censorship. On 14 October 1970 Justice Khosla called a press conference and made a string of promises. He said he would approach the governments of the UK, USA, Soviet Union, Japan and Taiwan for evidence. He would not keep all of them.

A public spat consumed the commission’s opening session in Delhi’s Vigyan Bhawan two days later. It looked as though a post-mortem of the Netaji Inquiry Committee was underway. A grim-looking Shah Nawaz Khan—the first witness before the Khosla Commission—said he should be “hanged in public” if it was proved that he had “played a fraud on the nation”. “Yes, you are a traitor to Netaji Bose,” [14] Amiya Bose stood up and shouted. Afterwards, his equally angry uncle Suresh characterised Shah Nawaz, once so dear to him and his children, as “a shining example of an unparalleled loyalty to Nehru”. “He has been a traitor to Netaji by supporting Prime Minister Nehru in his report that Netaji had died which was clearly against the oral and documentary evidence adduced and for which he was awarded.” [15]

In his counter-charge, Shah Nawaz told the commission that Suresh Bose had “appended a dissenting report relating to Netaji’s death, apparently ‘under family pressure’ to keep the issue alive for political reasons”. He claimed that Nehru had nothing to do with his committee’s skipping a visit to Taiwan. “The Government of India did not come in the way at all,” he averred. [16] Suresh Bose

did not agree. He was quoted by the *Times of India* on 6 November 1970 telling the commission that Shah Nawaz had himself “told him that there was no diplomatic difficulty in visiting Taihoku, the Prime Minister, Mr Nehru, did not like it”.

The former Prime Minister’s handling of the matter was just one among a host of contentious issues in the controversy that Khosla was to adjudicate on under the Commission of Inquiry Act. Lawyers representing different parties—the national committee, Forward Bloc, Bose family etc.—were eager to cross-examine the witnesses, especially Habibur Rahman. They could even ask for the summoning of official files and have relevant documents brought on record as exhibits. Over the last decade several claims of Bose sightings had been made—Khosla was to make a sense of it all. Shaulmari sadhu had still not been forgotten and the war criminal controversy was refusing to die out.

Justice Khosla was suave in his public appearances. He allowed the witnesses to indulge in themselves. The commission worked in open sessions and its hearings in India were attended by several newspaper representatives. Sensational claims of the witnesses and reasonable-sounding announcements by Khosla made headlines in major dailies. The air was positive and it appeared that the time had come for a settlement. At least Suresh Bose believed that and so did the lawyers in the initial phase of the commission’s inquiry. Three-and-a-half years later, Suresh Bose was dead and so were all hopes of a fair deal. As Khosla finalised his report, the lawyers and deponents alike were pessimistic and anticipating a repeat of 1956.

For the former judge, this was perhaps the most productive period of his life. He loved to write, entertain the readers and here he was, working on three or more projects simultaneously. The first was a hagiographic biography of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The second the report of the commission and the third a book based on his report and experiences as chairman of the commission. Its very title would reveal Khosla’s gut feelings as to where he placed Bose in history. *Last days of Netaji* was clearly paraphrased on Hugh Trevor-Roper’s *The last days of Hitler*.

In late 1973 Khosla began dictating his report in his chamber in New Delhi’s Shastri Bhawan. He broke the rules to spice it up. By June 1974 the report was ready. To Home Minister Uma Shankar Dikshit’s delight, it had listed out 25 findings favourable to the ruling class. Yes, there was an air crash. Indeed Bose had died and...

* There is not the slightest evidence of any attempt by Nehru to suppress the truth about Bose at any stage.

* There is no evidence of any attempt by the present government to withhold evidence or place impediments in the way of this commission.

* The Japanese looked upon Bose not as an equal ally, but as a person whom they could use for their own ends.

* The numerous stories about encounters with Bose at various times and various places after 1945 are completely false and unacceptable. [17]

The main report, a much lengthier document than Shah Nawaz’s report, contained many more seemingly persuasive findings and brainy observations:

* When the war had ended and when conditions in the Japanese army were so chaotic, there could be no question of the Japanese agreeing to secrecy, subterfuge of dissimulation for the person who was as far as they were concerned, an alien, who had been useful to them up to a point but whose efforts had failed to achieve anything in the war.

* The evidence shows that the flight was arranged in order to carry General Shidei and other Japanese officers.... So in the very nature of things, Bose and Habibur Rahman were a sudden and unanticipated addition to an almost full compliment.

* Indeed, in the earlier inquiry carried out by the personnel of the British intelligence the finding was that Habibur Rahman’s story was true and that Bose had, in fact, died.

* Mahatma Gandhi’s expression amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking or a symbolic tribute to Bose.

* Most of the Japanese witnesses who gave evidence impressed me by their frank and honest demeanour.

* Suresh Bose had prepared a written statement to which he constantly referred during the course of his statement, although he was asked to give his testimony from memory and not from a document prepared at home.

* Suresh Chandra Bose was willing to be used as a tool by persons, who for reasons of their own, wanted to proclaim their disbelief of the crash story, and who continued to assert that Netaji was alive and constituted a challenge and a hazard to Nehru’s political position in the country.

There is nothing to indicate that there was anything fraudulent or stage-managed about the report from the time the Shah Nawaz Committee was appointed till the time the majority report was laid before Parliament. [18]

The Government approved Khosla's findings and tabled his report in Parliament in September 1974. The Opposition MPs were furious. Samar Guha tore the copy given to him. He couldn't take its conclusion, and he couldn't stand its portrayal of Bose as an impractical hothead whose "entering India with Japanese assistance could only mean one thing, viz. India would become a colony or a suzerainty of Japan". [19]

With this take on the dynamics of the relations between the Japanese and Bose, Khosla virtually turned back the hands of time. It was a throwback to the Raj-era, when the Japanese were painted as the enemies of India just because they were at war with the British. Having made the past "perfect" again, Khosla bridged the gaps in the air crash story lying open ever since the Shah Nawaz Committee had failed to explain them. The modus operandi in 1956 was to take out selective passages from the witnesses' contradicting testimonies and weave them into one flowing account. But even that could not straighten out many instances.

Apparently, no particular interest was taken by the local army command as to what happened to Netaji's body. A comparatively junior officer, a major (Nagatomo), was detailed, and thereafter no further interest was apparently taken. ...It is true that there was a certain amount of disorganisation following the Japanese surrender on 15th of August 1945, but even taking this into account, there remains a residual impression that all that could have been done, was not done. [20]

Khosla's one-stop explanation for all such grey areas was that in the "chaotic conditions" prevailing after their surrender, the Japanese could not be expected to be particularly nice to a man who "could be discarded and ignored, when deemed no longer useful". Because

from the beginning they had wanted him as their tool, a pawn in their hands, who could be made to move in compliance with their plans and wishes. They had treated Rash Behari Bose and Mohan Singh in the same manner. [21]

Rash Behari's nonagenarian half-Japanese daughter Tosiko Higuchi wouldn't agree. She has never visited India, which never accorded her father the respect he deserved. Wasn't Subhas Bose's case much the same? Then how come GD Khosla deduced that the Japanese were treacherous in their dealings with him? Well, it was largely on the basis of a book of Shah Nawaz's, with a foreword by Nehru! Khosla projected some of its passages demonising the Japanese as a whole.

From the day that we first came in contact with the Japanese, most of us developed a great dislike of Japanese methods of dealing with people whose cause they professed to champion. This dislike intensified when we saw with our own eyes the organised looting and raping indiscriminately indulged in by Japanese soldiers. We often asked ourselves: "Is the same thing going to happen in India when we take the Japanese with us?" [22]

Khosla's own thinking was that "the Japanese were interested in the INA not in order to help India free itself from British bondage but to make use of the INA in their campaign against the Allies in Southeast Asia".

They had realised that Bose commanded a great deal of respect and following amongst a vast number of Indians in Southeast Asia and that he was in a position to draw upon the wealth of the richer Indians for a patriotic cause. [23]

In alleging so, Khosla completely overlooked that not one of the Japanese witnesses who appeared before him and the 1956 committee had spoken of anything but their highest regard for Bose. Even among the Indian witnesses, with the exception of Deb Nath Das, who had come to suspect that the Japanese had killed Bose and turncoat AM Sahay, all vouched for cordial relations between the Japanese and Bose. Early in the course of the inquiry, Khosla asked Bose's military secretary Colonel Mahboob Ahmed, then a senior MEA official, about his "assessment of the relations between Netaji and the Japanese Army on the other". And this was the reply he got:

There was a great deal of respect for Netaji for his personality, for his person, amongst the Japanese that we came across and his relation with the Japanese government was that of the two interests at that stage coinciding. That is to get the British out of India. [24]

Lt Gen Fujiwara, co-founder of the INA, told the commission that "Netaji was highly respected by Japanese people". [25] His words were echoed by the experience Shah Nawaz had as chairman of the Netaji Inquiry Committee. Following the committee's visit to Tokyo in May 1956, he had to acknowledge in his report that "Netaji's name was still a household word in Japan, and a great deal of interest was taken about him both by the public and the Press." [26] There was another account which he and Khosla would have heard as well. When Bose's name was mentioned during the Tokyo war

crimes trial, Hideki Tojo and other top brass facing death sentences, stood up and bowed down in deference to their former ally's memory. Decades thereafter many of the former "war criminals" continued to recall their association with Bose with considerable pride.

The Indian leader was never a fair-weather friend. At the close of the war, a Japanese government communication to Bose referred to their "spiritual" ties and said,

Nippon Government pays deep respect with its whole heart to Your Excellency's cooperation with Nippon on the moral strength to the utmost in order to attain Indian independence without resorting in the least to the opportunism. [27]

All this and much more was before Khosla and a lot has come to light recently. Were the Japanese trying to make India a colony of theirs? In a paper on Bose, eminent historian TR Sareen—a believer in the air crash theory—observed after studying the British records that it was just a myth propagated by the colonial British to enlist support of the Indian political parties during the war. Interrogation of Japanese high officials confirmed that they had never contemplated the conquest of India.

Was Bose a Japanese stooge? The National Archive in Melbourne, Australia, has a file on Bose made up of formerly secret German-Japanese diplomatic communication intercepted by the Australian Navy. On 30 July 1943, Japanese Ambassador Hiroshi Oshima sent this account of his telling Adolf Hitler about Bose:

The Japanese Government too, has absolute faith in him and is giving him carte blanche where India is concerned." [28]

Speaking of Bose, I said: 'It was good of you to think of sending Bose to East Asia. We thank you very much. As you have already read in the newspapers, after reaching Japan he went to Singapore where he is re-organising an Indian Army of Liberation. He is working hard on plans to bring India into line. The Japanese Government too, has absolute faith in him and is giving him carte blanche where India is concerned.'

Hitler answered: 'Yes, I am very satisfied with what Bose is doing.'

I told him that the submarine the Germans had given us had already reached one of our bases in the South Seas, and expressed great gratitude. I then went on to say: 'The Japanese Navy just wired my Naval Attaché that those new bullets you ordered not long ago will reach you by the earliest convenience and plenty of them at that. As for the new warship you wanted, the Japanese Navy has informed Naval Attaché Wenneker that it has been especially arranged to let you have it. We are not going to let the Italians or anybody else know about that. I just wanted you to know about it.'

Hitler answered: 'Thank you very much for that kindness. In this war we also want to co-operate in those technical matters. I do not mean to say that my army's equipment is inferior to yours, we do not need to compare them, but if there is any service we can do for you in this respect, please let me know.'

I answered: 'Thank you very much.'"

NAA

TOP SECRET

In Tokyo's Yasukini Shrine for Japan's war dead appears an inscription based on a letter written in 1998 by Captain SS Yadav, general secretary of now defunct INA veterans' association: "We the members of the Indian National Army pay our highest and most revered tributes to our comrades-in-arms members of the Japanese Imperial Army who laid down their lives on the battlefields of Imphal and Kohima for the liberation of India. The Indian nation will ever remain grateful to valiant martyrs of Japan and we pray for eternal peace of their soul." Red Fort Trial hero and Shah Nawaz's friend for life Col GS Dhillon wrote in his 1998 memoires that he remained "under a debt of gratitude to them forever". [29]

Japan had a terrible record with the Koreans, the Chinese and others during the World War II, but

not with the Indians. Many Japanese war veterans thought of their association with the INA as a bright spot. Even the Ministry of External Affairs later came to hold the view that “India as the country of origin of Buddhism and Netaji and INA’s association with Japan during the war also invoke friendly feelings among a section of the Japanese society”.

Like his retrogressive view of Bose’s relations with the Japanese, many of Khosla’s other observations were based on twisted logic. His freely playing up the Shaulmari episode and inane cases of “Bose sightings” in his report may have looked all right to underline the absurdities going around in the name of mystery, but it was at the cost of several sensible testimonies.

For example, on page 107 of his report Khosla devoted more than 1,500 words to describe a “palpably false and fantastic story” which, according to him, “could only have been imagined by a diseased mind”. But he could not spare even one word to dwell on the deposition of an eminent lawmaker. The following is excerpted from the testimony of Mulka Govinda Reddy before the commission on 30 May 1972. Recalling his 1966 visit to Taiwan, Reddy—who is in his mid-90s and lives in Bangalore—said that official Dr Lin told him “and other members of the delegation that on 18th of August, no air crash appears to have occurred”. “Not on 18th August?” a lawyer double checked with Reddy.

“Not on 18th August and in no air crash Netaji appears to have died.”

“But he told you that he had collected some material?”

“Yes, he told us he had collected very valuable material in this connection. He also told us there was one Mayor of Taipei at that time, who is still alive. He appears to have told him that no such air crash occurred on that day and that at no time Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose appears to have been involved in any air crash in Taipei.”

“Had you any occasion to meet the Vice Foreign Minister of Formosa?”

“Yes, we were his guests for a dinner party and he also confirmed what Dr Lin said and he assured us that the Government of Formosa will be ever ready to cooperate with the Government of India if a commission or an officer is appointed to go into this question.” [30]

Another member of the same delegation, former MP Prakash Vir Shastri, testified that the MPs also met Taiwanese Premier Chiang Kai-shek who “said if Government of India made an inquiry, his Government would give all necessary help”. [31]

Again, not a word from Shastri’s deposition was deemed fit by Khosla for incorporation in his report.

For a man who had boasted that he was “not only an inquirer but also an investigator”, Khosla played a most partisan role when it came to classified records. Evidence has now emerged that he helped the Government in obstructing justice. Incriminating records were either completely hushed up, or not shared with the non-government lawyers till it was too late and doctored documents were exhibited to uphold the official stand.

Habibur Rahman saved the day for Khosla so far as his contradictory statements about the events in August 1945 were concerned. On 9 March 1971 Pakistan foreign ministry informed the High Commission of India in Islamabad that Rahman had “nothing to add to what he had already said in his evidence before the Shah Nawaz Committee” and was “of the opinion that no purpose would be served by his going to New Delhi or by the visit of the inquiry commission to Pakistan”. One doesn’t know if the worsening Indo-Pak relations at that time had anything to do with this decision.

Anyhow, now everything that Rahman had said earlier could be kept out of consideration by Khosla under provisions of the Indian Evidence Act. But the judge did get a chance to examine a few of the surviving Japanese witnesses. He visited Japan in March-April 1971 with two independent lawyers. Balraj Trikha, whose client was a fringe group waiting for Bose to return, and ailing Amar Prasad Chakrovarty of the Forward Bloc. None of the other outstanding lawyers associated with the inquiry could accompany the commission to Japan. For example, irrepressible Gobinda Mukhoty, standing for “national committee” of Samar Guha and other prominent citizens, and ND Mazumdar, who represented Suresh Bose. TR Bhasin, the commission’s counsel, was yet to be appointed.

By this time the events under inquiry were 25 years behind for the mostly middle-aged Japanese witnesses. Since eyewitness accounts of a complex occurrence are bound to differ in minor details, the Japanese couldn't be faulted if they could not agree whether the plane took off at 2pm or 2.30pm or whether it carried 10 people or 13. But then, once in a lifetime happenings are hard to expunge from one's memory. Especially if they are tragedies and one is asked to repeat them over and again. No one who was misfortunate enough to have witnessed the carnage in Delhi in November 1984 could ever forget those grisly scenes. It would be hard for most of us to ever forget where we were when the hijacked airplane rammed into one of the towers in New York on 9 September 2001. At least I won't, though I saw it all on TV.

In fact, I just recall that I still remember, quite vividly, a scene of accident I watched from afar as a child. More than thirty years have passed, and I am sure I can make no mistake in recollecting whether the body was lying under a truck or a bus; whether it was on this side of the road or the other and what was the exact location of the scene of mishap.

Thanks to the Right to Information, a copy of reams of pages constituting the record of the Japanese witnesses' deposition which the Khosla Commission created is in front of me. I am not a lawyer, but I can hardly miss that the amnesia suffered by the witnesses in Japan was akin to the one that had gripped the intelligence officers in India. They tripped up over major details. They contradicted not only each other, but even their own statements. When some war-hardened former army officers who saw a famous man getting burnt alive right in front of their eyes start fumbling on basic details, you know something is wrong.

Mind you, this was not the first recollection for these people. Many had been repeatedly questioned by the Japanese and other governments, the media and the Shah Nawaz Committee over the years. And yet the following unfolded.

Lt Gen (Retd) Saburo Isoda, the link between the Japanese government and Bose, was examined on 16 April 1971 in Tokyo. It did not take GD Khosla himself long to catch the general contradicting the statements he had made before the Shah Nawaz Committee.

Commission: If I put to you that you did not receive any official information regarding the air crash which took place at Taihoku, will it be correct or not?

Shri Isoda: That is wrong. I think I received an official information about the aircrash.

Commission: You made a statement before the Shah Nawaz Committee earlier?

Shri Isoda: Yes, I did. I met them at the Imperial Hotel for three days.

Commission: In that statement, you had stated: "I do not remember if I received any official information about the accident." Did you state so?

Shri Isoda: I do not remember what I stated before.

Commission: But I have read it to you. Do you think that statement is correct or incorrect?

Shri Isoda: At the present moment I think that I had received official information.

Commission: Therefore the statement recorded earlier is not correct?

Shri Isoda: I believe I had received official information.

Commission: My question is about the previous statement. Is that statement correct or not correct?

Shri Isoda: At this moment I think that that statement is not correct. [32]

Maybe it was due to age. Running 78, Isoda was the oldest among the Japanese witnesses. But then, his memory was sharp. Still, he fumbled again.

Commission: You have stated today that you met Field Marshal Terauchi at Dalat and arranged for 2-3 seats for Netaji?

Shri Isoda: At Dalat I did not meet supreme commander Terauchi himself. I met his staff officer Yano.

Commission: You have said today in your earlier statement an hour ago that you met Field Marshal Terauchi at Dalat!

Shri Isoda: I met staff officer Yano and not Terauchi himself. Yano was lieutenant of Terauchi and Terauchi's opinion was conveyed to me by Yano.

Commission: Therefore what you had said today that you met Field Marshal Terauchi is not correct?

Shri Isoda: I did not meet Mr Terauchi himself. [33]

Khosla asked Isoda if Bose had taken off from Bangkok on August 16 in "his personal plane" and the general said yes. Counsel Balraj Trikha took up from there and grilled him as to why then he had to personally haggle for two seats in another plane.

Shri Trikha: Now, at Saigon, Netaji had his personal plane?

Shri Isoda: Netaji's personal plane was there at Saigon.

Shri Trikha: What made you arrange for him some seat in the other plane when he had his own personal plane?

Shri. Isoda: I did not arrange seat for him. Staff officer Tada did.

Shri Trikha: So you did not know who stopped Netaji [from] using that plane?

Shri Isoda: Perhaps it was the idea of commander-in-chief Terauchi.

...

Shri Trikha: So the personal plane of Netaji was withheld from him at Saigon under orders from Field Marshal Terauchi?

Shri Isoda: I thought so.

Shri Trikha: And on that Netaji got disturbed?

Shri Isoda: He was not surprised. [34]

Despite Isoda's evidence on record that Bose acquiesced to the change of the planes, Khosla charged in his report that the Japanese

denied him the use of the special plane which had earlier been placed at his disposal. He was denied accommodation for his colleagues in the bomber which was to leave Saigon.

Bose had bitterly complained to his colleagues of a change of plan by the Japanese. He was so angry and resentful that he was prepared to stay on and not go beyond Saigon. He mistrusted the Japanese after their ignominious defeat. [35]

This was notwithstanding General Fujiwara's emphatic statement to Khosla's loaded question whether "between Netaji and other Japanese officers, was there complete trust or not?"

Netaji was a very great man. So, there is no question of mistrust between them. [36]

This was also despite Tada telling SA Ayer, whose report was shown to Khosla, that Terauchi had in fact told him to "tell Netaji that all facilities would be given to him to reach Russian-held territory". [37]

Khosla's deduction was not based on any evidence before him. Bose's reaction when Isoda told him that he would have to shift to another plane was clearly indicative of his approval of the idea that he should resume his journey with only one of his colleagues. Bose chose the one who had joined him in his secret meetings with Isoda and others in Saigon—Habibur Rahman.

Tadashi Ando was the military officer in charge of media in Taipei when the plane carrying Bose allegedly crashed at the aerodrome. He told the commission on 30 March 1971 that when he heard about the crash, he felt greatly concerned for General Shidei, his "teacher in the military academy". So, shouldn't he have rushed to the airport and look for Shidei? Ando told the commission that he "went to the airport immediately and was told that General Shidei was already dead. Subhas Chandra Bose was taken to the army hospital and those who had suffered minor injuries were taken to other hospitals".

Khosla asked Ando if he saw the general's body and his strange response was: "I did not see directly the body of General Shidei." "Did you see any other dead bodies?" was Khosla's next question. "I did not see the bodies although I knew that they were dead." "Did you go to the hospital where Netaji Bose was lying?" Khosla asked him pointedly. "I did not go. I presume staff officer Shibuya knows everything about this accident." [38]

Another officer who had also heard of the air crash from Colonel Shibuya was Shigetaka Sugiura, an intelligence officer posted in Taipei. His statement to the commission that he "received information that...Chandra Bose [was] arriving" from Shibuya ran contrary to Shibuya's subsequent claim that the "army authorities were not informed about Mr Bose's arrival". Sugiura first affirmed that he "was at the airport when the plane arrived" only to deny it minutes later. The record of his cross-examination reads just as any seasoned intelligence officer's should. [39]

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Commission: Did you go next time?

Witness: I did not go to the airport at all.

Commission: Did you meet Chandra Bose?

Witness: I did not meet him.

Commission: Did you meet any one of them?

Witness: I did not meet any.

Commission: Did you go to hospital to see any person?

Witness: I did not go to hospital.

Commission: Is there anything which you know within your personal knowledge?

Witness: I did not hear.



Lt Col Masanari Shibuya was attached to the army headquarters in Taipei and he was, in Tadashi Ando's words, the "incharge of looking after Netaji" after the crash. Shibuya told the commission that after he received the telephone call from the aerodrome, he "reported that information to General [Rikichi] Ando, commander-in-chief of the army in Taiwan" and later visited the aerodrome and "saw the wreckage of the plane".

In the course of examination by GD Khosla and Balraj Trikha, Shibuya conceded that he had in fact seen no wreckage and that his superiors showed little interest even though there had been a major mishap involving an ally and the vice chief of staff of an army which was still on the battlefronts. General Ando gave Shibuya "no instructions" and Isayama was not too much concerned about either Bose or his batchmate Shidei. Shibuya said he went to the hospital soon after the crash following an instruction from Isayama.

But Isayama's evidence to the Shah Nawaz Committee was that "he learnt of the accident when he went to his office the next morning". [40] Shibuya himself forgot what he had told the committee:

Khosla: Are you quite sure that when you reached the hospital Mr Bose was alive and you heard only the next day that he had died?

Shibuya: It is certain that Mr Bose was still alive when I reached the hospital, and I heard that Mr Bose died on the following day.

Khosla: You gave evidence before the Shah Nawaz Committee also?

Shibuya: Yes.

Khosla: In your statement it is written that when you reached the hospital Mr Bose was dead and you never saw him alive. Which is the correct statement?

Shibuya: When I reached the hospital Mr Bose was still alive, that is certain.

Khosla: So your previous statement is not correct?

Shibuya: Perhaps the previous statement may be incorrect if you so ask me.

Halfway through his examination, a confused Shibuya told the commission that "if there are any differences between my present statement and previous statement, please take my previous statement as correct and treat my today's statement as incorrect".

Trikha had soon picked up another gaping hole:

Trikha: You have stated today that you went to the airport to see the wreckage of the plane. You did not say so before Shah Nawaz Committee in your statement?

Shibuya: I did not make the statement before the first committee. I went to the airport and immediately I went to the hospital. The wreckage of the plane did not strike my particular attention. It was one of the usual things.

Trikha: So you did not see the wreckage of the plane?

Shibuya: I did not see the wreckage of the plane.

As the examination proceeded, Shibuya's responses raised more questions than they answered.

Trikha: What is the system in the army? When a plane crashes, is it not your duty to inquire into the matter?

Shibuya: During the war time there were no specific inquiries about air crashes unless that was of specific importance.

Trikha: But here you said that a very special person was travelling. So is it not a special reason to make an inquiry into the matter?

Shibuya: The Japanese army headquarters in Taiwan had nothing to do with this accident because the aeroplane was just to pass the area. It was not in the jurisdiction of the Taiwan army headquarters.

Trikha: But you have just now deposed that if there is any special reason then the inquiry is made. My question was that since a very special person was travelling in the plane, was it not the duty of an officer to make an inquiry?

Shibuya: The decision of the army headquarters at that time was not to touch this case. [41]

Four survivors of the crash also deposed before the commission in Tokyo. Their cross-examination brought out further discrepancies in the air crash story. One could not expect that sort of thing from the men who were senior business executives at that time.

Colonel Shiro Nonogaki, now president of Japan Furnace Material Company, was examined on 7 April 1971. He testified that he was "incharge of the plane" having specially been "appointed by General Shidei"—his teacher in the army academy. When the plane crashed, both Nonogaki and his fellow passenger Takahashi went around the burning wreck shouting out..."Chandra Bose, Shidei, come out!" And then, like Tadashi Ando, Nonogaki too forgot about General Shidei.

**Shri Trikha: You did not go back to the place of occurrence
to find out about Gen. Shidei?**

Col. Nonogaki: No, I did not go.

**Shri Trikha: You thought that Gen. Shidei's life was not of
much importance?**

**Col. Nonogaki: It was not that I did not consider his life
important.**

**Shri Trikha: But you took no steps to find out about Gen.
Shidei?**

Col. Nonogaki: No.



*...
Shri Trikha: And when you heard the news that General Shidei had died, was there any cremation for him at the airport?*

Colonel Nonogaki: I heard it later that he was cremated after I was hospitalised at Hokuto Hospital.

Shri Trikha: You did not go to attend the cremation?

Colonel Nonogaki: No.

Shri Trikha: You had no injuries on you and General Shidei was your superior. Did you not consider it necessary to attend the cremation?

Colonel Nonogaki: It may be worthwhile but I did not go to the cremation.

Shri Trikha: So you do not personally know whether the cremation of General Shidei was done?

Colonel Nonogaki: No [42].

At the start of Major Taro Kono's deposition, GD Khosla had to tell him to give "evidence from your memory and not from the book" [43] because he and the lawyers had been noticing that many Japanese witnesses were checking their notes while giving evidence. According to one account, they had done so even before the Shah Nawaz Committee.

But in his report, Khosla made example of only Suresh Bose. He attacked him for refreshing his memory with notes while narrating detailed account of his experiences and observations. In his most detailed evidence, Suresh Bose gave file numbers and quoted from the intelligence reports he had seen. He became emotional several times and was not keeping well. More than once, right in front of Khosla's eyes, the nearly 80-year-old man's health failed.

Suresh Bose died within months of his deposition, never seeing Khosla's report running him down. "It will be seen that Suresh Chandra Bose is drawing inferences which are not warranted by the facts". He was "at pains to enlarge upon his grievances real or imaginary". His "testimony in the present proceedings was a long diatribe against Nehru and Shri Shah Nawaz Khan". "The examination of Suresh Chandra Bose's evidence is a pointless exercise." [44] Of all the documents brought before him, the only one Khosla deemed fit to be reproduced in full in his report was the government-manipulated note of June 1956 "agreement" of Suresh Bose with the other members of the Netaji Inquiry Committee. Even after his death, Suresh Bose was maligned for daring to challenge the official stand.

Kono, director of Kichi Sony Battery Company Limited at that time, claimed before the commission that after the crash he saw Subhas Bose bleeding from hands, legs, head and face. The others somehow did not catch this gory sight. Many of Kono's other statements did not tally with what he had testified to the Shah Nawaz Committee.

Trikha: I am putting to you that you had stated before the Shah Nawaz Committee that "I heard that Mr Bose was in the next room, though badly burnt yet alive. The nurses whose name I do not recollect told me this".

Witness: That statement is correct.

Trikha: So what you have stated today that you had seen Bose personally in the hospital is incorrect?

Witness: My statement today that I saw Mr Bose lying on the bed is correct.

Trikha: You could see with your eyes?

Witness: Yes.

Trikha: Your eyes were closed due to injuries?

Witness: At that time I still could see.

Trikha: You have stated before Shah Nawaz Committee that "whole of my face had swollen and my eyes were closed and I could not see anything". [45]

Ex-major Ihaho Takahashi, then Managing Director of the Tokyo Airlines Company, made a similar bloomer:

Trikha: Inside the plane, when the plane had crashed, you were in your senses?

Takahashi: I lost senses for a while.

Trikha: But inside the plane, after the plane crashed, you regained your senses and crawled outside, as stated by you earlier [today]?

Takahashi: Yes, it is correct.

Trikha: I am reading to you your statement made earlier before the Shah Nawaz Committee. "When the plane hit the ground, I became senseless. When I recovered consciousness, I was lying outside the plane at point two." Is it correct?

...

Trikha: But this statement of yours made earlier is incorrect that you regained your consciousness outside the plane?

Takahashi: I think it may be correct.

Trikha: So what you have said today earlier that you crawled from the plane yourself and you were not unconscious, is that statement correct?

Takahashi: I gained consciousness. I was lying outside.

Trikha: So what you have stated today is incorrect?

Takahashi: Yes.

A howler followed. While Kono and Nonogaki said they saw Rahman beating the fire out of Bose's clothes following the crash, Takahashi said he "saw Mr Bose coming from the other door. ...He came out walking with his clothes on fire. I could not speak his language. I showed him by rolling on the ground how to put out the fire. Mr Bose followed me and himself rolled on the ground. I and his aide tried to put out the fire. We extinguished the fire".

There was no mistake about it. Takahashi clarified to Trikha when he was cross-examined: "I caught his legs and showed him how to roll. ...I think Mr Nonogaki was there and helping him." [46]

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Mr. Trikha: So when Chandra Bose followed your advice and crawled on the ground the fire extinguished?

Mr. Takahashi: I remember I caught his legs and showed him how to roll.

Mr. Trikha: After when you helped Chandra Bose to roll on the ground, his fire was extinguished?

Mr. Takahashi: Yes.



Wordsmith Khosla crafted a long justification for all these conflicting statements.

Anyone with some experience of hearing witnesses testify knows how impermanent, how subject to erasure, distortion and deception is human memory in the matter of minor details attending a major event. The broad facts stand out fairly clear and positive but all else is enveloped in the mist of oblivion. Memory is prone to play tricks and conjure up imaginary picture to provide verisimilitude to the more easily remembered incident of a murder, an air crash, a death or a rescue. ...Inevitably there will be contradictions and discrepancies between the evidence of witnesses who describes an event which occurred a long time ago. [47]

This extremely persuasive logic was not applicable to those who opposed the air crash story. A question was raised about the round watch Bose was seen wearing at the time of his death and the burnt square one Habibur Rahman produced in support of his claim. The exacting standards of evidence put forward by Khosla in this instance were:

Witnesses have made totally contradictory statements about the matter of this watch. Aurobindo Bose (witness No 165), son of Suresh Chandra Bose, said that Subhas Chandra's father had made a present of a round watch to him. Dwijendra Nath Bose (witness No 162) another nephew of Subhas Chandra Bose said: "That watch was a gift from Subhas's mother...." [48]

Here were two individuals recalling a six or seven decades old family lore they had most probably heard from their elders. What terribly big difference did it make whether it was the mother who had handed over the watch, or the father? The watch was a gift from Subhas's parents, plain and simple. Whatever warranted the usage of harsh phrase "...totally contradictory" here?

Also deposing before the commission in Tokyo were the two Japanese doctors who had treated "Chandra Bose" at the hospital in Taipei. Dr Yoshio Ishii and his senior Dr Teneyoshi Yoshimi. Khosla described the former as "another important witness who corroborates the story of the four eyewitnesses of the crash". This is what this "important witness" told the commission: A patient was identified to him as Chandra Bose by a nurse, who was giving him a blood transfusion. Dr Ishii gave her a helping hand, without enquiring why it was being done and which doctor was in charge. He did not see any bed ticket. [49] He remained by the patient for a good 20 minutes and found no one else around—never mind Rahman insisting before the Shah Nawaz Committee that he was there all the time.

Dr Yoshimi, who "appeared to be a most convincing witness of truth" to Khosla was examined at his residence at Miyazaki. But statements wouldn't tally with those he had made previously.

Shri Chakravarti: You have said that burns were of serious nature. Why did you not send him to the big hospital for treatment?

Dr Yoshimi: The patient was so serious that he could not bear any transfer to other hospital and the patient himself wanted not to be moved. He said, "I would not like to move."

Shri Chakravarti: Did the patient say it to you?

Dr Yoshimi: I got this through his interpreter.

Shri Chakravarti: Who was the interpreter through whom Mr Bose intimated this?

Dr Yoshimi: Mr Nakamura.

Interpreter Juichi Nakamura's lengthy statement to the Shah Nawaz Committee, available to GD Khosla, contained everything "Bose" had stated in his last hours to Nakamura. The interpreter never heard Bose saying that he did not want to be shifted to the main hospital.

More from Chakravarti's cross-examination:

Shri Chakravarti: You have already told that he was seriously burnt. Was his heart also burnt?

Dr Yoshimi: His heart was not burnt.

Shri Chakravarti: What were the places burnt seriously?

Dr Yoshimi: He was burnt all over the body. So it cannot be said which part was more serious.

Shri Chakravarti: But, doctor, if heart is burnt can a patient survive?

Dr Yoshimi: He cannot survive.

Shri Chakravarti: But when Mr Bose was brought into the hospital, he was fully conscious and he had a talk with you through an interpreter?

Dr Yoshimi: Yes.

Shri Chakravarti: So the statement you gave before the Shah Nawaz Committee was mistaken. You have stated: "I found that he was severely burnt all over his body and all of it had taken on a grayish colour like ash. Even his heart had burnt."

Dr Yoshimi: It should be chest and not heart. That is a mistake.

...

Shri Chakravarti: How much blood you extracted from the body of Mr Bose?

Dr Yoshimi: I did not take [out] any blood.

Shri Chakravarti: When a patient is burnt, his blood becomes thicker?

Dr Yoshimi: Yes.

Shri Chakravarti: Unless the blood is let out, new blood cannot be transfused. Is it so?

Dr Yoshimi: Blood transfusion can be made without extracting blood.

Shri Chakravarti: Mr Bose's burns were of the third degree?

Dr Yoshimi: The general burning all over his body was of the third degree.

Shri Chakravarti: So, what you deposed before the Shah Nawaz Committee is not correct: You have stated: "In case of severe burns of the third degree, the blood gets thicker and there is high pressure of the heart. In order to relieve this pressure, usually blood is let out and new blood is given in its place. In the case of Mr. Bose, I let out approximately 200 cc of his blood and transfused 400 cc of blood into him."

But today you have said that no blood was let out and blood can be transfused without extracting blood even in the case of third degree burns.

Dr Yoshimi: As I said before, blood transfusion was not done by me.

Shri Chakravarti: Then this statement is wrong?

Dr Yoshimi: If it is said so, that is wrong. [50]

Shri Chakravarty: Mr. Bose breathed his last at 12 midnight

and after arranging for his body you left at 1 A.M.?

Dr. Yoshimi: Yes.

Shri Chakravarty: The statement made by you before the Shah Nawaz Committee that "it was shortly after 8 P.M. that Mr. Bose breathed his last. I tried to give artificial respiration to him, but it was of no use" is not correct?

Dr. Yoshimi: I think it is incorrect.

Shri Chakravarty: And today's statement is correct?

Dr. Yoshimi: Yes.



[Khosla proceeding record shows Dr Yoshimi contradicting himself on the time of Bose's death.]

It was quite strange that previous statements of the witnesses should have been wrongly recorded because as per Khosla's admission "a perusal of the file of the previous committee shows that almost all statements were...sent to the respective witnesses, who studied them at leisure, made corrections, signed them and then returned them to the committee". [51]

One witness who pleased both GD Khosla and the lawyers with his "entirely disinterested" demeanour and straight talk was Morio Takakura. "There is no reason why reliance should not be placed on his testimony," Khosla wrote of him in his report and yet failed to fully appreciate his statements.

In 1945, Takakura was a colonel posted at political affairs section of the Imperial Japanese Army HQ in Tokyo and was as such in the know of things. Trikha examined him on the point why Bose was "going with Lt Gen Shidei":

A: Because Lt Gen Shidei was on transfer to Quantung Army, as assistant chief of staff of the Quantung Army. That is why

Mr Chandra Bose went with him.

Q: Where he was bound for?

A: Perhaps it was for Diren.

Q: Was he an expert in Russian language?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: Is it true that he knew the Manchurian border very well,

A: He was on transfer knowing fully well of the situation on the border.

Q: Will it be correct to say that the HQ at Tokyo accepted the plan of Netaji for his going to Russia via Diren and the HQ selected Lt Gen Shidei to accompany Netaji?

A: Yes, it is so. The HQ was aware. [52]

This evidence on record did not square with Khosla's assertion in his report about Bose and Rahman being a "sudden and unanticipated addition" to a flight "arranged in order to carry General Shidei and other Japanese officers". More so, because even Taro Kono recalled having been told by General Shidei himself that Bose was going to the Soviet Union and Shidei "was to go with him and look after him".

What General Shidei told me was that after Japan's surrender if he went to Japan, the Allied forces will confront him and he will be in danger and therefore he was being taken to the Soviet Union. [53]

And could the Japanese have taken Bose towards Soviet Russia without resorting to some sort of subterfuge? Takakura admitted that there was some inexplicable secrecy surrounding Bose's flight.

Q: You have stated earlier that you received intimation about the alleged plane crash at Taiwan?

A: That is because there was a telegraphic message to us. There was an intimation about the transfer of Lt Gen Shidei and that some important person was being accompanied by Lt Gen Shidei.

Q: Was the word "important person" used to camouflage the name of Chandra Bose from the American enemy?

A: Yes.

Q: The HQ at Tokyo did not have any intimation by which plane Netaji went?

A: Perhaps nobody knew by what plane he was coming.

Q: That was also made to create a camouflage in the way Chandra Bose was moving?

A: I think so.

Q: You have earlier stated that you had received some news about air crash. What steps have been taken by the Tokyo HQ?

A: I do not think we had then any steps in Tokyo. There was no alternative, but to leave it to the discretion of the army headquarters in Taiwan. [54]

The headquarters at Taiwan did nothing. Because, according to Col Shibuya, the army headquarters had ordered "not to touch this case". "There was a decision that no official contact was to be made in this case."

All this confusion created by disparate claims of the witnesses to the Taipei air crash boiled down to this: Unless a clinching evidence of Bose's—as well as Shidei's—death in Taiwan was forthcoming, it could not be ruled out Bose actually went to Russia as planned. That clinching evidence in the absence of any photographs of their bodies could only be the hospital and cremation records. These were the records that CSDIC's GD Anderson had been wanting to lay his hands on in 1946. The Government of India had tried to access the same in 1956 from the authorities in Taiwan.

On 10 May 1972 the Government informed Khosla that it would not allow him to visit Taipei because India did not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. This made Samar Guha and other lawmakers intervene. A joint letter to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi signed by 26 of them, with Atal Bihari Vajpayee's name on top, demanded that the commission "should be given facilities to visit Taiwan". It was pointed out that "many Indian government officials visit Formosa every year even though India has no diplomatic relations with the island". [55] When the Government still did not concede to their demand, Guha had to play hardball. In a private meeting with the PM, he held out a threat that he would go public with India's intelligence links with Taiwan:

I told Indira Gandhi that during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the Indian government procured weapons and intelligence from Israel through the Taiwan government, and India also has trade relations with Taiwan through the Hong Kong route. I was able to collect this secret information from a representative of the Taiwan government. [56]

Pressure tactics worked and on 11 July 1973 GD Khosla landed at the Taipei Songshan Airport, which had come up on the site of much smaller Matsuyama aerodrome. Waiting for Khosla here were

Samar Guha and Sunil Krishna Gupta, Amar Prasad Chakravarty's deputy. According to Guha's account, he implored Khosla to contact the Taiwanese authorities only to be informed that the Ministry of External Affairs had advised the judge against it. "Why have you come over here, then? Why did you not tell us this in Delhi?" Guha protested. "Why have you come to Taipei after 27 years?" people asked Guha as he went around the Taipei city making enquiries about the reported air crash. The word spread and soon Taiwan government knew of a foreign judge on their territory, carrying out an inquiry without any notification. Had Guha-Gupta not intervened, Khosla would have been shunted out of Taiwan. [57]

The duo did most of the ground work, helped by Pritam Singh, a former INA man who had made Taiwan his home. They obtained permission to inspect the out of bound, unused old airstrip where the Sally bomber had reportedly crashed. But more difficult was to persuade Khosla to undertake a field trip. Near the airfield, Khosla behaved rudely. He wouldn't listen as Guha tried to impress on him that the pictures of a plane wreck furnished by the Japanese on August 19 were apparently of the debris of more than one air crash in the same area. Khosla was treating them as "inadmissible in evidence" because Habibur Rahman had not appeared before him to testify as "to what they [really] depict".



[Sunil Gupta, left; Samar Guha, in specs and GD Khosla, right, in a picture from Samar Guha's collection]

Accompanied by Guha and Gupta, Khosla also visited the crematorium where Bose's body had allegedly been consigned to the flames. There it emerged that nurse Tsan Pi Sha was not the only fictional character in Harin Shah's story. Khosla wrote in his report that "when I went to the crematorium at Taipei and interviewed the son of the original caretaker, I showed him a photograph appearing at page 99 of Harin Shah's book and asked him if the man represented there was his father. The young man denied that the photograph was that of his father". [58]

During its tour of Taiwan, the Khosla Commission examined seven individuals. Khosla referred to two of them in his report as corroborating witnesses. They had heard of an air crash and seen a coffin, which according to their Japanese superiors carried Bose's body. Guha charged Khosla with misinterpreting and fudging the evidence. He cited the case of YR Tseng, the last witness to appear before the commission on July 17. Tseng, an engineer, said that "during war time we only knew two leaders of India, Mahatma Gandhi and Chandra Bose" and the latter often made news in Japanese newspapers. Commission's counsel asked Tseng if he knew anything about the plane crash. Tseng—a 16-year-old school boy in 1945—said he knew of only one air crash at the alleged site of Bose's crash, but it took place in 1944. [59]

Responding to questions put by Bhasin and Guha, Tseng said no one was rescued from the crashed plane and he never heard of any air crash taking place three-four days after the Japanese surrender. "There was no air crash after Japan's surrender," he said emphatically. [60] Later he heard about Bose's death and said the other plane crash of 1944 at the very site "was not even mentioned in the papers".

Guha's version of the cross-examination has it that Khosla haggled with Tseng over the year and month of the crash. This got on the Taiwanese's nerves and he walked out saying he would bring in

the next day a dozen of his former schoolmates, all of whom had helped clear the wreckage. Guha begged Khosla that one day's wait was worthwhile to hear out the Taiwanese. He sensed some truth in Dr Satyanarayan Sinha's claim before the commission earlier "that this was not the photograph of the crash which they [Japanese] are saying" and that "he saw [in a newspaper] a photo of plane crash of October 1944, which was exactly similar to the photo published in the committee report". [61] However, Khosla turned down his request. According to Guha, the judge spent the next day shopping around for a present for Indira Gandhi, whose biography he was writing at that time.

On return to India, Guha visited the Prime Minister in New Delhi to complain about Khosla's conduct. Sunil Gupta quietly slipped away to somewhere in Uttar Pradesh to brief a holy man. This holy man, who did not appear before anyone, was keeping an eye on the commission's work through Gupta, his secret informer whom he would hereafter codename as "Sukrit". He told Gupta that Khosla's inquiry was a "command performance".

Nothing came out of Guha's protests before the PM. "I don't know why they have done so," she responded to Guha's charges about the MEA's missive to Khosla. Guha then blasted the ministry in the Lok Sabha, accusing it of sabotaging the inquiry in Taiwan.

At the lengthy argument session of the Khosla Commission, commencing on 10 September 1973 and concluding on 14 March 1974, the lawyers dissected the evidence on record. "What to speak of your Lordship, even a fool will not believe in these stories," Gobinda Mukhoty said of the Japanese eyewitnesses' statements. "Why Your Lordship was not allowed to correspond freely with the Formosan government?" [62]

Mukhoty specifically raised the point that if indeed Bose had died and was cremated, some documentary evidence "in the form of a history sheet or bed-head ticket containing details of Bose ailment, the treatment administered to him and the progress observed", and a death certificate signed by the doctor attending on him "should have been forthcoming from the hospital and municipal records at Taipei". [63] But all that had come on record pertained to the death and cremation of Japanese soldier Ichiro Okura. Khosla's cunning counter to this was:

Mr Mukhoty, while arguing his case, assumed, in the first place, that these documents related to Bose and were respectively his death certificate and an application for permission to cremate his dead body. But, because the details of the deceased mentioned in these two documents did not correspond to Bose, he went on to demolish his preliminary hypothesis by saying that the documents did not relate to Bose and, therefore, Bose did not die and his dead body was not cremated. ...The argument is in the nature of a non sequitur, for what does not relate to an event, cannot be used to disapprove it. It is tantamount to raising a phantom and then destroying it. [64]

Khosla thus concluded that the Okura records had "no evidentiary value at all" for they do not "prove or disapprove anything". "They relate to totally different persons and not Bose at all." [65]

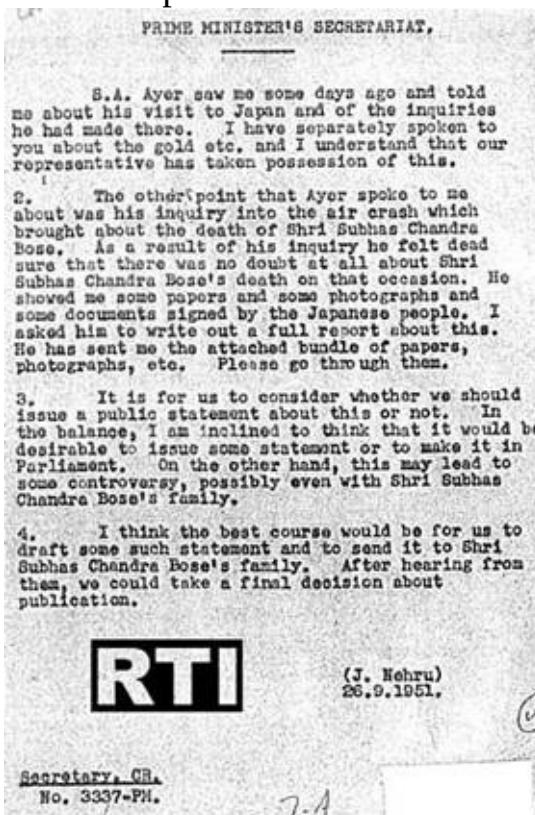
The hole in this argument was that the documents did relate to "Bose" because the Japanese government itself had vouched for them. When requested to furnish records proving Bose's death and cremation, the Gaimusho's Asian Affairs Bureau on 24 July 1956 informed the Embassy of India in Tokyo that they had traced the cremation permit—but it was not in name of Subhas Bose. The Japanese government's explanation for this was that

since the death of Mr Subhas Chandra Bose was kept strictly confidential at that time, it is believed that this cremation permit on Ichiro Okura must correspond to the case for late Mr Subhas Chandra Bose. [Emphasis mine]

This communication, seen by Khosla, established that it were the Japanese who had raised a phantom. Why would they do that sort of thing? And how did it dovetail with Khosla's grand idea that in post-surrender period "there could be no question of the Japanese agreeing to secrecy" over Bose and "there was absolutely no necessity of inventing and advertising an alibi" for him? Khosla did not think too much of the Japanese government view in this case, but he was all game when the same government produced a 1947 record indirectly referring to Shidei's death and, lo, it became "a clear corroboration of the story of the crash and of General Shidei's death in it". [66]

To ensure that the lawyers representing non-official parties do not get the complete picture,

Khosla saw to it that they did not get access to all relevant official records. Thus the report obtained by the Government of India through the British High Commission in 1956 never came to anyone's knowledge. The lawyers also never saw the most important pre-1947 secret intelligence reports. Khosla went to the extent of exhibiting censored records, leaving out their originals containing information not conforming to the air crash theory. A case in point was of "Exhibit 29 BB" [next image] of the commission which looked like a routine primeministerial minute by Nehru after he met SA Ayer, who briefed him about his visit to Japan in 1951 and left a bundle of papers.



But not only was this record a copy of the original, it was devoid of the Foreign Secretary's observations after he had studied the papers on PM's directive. The excised portion was very much there in the original record placed in a classified file made available to Khosla.

S.A. Ayer saw me some days ago and told me about his visit to Japan and of the inquiries he had made there. I have separately spoken to you about the gold etc. and I understand that our representative has taken possession of this.

2. The other point that Ayer spoke to me about was his inquiry into the air crash which brought about the death of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose. As a result of his inquiry he felt dead sure that there was no doubt at all about Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's death on that occasion. He showed me some papers and some photographs and some documents signed by the Japanese people. I asked him to write out a full report about this. He has sent me the attached bundle of papers, photographs, etc. Please go through them.

3. It is for us to consider whether we should issue a public statement about this or not. In the balance, I am inclined to think that it would be desirable to issue some statement or to make it in Parliament. On the other hand, this may lead to some controversy, possibly even with Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's family.

4. I think the best course would be for us to draft some such statement and to send it to Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's family. After hearing from them, we could take a final decision about publication.

J. Nehru

(J. Nehru)
26.9.1951.

Secretary, CR.
No. 3337-P.M.



35

I told P.M. that it would be inadvisable for him to ~~make~~ ^{make} a statement now. Whether or not Shri Subhas Bose is dead is not a live issue at

In the portion culled out of the copy, the Foreign Secretary had made an observation similar to Mukhoty's after he saw the cremation record for Okura given to Ayer by Harin Shah. He pointed out

that whereas according to Habibur Rahman the dead body was cremated on the 20th August 1945, according to the municipal certificate the cremation took place at 6pm on the 22nd August 1945. One could understand a fictitious name being used in the death certificate and in the cremation certificate, but there was no necessity of using a fictitious date of cremation. Either Habibur Rahman's memory must have played him false or there is something wrong with the cremation certificate.

The first man to call Khosla's findings into question was Barun Sengupta. Soon after the commission report was tabled in Parliament, Sengupta began a series of fast-paced, incisive articles in Bangla daily *Anandabazar Patrika*. He accused Khosla of putting up the "pretence of an impartial inquiry" even though he suppressed vital records from the independent lawyers. "If they had access to these documents before the argument they could have brought out many secrets and the deceitful evidence of the so-called eyewitness would have been pierced with greater transparency." [67] Sengupta mocked the way Khosla had glossed over the mismatch in various eyewitness accounts.

If he believes that only the date of the plane accident and the death of Netaji in the hospital after the accident are the only matters of importance and significance then there is no doubt that all the Japanese witnesses and Habibur Rahman have given the same evidence. [68]

Sengupta rebutted that if the Japanese had no respect for Bose, why was Lt Gen Isoda tailing him in his last known days? "How often during the liberation war of Bangladesh, our Lt Gen JS Arora was moving about with the acting president of Bangladesh...or their Prime Minister...?" [69] He concluded that from his analysis of the evidence advanced before the commission, "it is not at all established" that Bose had died in Taiwan. Rather, "according to a top secret plan and with the help of Japanese, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose disappeared from Saigon airport on 17th August, 1945". [70]

Before Khosla's report could be discussed in Parliament, the Emergency was imposed and all

leading Opposition leaders were imprisoned. Samar Guha was bundled into Rohtak jail with his friend Atal Bihari Vajpayee and giving them company were LK Advani and Devi Lal. Some 25 years hence, as Deputy Prime Minister of India, LK Advani would recall on *Aaj Tak* TV channel that Guha was “always talking and writing about Netaji”.

The next year, when many leaders were still in jail, some glad tidings came from London. Thirty years after the end of the British Raj, Her Majesty’s Government released the single biggest compendium of official documentation for the period when the news of Bose’s death was received in India. The collection was volume VI of the mega Transfer of Power series, titled “The post-war phase: New moves by the Labour government, 1 August 1945-22 March 1946”.

Post-Emergency, Guha rolled up his sleeves. For the first time in post-1947 India, the Congress party was not in power at the Centre. On 3 August 1977, Guha moved a motion in the Lok Sabha against Khosla’s report. He quoted from the records reproduced in the latest Transfer of Power volume. On the day Bose’s death was announced by the Japanese, Sir Robert Francis Mudie, Home Member (Home Minister) sent a note to Sir Evan Meredith Jenkins, Private Secretary to Viceroy Wavell, on how to deal with Bose. The note began with the premise that “one of the most difficult questions that will confront Home Department in the near future is the treatment of Subhas Chandra Bose”. Then it went on to list a number of options ranging from bringing “him back to India and try him either for waging war or under the enemy agents ordinance” to leaving “him where he is and don’t ask for his surrender”.

But could the Home Department hazard a guess about Bose’s plans in post-surrender days? Certainly! The Allied intelligence had penetrated deep into INA, IIL set-up and whatever the Axis secretly deliberated on Bose was known to them. A lot of this was fed to the Intelligence Bureau, which functioned under the Home Department [ministry]. The department’s assessment was:

In many ways the easiest course would be to leave him [Bose] where he is and not ask for his release. He might, of course, in certain circumstances, be welcomed by the Russians. This course would raise fewest immediate political difficulties, but the security authorities consider that in certain circumstances his presence in Russia would be so dangerous as to rule it out altogether. [71]

Home Minister Charan Singh explained to Guha that it was quite possible that this assessment was made before the department received the death news. Guha then referred to documents created months later and doubting if Bose was indeed dead. One of these was a minute of the India and Burma committee held at 10 Downing Street under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Clement Attlee on 25 October 1945. It noted that “the only civilian renegade of importance” at that time was Subhas Bose. [72]

Guha appealed that the Government should institute a fresh inquiry “without losing a day”. A number of MPs—from old-timer like HV Kamth to newcomer Dr Subramanian Swamy—supported the demand. “It is the unanimous voice of the House...it is a national question,” underscored Kazim Ali Meerza. Sasankasekhar Sanyal claimed that Khosla’s inquiry “was something like QED. This was to have been proved; this has been proved”. Almost giving up, the Home Minister said he was not “opposed to a fresh inquiry” but could not make any commitment. “The Government will consider it.” Guha moved a substitute motion, calling for the setting up of a three-man commission with powers to “scrutinize the secret official documents in possession of the Government of India” and obtain documents from the foreign governments.

The Parliament session concluded at that juncture. In the intervening period Guha managed to overturn long-time government policy not to have Bose’s portrait in Parliament House. On 23 January 1978, President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and Prime Minister Morarji Desai unveiled Bose’s portrait in the Central Hall, nearly thirty years after a demand was first raised by Kamath. Moved by the belated gesture, Subhas’s youngest brother Shailesh sobbed publicly. President Reddy looked at the portrait and remarked: “Netaji has come back today, though not as expected. ...Some people say

he is alive. I wish I could believe it so. If he is alive, let him come to us even for one day...." [73]

In February that year, a most unlikely step was taken by a government official and it gladdened Guha no end. NG Goray, Guha's friend and India's new High Commissioner to the UK, took up the issue of Bose's death with the last Viceroy and the first Governor-General of India. Lord Mountbatten's encyclopedic memories of the India of late 1940s were as fresh as ever. A little earlier, writers Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre had met Mountbatten at his family mansion near Southampton and were struck when he recalled, one after another, the minute details of every big and small event down to the colour of horses and the make of the lanterns on his stately coach. And whenever he needed to refresh it, he would "go down to the basement of his mansion" to consult what the writers described as "the most extraordinary personal archive ever in the possession of a single individual". [74]

To such a man with such a wealth of information and experience, Goray addressed his letter. He drew Mountbatten's attention to the records in the Transfer of Power volume and beseeched him to tell the truth about Bose's death.

As you took over from Lord Wavell it will not be wrong to presume that you must have come to know every detail about the incident.... Will it be possible for you to shed some authentic light on the Subhas episode...? [75]

...

You would say: "Why rake up the past?" My answer would be: Because there is a deep suspicion in India that Sri Bose took asylum in the USSR and all this was known to you, to Nehru, and the Soviet government. But all of you preferred to observe silence, an intriguing silence, I would say, because the British did not want to pick up a quarrel with their erstwhile ally and Nehru did not want to have a rival. [76]

When Goray wrote this letter, two official panels appointed by the Government of India had already supported the air crash theory and Lord Mountbatten could have easily taken that line. But he didn't. He dodged the query with an evasive reply on 10 March 1978 that "there was no official record of Subhas Chandra Bose's death in his archives". [77]

That March, President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy released Guha's book, the strangely titled *Netaji: Dead or alive?* For the first—and last—time since Independence, a head of the state openly strayed into the uncharted politically volatile issue. "Let us see him even for one day," [78] Reddy wished 33 years after Bose's death and remarked that "India would make another attempt to unravel the mystery of Netaji's death". Urging "the USSR to cooperate with the Government of India in ascertaining the truth about Netaji", he said he "would coax the Soviet authorities to 'send Netaji back if he is there'". [79]

Guha's book took the readers through the Khosla Commission's report with a fine tooth-comb. The narrative in *Netaji: Dead or alive?* often became obsessive and jumbled, but it nevertheless served its purpose. Unlike Suresh Bose's *Dissentient report*, Guha's book proved to be a hit. The most curious part of the book, though, was a passage in the forward, where Guha had made an astonishing claim that he "possessed some significant information which indicates that Netaji is still alive".

Khosla did not issue any rejoinders. As a judge he was not supposed to and he had no face to. *Last days of Netaji* had annoyed a section of the Bose family so much that, led by Dwijedranath Bose, they filed a suit against Khosla for trying to demean Bose. In a re-run of the defamation case filed by Justice Sikri, for more than a year Khosla was literally on the run. Finally, on 1 April 1978, he, a retired high court chief justice, accepted his comeuppance in a magistrate's court in Kolkata. For the second time in his life, he had to wriggle out of a situation of his own creation by making an unqualified apology in which he accepted that Bose was "the liberator of our Motherland".

The high point of the year, and Guha's achievement of a lifetime, came in the second half when the Lok Sabha was about to resume the discussion on Guha's motion. In the weeks leading to it, Guha met Prime Minister Morarji Desai several times and sought a formal scrapping of the Khosla Commission report. Desai chided a much younger Guha like a schoolboy. "How can I reverse the stand of previous government?" Guha continued to insist and Desai confronted him: "Why do you say

that Subhas *babu* is alive? If he had returned to the country in 1946, he would have become all-in-all. There would have been no Nehru, none from the Nehru family.” [80] Guha had no cogent answer. He said he had not met Bose but had been informed by some “honest people with no political ambitions” that Bose was now a holy man.

Guha wouldn’t climb down and that put Desai in a bind. The proposed inquiry—possibility of which was being looked into by Desai’s Law Minister Shanti Bhushan—would have led to parliamentary questions, incisive reports from recently unshackled media and demands for declassifying secret files. It was a new era of great expectations and the bar was high for the Janata Party government. Even the officialdom was willing to venture into the hitherto forbidden Russian angle to the Bose mystery. A note in a secret PMO file actually contemplated the scenario of Bose’s possible escape to the USSR, and even the wild assumption that he could have got out of there, as theorised by Guha.

In the face of evidence which has already been collected by the two committees it is only a strong positive evidence that can establish the faked character of the air crash and the fact that Netaji survived and went over to Manchuria and thence to Russia. The question will still be a million-dollar question. What happened to him when he went to Russia? Was he liquidated, as was the fashion in the time of Stalin, or did he escape? If so, how and where he got the asylum.

The Janata Party government was not ready to dwell deep into this question publicly. It was simply not worth the trouble. An upright judge could have given the government a headache. So Desai made a bargain. He made Guha drop the demands for a fresh inquiry and in lieu of it gave out an honest appraisal of the Bose case.

On 28 August 1978, Desai stood up in Lok Sabha, looked Guha in the eyes, and said: “I may differ sometimes from honourable friend, Mr Samar Guha, but I can never doubt, even in my sleep, his sincerity. I have great admiration for the dedication with which he is pursuing this cause and yet we have to be realistic.” He said the Government found it difficult to accept that the findings of Khosla and Shah Nawaz were decisive and requested Guha to withdraw his motion. Just as he had attained his finest moment, Guha got carried away and undid it all. With the rush of adrenal, he said:

For me, there is no necessity any more of fresh inquiry. I got the report quite earlier and some important information also from very responsible quarters that Netaji is alive. Today for me there is no question of indecisiveness in any way. In the name of God, I announce in this House that I know that Netaji is alive.

A hush fell before it was replaced by shouts and sniggers. The MPs gawked and smirked and laughed. Quite naturally. But the misty-eyed Guha went on and on with his impassioned outburst no one was taking seriously.

Naturally, my friends will ask the question, why are you not divulging his whereabouts? I am too eager, too impatient to let the country know what I know, but then I have not the freedom yet to disclose what I know. ...But this much I can say, Netaji is nowhere under duress. He is a free man. I again pray to God along with all of you so that Netaji keeps well and we get him back in our midst as early as possible.

This went on till the time the Speaker firmly asked Guha if he was formally withdrawing his motion. As he sat down agreeing, Guha murmured, “There is no necessity of any fresh inquiry because Netaji is alive.”

Five months later followed a disaster which wiped out whatever credibility Guha was left with. On 22 January 1979 at the Calcutta Press Club he flaunted a photograph and told mediapersons that “Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is alive, healthy and free”. [81] He said he had no intention of making political gain. “My moral responsibility impels me to let the people know that Netaji is alive.”[82] “No more inquiry commissions are needed.”[83]

While paying our national tributes to Netaji on the occasion of his birthday, let our countrymen offer their prayers to the Almighty in temples, mosques, churches and everywhere for his long life and for his early appearance before his beloved countrymen. [84]

Let this picture of Netaji taken recently (in India) dispel all certainties and doubts from their minds to know it definitely that their Netaji is living in intense tapasya (meditation) for the fulfillment of the unfulfilled mission of his divine motherland. [85]

Guha said the picture was taken in 1978 in a temple in India and that he knew some non-political

personalities who had had “the good fortune of seeing him”. [86] He claimed that the picture had already been shown to Jayaprakash Narayan, who had been “overwhelmed with an ecstatic joy”, [87] and the Lok Sabha Speaker KS Hegde. The others not named by Guha included President Reddy, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, HV Kamath and Gobinda Mukhoty.

Disbelieving reporters hurled a volley of questions that Guha could not handle. “Please don’t cross-examine me. You are at liberty to take it at my word or reject it. I am not authorised to state anything more.” [88] “Excuse me, it is not possible at the moment to disclose where he is living.” [89] “Netaji...is a *yogi* of the highest order.... Netaji will not go the Sri Aurobindo way...the moment Netaji appears in public, there will be a political earthquake in India,”[90] Guha avowed he possessed “a host of information” that “countrymen will know from Netaji himself when he chooses his time to disclose it”. [91]

Reporters, nevertheless, plied on and extracted something out of Guha. He told them that “the story of Netaji’s death in an air crash in Formosa in 1945 was cooked up by his devoted accomplice Habibur Rahman, so as to cover up Netaji’s escape from approaching Anglo-American army. Netaji was in jail for many years in the Soviet Union”. [92] Guha would not say how “Netaji” had landed up in a temple in India, but couldn’t stop himself from launching a broadside against two former prime ministers. Desai’s statement in Parliament, Guha said, was “a step towards the present government’s undoing of a conspiracy”. [93] “The conspiracy of the father and daughter has now been undone by the present government.” [94]

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, Guha alleged, had committed “an unpardonable sin” by misleading “the people about Netaji’s fate and even undertook to hold a fake inquiry to fraudulently confirm the report of Netaji’s death”. [95] Nehru-bashing continued till the end of the press conference: “The biggest treachery on the part of the first Prime Minister of India was suppression and concealment of convincing evidence....” [96]

The next day, January 23, all major newspapers across India covered Guha’s press conference. Most either downplayed the announcement or tore into it. An editorial in the Tribune appealed to Prime Minister Desai to call Guha’s bluff. No one responded. Guha’s ridiculous claim about Bose being alive in 1979 and the serious charges against two former Prime Ministers were completely ignored by Desai. Ailing Jayaprakash Narayan did not issue any statement and nor did Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Probably they were much too embarrassed.

But angered Congressmen decided to lock horns with Guha. They knew where to hit: Doubts had instantly been cast on the authenticity of the picture Guha had flaunted before the pressmen. They looked at it and knew it was a shoddy trick photography job. [*The following is photocopy of the morphed picture Guha produced in 1979*]



Subrata Mukherjee, general secretary of West Bengal Congress (I)—still in active politics—later demonstrated that Subhas’s “head” was morphed on to a picture of Sarat Bose. Mukherjee dared Guha

to prove his claim by producing Subhas Bose.

The entire episode left a bad taste. For collateral damage, media disengaged itself completely from the Bose mystery. It was almost like the end of the road. In the years to come very little was heard on the issue on national level. Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980. The call of duty for media was in Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Assam. There was no point in looking back.

Towards the end of his life, Guha, lamented that he had in his *naïvety* allowed himself to be trapped by his political opponents, who knew of his secret belief that Bose was alive and in India in disguise as a holy man. This was the same holy man to whom “Sukrit” had provided the dope about Khosla’s inquiry. The holy man was virtually unseen, forever holed up in a room, and had never been caught on camera by anyone in India.

When the first-ever attempt to seek the judiciary’s intervention into the Bose mystery was made in July 1984, neither public nor media paid any attention to it. Through his writ petition in the Rajasthan High Court, Bose admirer Nand Lal Sharma prayed for a judicial inquiry. To make his case, Sharma attached a few documents along with his application and also filed an application seeking documents he wanted the Foreign Secretary to produce.

The court ordered the Standing Counsel for the Union of India on 15 March 1985 and “directed to file reply of the writ petition within one month”. On 8 May 1985, the counsel prayed for time and the case was fixed for hearing in July. In the meanwhile, the judge hearing the matter, Justice SN Bhargava, moved to another Bench “and the case was not listed before any other Bench in spite of application for early hearing filed by the petitioner”. Justice Bhargava returned to the Jaipur Bench after some time to find that “no reply was filed by either the State of Rajasthan or the Union of India”. The government counsel submitted that he had received no instructions from the Ministry of External Affairs. The case was then ordered to be put up in November 1985, when the government counsel told the court that he had still not received any word from the government “in spite of written communication”.

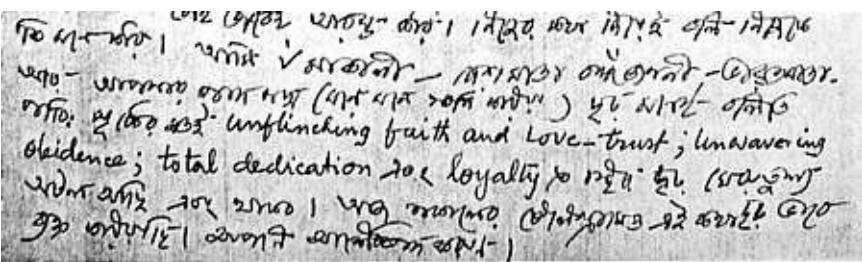
The case was taken up finally for arguments on 4 December 1985. This time too both the government counsel repeated the same story and the petitioner was heard *ex parte*. In his 18 January 1985 order, Justice Bhargava took the Government to task for not caring “to file any reply of the writ petition and produce relevant material before this court”. The judge felt that “either because the Union of India is indifferent to this question...or the Government of India itself is not satisfied with the reports of the two commissions and, therefore, does not want to contest the writ petition which has been filed for ordering a fresh inquiry into the disappearance of Netaji”. The court directed Sharma to make his case before the Government and asked the authorities to “come to a definite conclusion”. The Government was given six months “to examine the whole matter afresh with open mind...before coming to a *prima facie* decision as to whether fresh commission is necessary or not”.

A 1987 memo from the Joint Secretary (Coordination Division) in a secret file later said that no action was taken by the External Affairs Ministry because petitioner Sharma was “no longer in this world”, having died in July 1986. In the intervening one-and-a-half years, all that the Government could do was to touch base with Nand Lal telephonically.

Around the same time, in September 1985, the news of the death of the unseen holy man’s passing away in Faizabad created a stir in the state of Uttar Pradesh for he was identified as Subhas Bose by his local followers and local media. For one, the *Saptahik Sahara*, then edited by Subrato Roy Sahara himself, in its 24-30 November 1985 edition concluded after an intense investigation that it was “quite possible” that the holy man was Bose. Letters of Samar Guha and Sunil Gupta were found from his residence. He was the man Guha had in mind when he swore in Parliament that Bose was alive.

It was also revealed that after the picture controversy of 1979—when Bose at 82 would have been a year younger to incumbent Prime Minister Desai—the holy man severed links from all his

followers in Bengal. For months he remained incommunicado and he would never ever allow Guha to contact him again. A few months later, his closest follower, one Dr Pabitra Mohan Roy of Kolkata renewed the contact by writing to him again. He begged for forgiveness, holding himself responsible for not been able to stop Guha in time, and reaffirmed his allegiance to the holy man in a letter written in Bangla:



I wish to say something—your own words—‘**You are my intelligence officer—without fear or favour must act**’. Now allow me to begin in a similar way. Keeping in mind Ma Kali—Deshmata—Bangajanani—Bharatmata [Mother India] and your feet, I wanted to tell you that just like in the past, I still have the same **unflinching faith and love-trust; unwavering obedience; total dedication and loyalty** towards you.... [Translated from Bangla. Highlighted words appear in English in the letter]

Interesting words were these because Pabitra Mohan Roy was a staunch follower of Subhas Bose. A copy of his 1980 Bangla book *Netajeer secret service* (Netaji's secret service), which he had dedicated to the holy man, contained some snippets from his own extraordinary life. Pabitra had started out as a volunteer of underground revolutionary group Anushilan Samity, and then he went missing. “We had been inspired by Netaji’s ideals and left our wives and families and ventured out so far,” [97] he wrote in his book. Pabitra, who had first met Bose in 1933, returned to India 12 years later in 1943 as a daring INA secret service officer.

A Japanese submarine dropped Americk Singh Gill, T Mukherjee, Mahindra Singh and him at Puri coast. They arrived in Kolkata to a cold reception. “Still I would say, in that darkness, it was Netaji’s words which inspired us to go it alone,” [98] Pabitra, in picture, wrote.



His mission was doomed. T Mukherjee betrayed the group. Mohindra Singh was caught in Mumbai and tortured until he gave out the whereabouts of others. Americk and Pabitra were arrested. Also arrested along with them were the only people who had come to their assistance. Suresh Bose’s daughter Amita, her husband Haridas Mitra and revolutionary Jyotish Chandra Bose. The fast track trial under the Enemy Agents Ordinance against Pabitra, Americk and Haridas Mitra commenced in May 1945 and by June end their execution orders were out. However, in November the death sentence was commuted to transportation for life, “thanks to the efforts of Mrs Mitra, who lobbied Mahatma Gandhi, who in turn interceded with Lord Wavell”. [99]

Pabitra was eventually released when all other INA men and women had to be set free under public pressure. Americk won his freedom. He fled from the custody, ran through Kolkata’s labyrinthine lanes while his handcuffs were on, went out of India and lived long as a prosperous man. Pabitra did not do badly either. He joined politics and was elected as an MLA in 1957 on PSP ticket. Then, suddenly he withdrew from the public life and went back to his secret service ways for the holy man he thought was Bose. In 1979, Pabitra sent the holy man a blow-by-blow account of the fake photo controversy.

1978

10 January. - ১০ জানুয়ারি সন্তোষজ্ঞ মিশন-পুরস্কাৰ
দিবস আৰু পৰিবৃত্ত।

মুক্তি পৰি বাহ্যিক। এই মনোবৃত্ত "গুণ" পুরস্কাৰ
জৰীৰ অনুৰোধ-প্ৰস্তাৱ দেও-পৰি গ্ৰহণ-
কৰা আৰু পৰি প্ৰদান কৰা হৈলো এই পুরস্কাৰ।

13 January - ১৩ জানুয়ারি (গুণ) পৰি-অনুষ্ঠান, পৰি-কৰ্ম
কৰা আৰু পৰি প্ৰস্তাৱ- দো পৰি আৰু - পৰি-
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100. বৰুৱা আৰু থোকা কৰা

Pabitra's letter said that there was a conspiracy to finish off Guha's political career. He had been given the fake picture by some deceased INA veteran's wife and despite reservations Guha fell for it. The explanation did not stop the holy man from expelling Guha from his close circle of disciples. Guha lived in agony till his death as a forgotten man in Kolkata in 2002.

"If he doesn't want to come out, what can I do," Guha bemoaned once. His book ran into many editions, the last one being in 1997. When it was re-released in 1983, Morarji Desai made a rare public appearance after his humiliating ouster as Prime Minister in 1979.

At the book release venue in Mumbai, the former PM appeared to be in two minds. He said he did not think Bose as alive after 1945. "Had Netaji been alive he would have definitely come to the country...No one else would have become the leader of the nation if he had come to India." Then he said "he did not like to have a controversy about Netaji whether he was dead or alive. There was, however, a story that he was alive and had taken *sanyas*". [100]

GD Khosla too was around at that time. Obviously he did not care too much about the talks of Bose being alive. His 1985 lookback at his long, eventful life—*Memory's gay chariot*—contained a passing remark that he thought nothing of what the Morarji government did to his report when it was there "for a brief period".

In post-Netaji commission years, Khosla kept himself busy as first president of the Authors' Guild of India. He passed his last years as a much contented man, residing at a locality where now Delhi's super rich live. His wife outlived him and his children did well in life—one son became an ambassador, another a top civil servant and youngest a leading architect. "GD" for his friends, Gopal Das Khosla remained a part of Delhi's high society almost right up to his death in 1996, when he was 95. He lived a life the kind of which Frank Sinatra had crooned in "My way"—especially the stanza about biting off more than what he could chew and then spitting it all out.

5. A proper inquiry at last

A blessing in disguise brought Subhas Chandra Bose back in national spotlight in the early 1990s. For all those years the Government did not think Bose deserved to be placed on a high pedestal, and suddenly India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna was proposed to be conferred on him. Quite possibly, the Narasimha Rao government aimed at downing two targets with one shot. A glittering ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan attended by Bose's near and dear ones would have helped the Congress blunt the charges of the party's hostility towards him. Then, riding high on the wave of sentiments, the Government could have set out to exorcise the ghost of disappearance mystery. Perhaps this was the reason why the official communication of 22 January 1992 stated that Bose was being given the award "posthumously".

Acceptance of the award by the Bose family would have amounted to their agreeing with the official version of his death. This in turn would have initiated the process to bring the Renkoji remains to India as Bose's ashes. The masterstroke, however, backfired and started a different chain of events which led to the setting up of a fresh inquiry. To Bose's followers and family members, the conferment of the Bharat Ratna merely opened old wounds. Injustices done to him, his followers and their legacy could not be whitewashed by one belated gesture. The outrage was universal and vitriolic. Articulating the family view, Dr Anita Pfaff said that her father "should have been one of the first to receive it!" [1]

But how could Bose be assumed dead when there was no indisputable evidence for it? Raising this point was lawyer Bijan Ghosh. He prayed before the Calcutta High Court that the Government must revoke the award. Additionally, Bijan sought that the Government should account for Bose's fate, bring him home if he is alive and if dead "furnish full particulars of...the place and manner of disposal of his mortal remains". [2]

The national relevance of his writ petition made the court refer it to the Supreme Court in 1993. Meanwhile, the Government got jittery and went back on its decision to confer the title on Bose. The case continued in the apex court for four years with eminent lawyer Fali Nariman giving some support to Ghosh. The 1997 order of the Bench comprising Justices Sujata Manohar and GB Pattanaik agreed with the Government view that "the matter was closed in the sense that no further steps were taken for the conferment" of the title. The judgment also observed that the court need not

go into the question whether the word "posthumously" has been justifiably used in the press communiqué or the wider question whether there is enough material available for reaching the conclusion that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose died either in the air crash of 18 August, 1945 or at any time thereafter. This is a wider issue on which undoubtedly in future, as in past, there will be divergent views. [3]

Bijan felt dejected for not been able to draw the Supreme Court's attention to the disappearance and yet by the time the order came, the mystery had started making headlines once again. Russian-speaking Dr Purabi Roy, a professor at Kolkata's Jadavpore University and widow of late Communist leader Kalyan Shankar Roy, son of Bose's one-time adversary Kiran Shankar Roy, brought home the message that for the first time the Russians themselves were dropping the hints.

In October 1996, Dr Roy and her Russian journalist friend arranged a meeting between Forward Bloc leaders Chitta Basu and Jayanta Roy on one side and on the other Alexander Kolesnikov, an army veteran turned academic, from the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences. In the lobby of Moscow's President Hotel, Kolesnikov gave Basu written details of an eye-popping classified Russian record purportedly showing "the minutes of a 1946 discussion among Soviet Politburo members

Voroshilov, Vyshinski, Mikoyan and Molotov. They were discussing whether Bose should be allowed to stay in the Soviet Union". [4] Kolesnikov advised that the Indian government should seek access to the Russian archives. This idea was to become the leitmotif of Dr Roy's big push.

In January 1997, Kolesnikov wrote a stirring essay titled "Destiny and death of Chandra Bose" in the Russian newspaper *Patriot*. He called Bose's disappearance "a mysterious point in Soviet-Indian relations" and wrote that "there was no definite reply from the Soviet side to the repeated statements that Bose remained alive and he was in the USSR". [5] Strangely, Chitta Basu did not make his note public on his return to India. Maybe, like any politician, he was waiting for the right occasion. It never came. He died during a train journey in 1997. Later, a search for Kolesnikov's note in his belongings yielded nothing.

Plucky Dr Roy battled on, making her case through media: "I need only a letter from the Government requesting the Russian authorities to allow me to go through classified documents kept in different archives." [6] There was no chance of the Government issuing any such letter. A 1995 Top Secret note for the Union Cabinet prepared by then Home Secretary K Padmanabhaiah with the approval of Home Minister SB Chavan gave away the Government's closed mind on the issue. The Committee of Secretaries (CoS) comprising Cabinet, Home, Foreign, Defence, Finance Secretaries averred that

there seems to be no scope for doubt that he died in the air crash of 18th August, 1945 at Taihoku. Government of India has already accepted this position. There is no evidence whatsoever to the contrary. If a few individuals/organisations have a different view, they seem to be guided more by sentimentality rather than by any rational consideration.

Consideration of the Committee of Secretaries

9. In view of what has been mentioned in foregoing para 6, a decision will have to be taken soon. There seems to be no scope for doubt that he died in the air crash of 18th August, 1945 at Taihoku. Government of India has already accepted this position. There is no evidence whatsoever to the contrary. If a few individuals/organisations have a different view, they seem to be guided more by sentimentality rather than by any rational consideration. The belief of these people that Netaji was alive and out of contact with any Indian, but would appear when found necessary, has also lost

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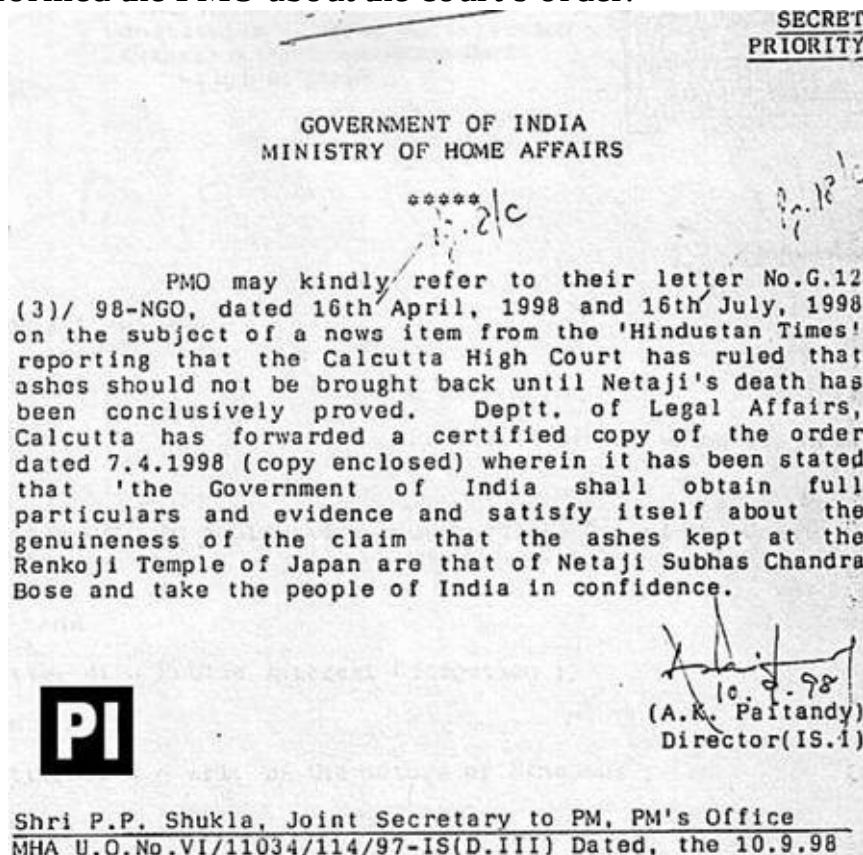
The year 1997 incidentally marked the 50th anniversary of Indian independence as well as the 100th since Bose's birth. On January 23 Bose's statue was unveiled in the courtyard of Parliament in the presence of Prime Minister Deve Gowda. The event prompted the *New York Times* to comment that "the adulation heaped" on Bose "involved doctrinal gymnastics by several of India's leading political parties that had previously condemned" him and was indicative that India had finally "officially rehabilitated" Bose. [7]

Not yet. Somewhere in the background, the age-old hostility was still lurking. It came to fore the same day at a function in the Red Fort when Atal Bihari Vajpayee stood up to speak his mind. The United Front government, whose survival depended upon the Congress party, appeared to have got some inkling of what Vajpayee was going to say. The master orator could not be silenced, so his live TV speech was censored as he began dwelling on Bose's ouster from the Congress. Discerning viewers realised in no time that there was more to the "transmission failure". The next day, the

Hindustan Times through its editorial “A Goebbels in DD” asked the Government to apologise.

In August a self-defeating move was made by Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, otherwise an admirer of Bose. His proposal to bring the Renkoji ashes to India set off another round of legal battle. It was going to be decisive this time. Ashim Kumar Ganguly pleaded before the Calcutta High Court in his writ petition that “without there being a conclusive proof” India could not accept that Bose had died in Taiwan. Chief Justice Prabha Shankar Mishra and Justice Barin Ghosh agreed and consequently directed on 7 April 1998 that “before accepting the ashes...as that of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the Government shall obtain full particulars and evidence and satisfy itself about the genuineness of the claim”. [8]

The Government took a note of the order. The general impression that the higher-ups don’t care much about “such an old and irrelevant issue” is a myth. Soon after the High Court order came out, the Director of Internal Security Division in the Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Prime Minister’s Office that “we have been pursuing this matter”. The ministry then sent a message to the government advocate through the Government’s most reliable courier—the Intelligence Bureau. Subsequently, the MHA informed the PMO about the court’s order.



By April end, Justice Mishra and Justice B Bhattacharya had issued another, history-bending order over a similar but much elaborate petition filed by advocate Rudrajyoti Bhattacharjee at the behest of Sunil Krishna Gupta. The judges heard arguments of the government counsel and concluded that

the official stand of the Government of India, thus, is that notwithstanding the reports of the inquiry committee and the commission of inquiry aforementioned, there are doubts as to the death of Netaji in the manner reports indicated and that there was/is a need to have further probe....

Taking the next logical step, the court ordered what the Government ought to have done on its own much earlier:

Respondents shall launch a vigorous inquiry in accordance with law by appointing, if necessary, a commission of inquiry as a special case for the purpose of giving an end to the controversy. [9]

In April 1998 Atal Bihari Vajpayee had just begun his second innings as the Prime Minister of India. As the BJP-led government took its time to take a call, Bose’s kin, researchers and Forward Bloc leaders—Debabrata Biswas, Dr Purabi Roy, Subrata Bose, VP Saini and others—lobbied for fresh inquiry. “The findings (of a new commission) could prove damning for some senior leaders of

the national movements in pre-Independence India,” [10] said Subrata, younger brother of Amiya Nath Bose, after emerging from a meeting with Home Minister LK Advani in August 1998. Mounting pressure on the Government was a Forward Bloc-sponsored resolution for a fresh inquiry in the West Bengal Assembly on 24 December 1998. Adopted unanimously, it said the people and scholars of India were still in dark and urged the Union Government to “make necessary arrangements for availability of records in and outside India”.

Finally, in a meeting convened by Home Minister LK Advani in March 1999, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Brajesh Mishra, Attorney General Soli Sorabjee and Home Secretary Kamal Pande, it was decided to comply with the court’s order. The Government consequently notified on 14 April 1999 that “the central government is of the opinion that it is necessary to appoint a commission of inquiry for the purpose of making an in-depth inquiry into a definitive matter of public importance”.

On Chief Justice of India’s recommendation, 66-year-old Manoj Kumar Mukherjee, former judge of the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of Bombay and Lucknow High Courts was appointed its chairman. The setting up of new commission was booed by the bulk of intellectuals and some leading English newspapers of Bengal. The matter described as “very sensitive and important” by the Internal Security Division director in a confidential letter dated 11 April 2000 to a future head of the Research and Analysis Wing was rubbed by a bunch of know-all. On 28 March 2000, a disparagingly titled editorial in the *Telegraph* scoffed:

The important question is why a commission is at all necessary. The findings of the Shah Nawaz Khan Commission [sic] and the GD Khosla Commission are gathering dust. A good historian, provided he is given free access to those findings and other evidence, written and oral, and is then allowed to express his opinions without fear or influence, will easily solve the mystery. A commission is not only a waste of money but in India also a convenient way to fudge the truth.

The unvarnished truth according to the enlightened writer of the editorial “Much ado about nothing” was that “the accepted version is that he died of burn injuries sustained in a plane crash in Taiwan in August 1945 and that his remains are kept in the Renkoji temple in Japan”.

The *Statesman* editorial on the same day lampooned the new commission: “Interesting times lie ahead of the commission’s members. They will have to travel abroad. To Japan, to Singapore, possibly the entire Far East. To Russia where, according to one school of thought, the leader was put through the Stalinist version of welcome. Why not Germany as well, to reconstruct the submarine ride....” It even asked “why is scarce public money being spent on a subject that has not been illuminated by any new evidence”.

That the new inquiry was a drag on public exchequer was also the message in the derisive comments from some reputed historians. “Waste of time”, Jawaharlal Nehru University’s Dr Harbans Mukhia said. “Why don’t we accept that the man is dead and that he died more than 50 years back.” [11] “Sheer waste of time and money”, historian Salil Ghosh opined. “At the end of the inquiry, the public should have the right to know about the money and time wasted.” [12] Delhi University historian Dr Sumit Sarkar thought that “any such inquiry would be a waste of time”. He felt that the subject was “so boring and unimportant” that he did “not even feel like reacting to it”. [13]

The tirade was going to impact the public. On 23 August 2001, NDTV reported a protest against the Justice Mukherjee’s inquiry in Kolkata. “The protesters say they’re sure nothing’s ever going to come out of the investigation and it’s time to stop wasting government money on it.” [14]

A year into the new commission’s inquiry, it was evident that it would throw up some surprises at least. There were a few shockers at the start. The first among these was the commission’s brush with the Government’s obsession with secrecy. In a note sent to the commission in July 2000, the PMO requested the commission not to publish the contents of the Top Secret files.

While sending photocopies of seven files marked as 'Top Secret/Secret' with a forwarding letter No. G-16(4)/2000-NGO dated July 24, 2000 (also marked 'Top Secret/Secret') addressed to the Secretary of the Commission, a Director of the Prime Minister's office, South Block, New Delhi has made the following request:

"It is further requested that while information contained in the 'Top Secret' papers may be made use of by the Commission, in camera, since these are classified as 'Top Secret', they may kindly consider not publishing the same."

Unfolding at the same time was the startling case of the most famous INA veteran alive. Head of INA's women wing and a Communist leader of repute, Colonel Lakshmi Sehgal gave one statement after another in favour of her belief in Bose's death in Taiwan. Such a conviction warranted that she give her side of the story to the new commission, especially since she hadn't made it to the Shah Nawaz Khan and GD Khosla panels.

Actually, Dr Sehgal was all set to give even the Mukherjee Commission a miss. But it so happened that the commission noted her assertion in the *Anandabazar Patrika* of 4 December 2000 that the Renkoji remains were of Bose's and summoned her. Dr Sehgal declined to appear, saying she was not "keeping good health". The commission then made it easier for the octogenarian icon by arranging for a hearing near her residence. She couldn't refuse this time. Overall, her health was not that bad. She still treated scores of patients who lined up each day in her clinic in Kanpur. Afterwards, she ran for the President's office. If her opponent was not the legendary Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, she might have even won.

On 4 June 2001, in the government circuit house in Kanpur, Lakshmi Sehgal took oath to "tell the truth, whole truth, nothing but truth, and not to conceal anything". She resolutely defended her conviction during the examination by the commission's Secretary PK Sengupta, a former state law secretary, and some deponents. Sehgal came up with some nice bytes: "We had no information then that he (Bose) would go to Manchuria." "The matter of his disappearance has now become a myth." She became tense when Bose mystery researcher VP Saini began putting questions to her as a deponent. Saini produced an old VHS tape containing a recording of his interview of hers eight years earlier. "Please tell us whether this is the video recording of the interview?" Saini asked her. Sehgal did not find it amusing that the tape should be played publicly on a video player brought at the venue by Saini. "Yes!" she said in a subdued tone as her visuals flickered on the TV screen.

Saini asked Sehgal to verify if he had indeed sought her guidance "to unfold the mystery shrouding the disappearance of Netaji" and had suggested that "the reason for Netaji's not returning to India might be that he was under arrest in Russia". "To that, you replied that there were some comrades of yours, especially Abid Hasan, who was personal secretary of Netaji, who had a feeling for a long time that Netaji had been arrested and he was in prison in Russia. Am I correct?"

With the tape playing before her, Sehgal had no escape route. "Yes, this is correct. I said so during the interview." It was not a case of a slip of tongue. Throughout the recorded interview, Sehgal sounded quite positive that there was more than a good chance of Bose having been alive after August 1945. She even gave Saini what she described as a "lead". She recalled that at the end of the WWII, she was examined by American intelligence personnel who told her that "they followed a person whose physical description answered to that of Netaji up to the Russian border". This was a big letdown. Dr

Sehgal should have shared this with the people long ago.

In the tape she also came across as a believer in a most atrocious conspiracy theory. She referred to some alleged message of Nehru to Mountbatten that Bose “should not be allowed to return to India until the process of partition of the country was completed”. She subscribed to Saini’s theory that “there was an international conspiracy to keep Netaji out of India”, and added that “India was a party to that conspiracy”. Having said all that, she couldn’t have but felt that “there should be further investigation to put a finality to the matter”. [15] Putting it other way, Dr Lakshmi Sehgal committed perjury before the Mukherjee Commission.

The inquiry of Justice Mukherjee commenced when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister and ended when Dr Manmohan Singh was gracing the top position. The difference between the two eras of these highly respected leaders was rhetorically explained to me by a commission official in this way—“During Atalji’s time we got some files, but Sardarji gave us nothing.” This sweeping demarcation got blurry many times. At the start of the inquiry itself, Justice Mukherjee felt dismayed when the government-controlled electronic media did not give publicity to the new inquiry. He had to bring it to the notice of then Information and Broadcasting Minister Arun Jaitley.

The Vajpayee government’s half-hearted assistance to the commission greatly disappointed all those who had pinned hopes on the BJP-led government. Its approach, rather dilemma, was best summed up in a report in the *Pioneer*. Deepak Sharma, now a reputed TV journalist, quoted a senior government official saying, “Whatever is relevant will be shown to the commission. But beyond a point, the files cannot be made public. It is too explosive.” [16] The same Atal Bihari Vajpayee who had in 1972 opposed Indira government’s decision to bar the Khosla Commission from visiting Taiwan remained passive when his own government did virtually the same to the Mukherjee Commission. While Justice Khosla’s visit to Taiwan became possible after pressure was mounted by Guha, Vajpayee and others, Justice Mukherjee’s inquiry in Taiwan followed his own efforts, with a little help from yours truly.

It was way back on 5 October 2001 that the Mukhrjee Commission first approached the Ministry of External Affairs to seek relevant information from Taiwan. In November 2002, the MEA was requested to “persuade the Government of Japan to get from the Government of Taiwan the original register of cremation permits for the period from 18.08.1945 to 21.08.1945”. [17] In June 2003 the MEA told the commission that no “relevant” documents are available in Taiwan. This was the same month when I beseeched the Republic of China (Taiwan) Government on behalf of all Indians to state facts about Bose’s reported death in their country. Within days, Taipei Mayor Dr Ying Jo Ma’s office responded that “according to the historical documents in Taipei city archives, there is no such record of a plane crash in Taipei on that day”.

ROC Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Ling-San emailed me following my subsequent appeal to President Chen Shui-bian. According to the minister, a thorough analysis of the records left by the Japanese showed that there had been only one major air crash during that period. An American C-47 transporter carrying about 26 released POWs had crashed near Mount Trident in Taitung area around 200 nautical miles away from Taipei. That was in September 1945. There was “no evidence” to show that any plane carrying Subhas Bose had ever crashed in or around Taipei between August 14 and October 25 of 1945.

I immediately informed the commission and advised its officials to contact the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in New Delhi. One official complained bitterly that the Government had not even bothered to tell them that such an office existed in the national capital.

In September 2003 there were two developments. On September 23 the MEA informed the commission that “after repeated reminders and follow-up by our Mission in Tokyo the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has responded in the matter (of obtaining original documents relating to

the alleged cremation of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose)". The Japanese communication read:

We have tried our best to find out in our old files a copy of the documents (relating [to] cremation permits') required by Justice Mukherjee. However, we are not able to find it so far. You may understand how difficult it is to find out nearly half a century old documents. [18]

Secondly, on September 24 the MEA called for "full details of the communication received from the Taiwanese side" with the request "that any information required to be obtained from Taiwan may be referred to the ministry". The MEA told the commission that "we do not recognise 'Republic of China' or 'Taiwan' and hence we do not have any official dealing with them". It was Indira Gandhi's days redux. In 2003 a foreign newspaper reported about India's secret military ties with Taiwan. Thinking about Guha's claim about similar ties in the 1970s, I wondered how in the world that squared with "no official dealing with them" policy.

Soon it transpired that the MEA was miffed with the Mukherjee Commission for contacting the Taiwanese authorities on its own and asked for an explanation. On 11 November 2003 the commission detailed the circumstances that had compelled it "to directly approach the authorities concerned in Taiwan" [19] notwithstanding the MEA's objection.

The main circumstance was my contacting the Taiwan government over a tabooed subject. I thanked my lucky stars that I was not living in the 1970s or 50s—the heydays of the Congress party's hegemony. The intelligence sleuths back then did not have too many terrorists to chase, so they had plenty of time to go after people who did what the Government did not like.

On November 25, the MEA parroted that the commission "should not send such communications directly to Taiwanese 'government' authorities" for it was "considering alternative options for seeking the assistance of other agencies/organisations for obtaining the requisite documents". The ministry promised to keep the commission "informed of the progress in this regard". [20] Thereafter, the commission "stopped communicating directly with the Government of Taiwan and the Mayor of Taipei with the hope that the Ministry of External Affairs would do the needful to enable the commission to obtain the relevant documents and information from Taiwan". [21] Sensing the sensitivities, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre had refused to assist the commission.

When nothing further was heard, the commission on 8 January 2004 sought "a progress report" [22] from the MEA. On March 15, the ministry reverted with "the outcome of efforts made by India-Taipei Association (ITA), a non-government office in Taipei". There was no outcome. ITA was beating about the bush, making inquiries in the archives. It told the ministry that it "could not get any document" and that "Taiwan's national archive does not have any record of the air crash". [23]

Another complication came to fore at this time. On 16 April 2004 Justice Mukherjee informed media that "the MEA was not inclined to fund its visit to Taiwan" and that "the government stand regarding the commission's Taiwan visit...seemed to be something different than what it was when this commission was set up". Mukherjee also said that minister Yashwant Sinha "would not be able to meet him before the elections". [24] It was only on June 25 that Justice Mukherjee was able to meet the minister. The new incumbent, Kunwar Natwar Singh, had earlier appeared before the commission. Singh cleared the visit to Taiwan and delighted commission officials who contrasted his action with the "inaction" of the BJP ministers Sinha and Jaswant Singh.

On 15 October 2004 Justice Mukherjee again informed the reporters that the commission "was ready to place its report on the basis of document available to it, if the Centre did not cooperate with the probe panel". The Home Ministry was coming in the way of its Taiwan visit.

Justice Mukherjee regretted the Union Home Department's communication of October 12 had made certain highly objectionable queries and, this, in turn, was delaying the inquiry with regard to the proposed visits. Stating that the commission replied to the Home Ministry's communication on October 14, he said: "It is humiliating for the commission to reply to the queries." [25]

The Home Ministry's posturing foretold the Government's intention to somehow put an end to the commission's inquiry. In November 2004 Finance Minister P Chidambaram in his resolute voice

announced that “no further extension” will be given to the commission beyond May 2005. From this time on, it was a race against time for the commission. Until the last, one did not know if the visit to Taiwan would be possible.

In the end, there was one last hurdle. On 30 December 2004 the commission got a message from the MEA, referring to a stinker of the ITA that “it would be difficult to make arrangements for the visit” because the commission had not “conveyed specific information about the places that the team intends to visit or about the people it wishes to interview”. [26] The commission gave it back to the MEA that it was strange that the ITA should have been asking for “specific information” when it was not done by the Indian missions in the countries the commission had either visited or was planning to visit. The message was understood and Justice Mukherjee visited Taiwan in January 2005. There he held direct consultations with the government officials in Taipei. They testified that the emails sent to me were genuine. But they were not too keen to share all the sources of their information. That’s quite understandable.

On January 27 Justice Mukherjee requested Sean Hsu of Foreign Ministry for cremation register for the period during which Bose had allegedly died. “Mr Hsu was kind enough to assure that he would do the needful within a fortnight”. [27] It was the same job the Japanese had told the MEA could not be done ever after months because it was very difficult to trace half-a-century old documents.

It hadn’t taken Justice Mukherjee long, given his vast experience, that tracing of the death and cremation records was the most vital aspect of the inquiry. He reviewed some, not all, of the pre-1947 intelligence reports and yet arrived at a view which would have pleased Colonel GD Anderson:

Reports of those inquiries indicate that they based their findings relying solely upon the oral testimony of some witnesses without caring to search for the relevant records of Taihoku airport, the army hospital, Taipei Municipal Bureau of Health and Hygiene and Taipei city crematorium to test the veracity of their assertion and, in case no such record was found, to incorporate that fact in their respective reports. [28]

Fulfilling the promise made by Hsu to Justice Mukherjee, the Taiwan government provided the commission the holy grail of Bose mystery: The 1945 vintage cremation register from the old crematorium of Taipei city. The record was quite comprehensive and meticulous, as you would expect Japanese records to be. Running into 25 big-sized pages, it listed details of about 273 persons—Japanese, Chinese, British—cremated or buried in Taihoku in between 17 and 27 August 1945.

2605	2664	2663	2662	2661	2660	四 百
病 死 者 名 單						
死亡年月日						
國籍						
姓名						
性別						
年齡						
職業						
地址						
甲	甲	乙	丙	丁	戊	己
男	女	男	女	男	男	女
出生地						
死地						
姓	姓	姓	姓	姓	姓	姓
名	名	名	名	名	名	名
字	字	字	字	字	字	字

A minute study of the record carried out by an expert recommended by the Japanese consulate in Kolkata showed that neither Subhas Bose, nor General Shidei, nor pilot Warrant Officer Aoyagi, nor

associate pilot Major Takizawa had been cremated in Taipei during this period. An entry in the name of Ichiro Okura was very much there uncontestedly proving his death. Habibur Rahman and the Japanese had obviously been untruthful when they spoke of the cremation of the air crash victims in Taipei. No plane crashed and there was no cremation of the people who supposedly lost their lives as a result of it. The official theory now stood turned on its head.

Justice Mukherjee also discovered the truth behind the sham statements of the only living eyewitness of Bose's "death" in Taipei. Right from the time he volunteered before the war crimes liaison section in October 1946, Dr Tenayoshi Yoshimi insisted that since the Indian leader had died of extensive burning and shock, he specified it in the death certificate he issued on 18 August 1945. Yoshimi testified before the Shah Nawaz Committee that this certificate carried the name of "Kata Kana", Japanese for "Chandra Bose". But his junior Dr Toyoshi Tsuruta, told a British army investigation in July 1945 that it was he who had issued the certificate. If it was a "minor" discrepancy, in a major one, the Japanese government in 1955 told the Government of India that the certificate was issued under the name of "Ichiro Okura" with a view to keeping Bose's death a secret.

The document mentions the name of ICHIRO OKURA as the deceased and that of TANEYOSHI YOSHIMI as the applicant. Since the death of Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose was kept strictly confidential at that time, it is believed that this cremation permit on ICHIRO OKURA must correspond to the case for late Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose.

Therefore, I wish to enclose herewith the above-mentioned copy of "Cremation Permit" together with its translation in English.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/- Hisajii Hattori



The Gaimusho's record paid little attention to Dr Yoshimi's statement and instead carried details from an interview with Dr Tsurtua, now saying he had definitely issued the certificate for Okura on 18 August 1945. But when he appeared before the Shah Nawaz Committee, Dr Tsurtua said that the certificate was issued by Yoshimi only. Dr Yoshimi told all the three panels—Shah Nawaz, Khosla and Mukherjee—that the certificate signed by him bore the name "Chandra Bose". Shah Nawaz and GD Khosla accepted this version and the latter hailed Dr Yoshimi as "a most convincing witness of truth" in his report.

To clear the confusion on this vital point, Justice Mukherjee surveyed the other evidence on record. This is the difference between investigating an issue and whitewashing it. It stood out that the Japanese authorities in Formosa followed a set procedure to dispose of the dead. It involved issuance of a doctor's report following a death. Thereafter the municipal bureau was approached for a cremation permit prepared on the basis of this certificate.

The permit recording details such as the date of birth of the deceased, their address, reason for death, date and time etc. was issued only after verification by the bureau staff. The body was also brought at the bureau for inspection under the rules. After it was done, the body and the permit issued were taken to the crematorium, where post-cremation an entry was made in the cremation register against the relevant serial number of the permit. Since this procedure was followed for "Chandra Bose", as Dr Yoshimi and other witnesses had testified, there must have been a clear paper trail, starting from the hospital and ending with an entry in the register maintained at the crematorium.

However, the doctor's report, police verification report, cremation permit and the entry at the

crematorium register all turned out to have been issued for soldier Ichiro Okura. While the names of both Yoshimi and Tsuruta figured in these records, Yoshimi misled the Mukherjee Commission, saying he never knew any Ichiro Okura and certainly did not issue any certificate for his death.

In 1955 the Japanese government had asserted that Ichiro Okura was a fake name used for Bose. If the Government of India was sincere about finding the truth about Bose's fate, this was the smoking gun. According to the records, Okura was born on 9 April 1900. He died on 19 August 1945 due to heart-attack. These details were not true for Bose, going by the official version. It was a clear-cut case of subterfuge resorted to by the Japanese. But India never thought it fit to press Japan to explain why it insisted that the records for Okura had corresponded to Bose and by what logic. Poor Yoshimi was caught in the middle of the Okura tangle as it was his name that appeared on the records. Congressman Shah Nawaz Khan saw nothing amiss and biased GD Khosla came out with what he was immensely good at: Weaving tales. "The certificates have no probative value because they do not purport to relate to Bose's death and cremation," he admitted and yet did not address the Japanese motive in claiming that the Okura records pertained to Bose.

Khosla theorised that since the truthful Dr Yoshimi was saying so, there must have been a doctor's certificate in Chandra Bose's name, and it must have got destroyed with other military records of that time. This inference was misleading because detailed Japanese-era crematorium records were and are still available in Taiwan. Accessed by Harin Shah in 1946, British/Taiwanese officers in 1956, Samar Guha and Sunil Krishna Gupta in 1973, they threw up no reference to either Bose or any other victim of the reported air crash, whose deaths were certainly not required to be kept secret. Also on record was a 1955 Japanese government communication, which GD Khosla saw, stating clearly that in the files of doctors' reports, death certificates etc. brought to Japan from Taiwan after 1945 there was no trace of any record about him. Also non-existent were the records for Shidei and others who supposedly died with Bose in Taipei.

Khosla's "truthful witness" Yoshimi was not being straight. Justice Mukherjee concluded that "the absence of any record relating to Netaji's death and cremation (in respect of which he claimed to have played a pivotal role) clearly demonstrates that he [Yoshimi] was not telling the truth. [29] Reinforcing it was a mysterious move of the doctor 43 years after the alleged air crash. In 1988 Dr Yoshimi issued a certificate for the death of "Chandra Bose" as a result of burn injuries. Asked by Justice Mukherjee under what circumstances he had produced this certificate, the former Japanese army officer and a man of razor-sharp memory—quite evident even in his advanced age—said "he did not have any clear memory about that".

Dr Yoshimi could not have issued a duplicate certificate without having the original or its copy in his possession. And he never had them; for his statement to the Shah Nawaz Committee was that "he did not know what had happened to the hospital records after his departure from there on January 21, 1946". In fact no death or document record bearing the name of "Chandra Bose" was ever in existence among the hospital and cremation records kept in Tokyo and Taiwan. The "Chandra Bose" death certificate was as much real as Bose's death.

Justice Mukherjee was constrained to deduce that "Dr Yoshimi's failure to give any reason, much less a satisfactory one, for belated preparation of the copy [of the death certificate]...clearly indicate that the above document cannot but be a manufactured one". [30] And since the manufactured 1988 certificate reached Joychandra Singh, a researcher and activist assisting the Government of India in proving the Taipei death story, it is not too difficult to guess the motive behind the fabrication.

If Bose had not died in Taiwan, what happened to him? All hints pointed up the Russian escape and a number of deponents before the commission wanted inquiry in Russia. February 2001 onwards, the Mukherjee Commission repeatedly asked the Government to make arrangements for its visit to the Russian Federation. In 2003 the MEA was requested "to kindly approach the Government of Russia

for access of the commission to the archives of KGB (FSB) Federal Security Bureau". In response, the MEA conveyed the Russian government's stand that there were no "records in the archive relating to...Bose". Then the commission made available to the ministry the names and addresses of Russian witnesses cited by Dr Purabi Roy. The commission wanted to examine them during its proposed visit to the country. The ministry was going to take forever to trace these witnesses.

There was no sign of the Russia visit materializing even in February 2005. Deadline hanging over his head, Justice Mukherjee decided to write his report on the basis of the inquiry made thus far. His staffers asked the Home Ministry officials to make arrangements for their handing over the report. Mukherjee was not interested in coming to Delhi. In his last meeting with Home Minister Shivraj Patil, the judge had not even been asked to sit and was given a dressing down. "Mr Patil is learnt to have opined that the inquiry had gone on for 'too long', and that 'too much money' has been spent on it," [31] the *Pioneer* rightly reported.

But many people interested in the inquiry wanted the commission to visit Russia. Many lobbied in their own ways. I approached former union ministers Murli Manohar Joshi and George Fernandes. Battling the Alzheimer's disease, the socialist warhorse was unable to do as much as he could have. It was erudite Dr Joshi who made the Government extend the commission's tenure to enable it to visit Russia. "Why didn't you come to me earlier?" he asked me in our first meeting. He clarified that as the HRD Minister he was not in the loop when the matter was handled by the NDA government. He met former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and discussed the issue. I don't know what exactly transpired between them, but apparently the former Prime Minister backed whatever Dr Joshi did afterwards. He met Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Home Minister Patil and pressed that national interest warranted the inquiry to continue. On 15 March 2005, Dr Joshi wrote to Dr Singh:

I am confident that you would agree that the people should not feel that the probe became infructuous due to non-cooperation of the Government. The country expects that all efforts would and should be made to bring the true facts to light. This is minimum what we should do in honour of this great son of Mother India.

While this happened, I made a desperate bid to draw the Supreme Court's notice to the case through a writ petition. It was dismissed on 6 May 2005 by the Bench of Chief Justice RC Lahoti and Justices DM Dharmadhikari and GP Mathur. In its short order, the court said:

We are not satisfied that any case for invoking the extraordinary jurisdiction of this Court under Article 32 of the Constitution has been made out. ...It is for the Government of India to take a decision either in the matter of extension of the term of the commission or such other decision as it may deem fit to take on the report, as and when it is submitted, consistently with the provisions of the Commission of Inquiry Act. We do not express any opinion thereon.

I was hurt by the judgment. I think I have a right to disagree with the honourable court without being disrespectful. I do not agree with everything that Lord Ram did, and yet I am a faithful. It was my misfortune that my well-documented but hurriedly drafted petition and spirited arguments of my counsel failed to impress upon the court that the delay in the case was caused due to impediments created by the Government. The court should have been compassionate while disposing of my case. Two days after it happened, another Bench of the apex court heard a matter pertaining to a BSF jawan declared dead after he was reported missing in the 1971 war. Here was the approach I was anticipating would be applied to my case: "Look for jawan declared dead in '71 war, says SC" read a story in the *Times of India* on 8 May 2005: "The Supreme Court has showed deference to the belief of one woman that her husband is alive, though the authorities decaled him dead in the 1971 war. It has asked the authorities to keep searching for him."

I may have goofed up with my petition, my counsel may not have argued properly, but I do feel that the honourable court showed little deference while handling such a matter of national importance. How could the apex court take an unemotional approach towards Netaji's fate when it is known to empathise and show touching concern in matters relating to even those who have been a menace to the society? The Supreme Court recently frowned upon illegal killing of a Naxal, commenting that "our Republic can not behave like this and kill its own children". [32] This Republic would not have come

into existence but for Subhas Chandra Bose. Of course, this was a different matter, but all I am doing is making a point about what I think is the right way to handle a matter of utmost national importance.

Legal setback was a bad episode, but the efforts of Dr MM Joshi, and probably the threat of a tussle in the Supreme Court, made the Government rethink its decision not to grant another extension to the Mukherjee Commission. On May 4, a day before the Supreme Court was to hear my petition, the commission was informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that it was actively considering giving the panel another extension. "A formal communication will be issued on completion of the required formalities which may be awaited." [33]

The commission's much-awaited Russian visit took place from 20 to 30 September 2005. Joining Justice Mukherjee there were some deponents, including Dr Purabi Roy, and the *Pioneer* senior editor Udayan Namboodiri. According to the commission report, it "visited some archives located in Moscow, Omsk, Irkutsk and St Petersburg as could be arranged by the Indian Embassy in Moscow in collaboration with the Russian government. The commission could not get any opportunity to visit the Central Archives of FSB (KGB) and the President's Archives of the Russian Federation". [34]

At Omsk in the Siberian region adjoining Manchuria, the state archive authorities produced two volumes containing the names of persons sent to the various concentration camps in Soviet years. There was no mention of Bose in those enormous volumes, the commission was told. The archive director told Justice Mukherjee that since all visiting foreigners in Stalin's era were required to register themselves with the authorities, documents about Bose must exist in Russian archives if he had indeed come to the USSR and "used his real name". But if Bose had come incognito, or been assigned a pseudonym, no record was expected to be found. A classic chicken and egg situation that is: You can't get the records unless you have the assigned name, and you can't get the assigned name unless you have the records.

Namboodiri reported that wherever Justice Mukherjee went, "he was told by responsible officials that evidence, if any, of Netaji's sojourn in Stalinist Russia, can only be found in some 'centralised' place. By 'centralized' they mean Lubayanka". That is the HQ of former KGB. The commission's 10-day tour produced "nothing except exasperation", Namboodiri, who had been following the Bose case for years, commented. "It was *nyet, nyet* and *nyet* all through. Yet, one fact that cannot be denied anymore is this: The Russians are certainly hiding something." [35]

The only place where the commission was offered some records was the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. Its director told Justice Mukherjee that they had one file each on Subhas and Sarat Bose. The one on Subhas contained *Tass* reports on Bose-related newsitems published in Indian, British and Chinese newspapers for the period 1942-1956. Namboodiri wondered why "Russia was so interested in Indian media coverage on Netaji's disappearance till 1956?" [36]

The commission examined some Russian witnesses whose names were suggested by Dr Purabi Roy. The presence of all of them was "arranged with their consent by the Indian Embassy in Moscow". [37] It was an exercise in futility as all the four Russians responded in short, measured sentences that they had no knowledge about the possibility of Bose being in the USSR after 1945. The hearings took place on 20 and 21 September in the conference room of the embassy. WWII expert Prof Boris Sokolov, 48, would go so far as to say that

if really Mr Bose was transported to USSR in 1945, then it should be kind of a big special operation and the preparation of such kind of operation should cover more than one month. I have no proof really that he was in USSR in 1945 or later. But, there should be documents in the Archives of Special Services only if Mr Bose really was in the Soviet Union in 1945 or later. I never worked in FSB Archives and could not prove or deny that fact. [38]

Dr Purabi Roy later said that the Russians had "turned hostile" under official pressure. I agreed with her stance for the most part, except that at times she went a little overboard with her suspicion-fuelled belief that Bose met his end in the USSR. Examination of Prof EN Komorov of the Institute of Oriental Studies was quite enlightening on this aspect. He told the commission that probably it was Dr

Roy and not him who had remarked during their previous conversation that “let’s take it this way, he [Netaji] was here and he died here”.

What I actually told Dr Roy was what would have probably happened to Netaji if he were here in 1945. Prominent political leaders who were given asylum in the USSR were treated well by the Russians, like Sukarno.... Soviet leaders did not like Nehru. Stalin might have taken interest in Subhas. [39]

But indeed something was fishy about the Russian witnesses. Komorov left without signing the record of his examination. The commission also noted that “Mr Yuri Kuznets declined to depose before the commission. Mr Kolesnikov, another witness, could be ultimately traced by the Indian embassy only after the commission reached Moscow. He, however, could not be made available for his examination since he was reportedly posted in Turkey”. [40] Alexander Kolesnikov was the same person who had claimed to have seen a record showing Bose’s presence in the USSR in 1946. The commission kept reminding the Government for months and months to trace him. One needn’t have Udayan’s experience as a journalist to question how was “it possible for any citizen of a country, leave alone a diplomat, to be untraceable?” [41]

Despite limitations and official stonewalling, Justice Mukherjee made several path-breaking findings. Unlike GD Khosla’s, his report was a transparency-seeker’s delight. Of the three volumes of the report, two contained status reports issued by him right from the inception, laying bare to all his conduct and approach—also that of the Government. The main report comprised a concise narrative roughly the size of the two chapters of this book. It did not stray from the subject matter germane to the inquiry, something GD Khosla did quite often in his lengthy report. More than half of the Mukherjee Commission report carried copies of the exhibits relied upon by the judge to arrive at his findings. A descriptive list of all the 308 exhibits was appended at the end of the report. The Khosla Commission report had none. Till date no one knows where the bulk of its exhibits are.

There can be no better way to summarise Justice Mukherjee’s findings than to excerpt his legalistic report in points:

* For proper appreciation thereof the entire story of the plane crash, death of Netaji in the hospital and his cremation, being interlinked, has to be considered as a whole and not in parts.

* Recording a firm finding on this issue [*by merely*] treating the oral evidence of the eyewitness about Netaji’s death and cremation as axiomatically true would be non sequitur and over-simplification of and a superficial approach to this complex issue.

* If...[*the contradictory evidence of the eyewitnesses to Bose’s death*] is accepted at its face value, still, it must be said, definite findings about Netaji’s death and his cremation can be arrived at if and when the evidence passes the two basic litmus tests of appreciation of evidence, namely, probability and the aphoristic saying, “Men may lie but circumstances do not.”

* The best corroborative evidence which can unmistakably prove the factum of Netaji’s death and cremation as deposed by the eye witnesses will be the contemporaneous official records relating thereto. Conversely, if there is no such record the commission would not be justified in drawing a definite conclusion on the facts in issue solely relying on the *ipse dixit* of the eyewitnesses.

* Proof of a secret plan as also the manner of its execution is largely inferential but the inference to be drawn must be a reasonable one supported by attending facts and circumstances.

* Netaji could not have thought of taking decision to escape—not to speak of translating that thought into action—without the active support and cooperation of the Japanese military authorities.

* That Netaji’s decision to go out of Japan was pursuant to a plan formulated on the advice and with the active co-operation and support of the Japanese military authorities stands established by overwhelming evidence adduced before the [Shah Nawaz committee and the two commissions. *Mukherjee accessed all available records of Khosla & Shah Nawaz panels in view of the fact that most witnesses had died much before his inquiry started.*]

* A secret plan was contrived to ensure Netaji’s safe passage to which Japanese military authority and Habibur Rahman were parties. ...The purpose of his (Netaji’s) flight was to go to the Soviet Union....

* The death of Ichiro Okura [*a Japanese soldier*] owing to heart failure on August 19, 1945 and his cremation on August 22, 1945 on the basis of a permit issued on the previous day were passed off as those of Netaji.

* The very fact that the Japanese army authorities wanted to pass off the death and cremation of Ichiro Okura as those of Netaji is an eloquent proof of their ensuring Netaji’s safe passage by creating a smokescreen.

* Obviously, in cooking up the story of Netaji’s death in the plane crash and giving it a modicum of truth they (the Japanese military authorities and Habibur Rahman) had no other alternative than resorting to suppression of facts and in doing so they not only invited material contradictions in their evidence...but also left latent loopholes which have now been discovered.

* Lest the identity of the dead body of Ichiro Okura should have been discovered by the Bureau people who were not likely to be party to the escape plan, the Japanese army officers resorted to various precautionary measures at the time when the dead body of Ichiro Okura was brought to the Bureau for regulatory inspection.... That Habibur Rahman was also a party to the escape

plan is evidenced by the prominent role he played in ensuring that the Bureau people could be misled in believing that the body which was going to be cremated was that of Netaji.

* The very fact that the Japanese Buddhist custom, viz. preservation of the dead body for three days before cremation which fits in the Ichiro Okura's death on the 19th and his cremation three days thereafter, i.e. on the 22nd, and picking up of bones from every portion of the body after the cremation and keeping the same with the ashes was adhered to is another circumstance which indicates that the body cremated and the mortal remains taken there from were of Ichiro Okura and not Netaji.

* The eloquent proof of Habibur Rahman's role in the escape plan and also the manner in which he wanted to execute the same is furnished by the fact that he ensured the photographing of the dead body minus the face.

* If this evidence of Habibur Rahman [*that the plane nosedived from a fairly high altitude*] is to be believed, then none of the 12/13 passengers—not to speak of the crew members—could have survived. Viewed in that context the explanation sought to be given by the surviving occupants of the ill-fated plane that as Netaji was sitting by the side of the petrol tank, gasoline flashed all over his body resulting in his sustaining third-degree burns cannot also be believed, for Netaji could not have been in his original position on the floor immediately following the plane's nosediving.

* There cannot be any manner of doubt that the version of Habibur Rahman about the nature of injuries sustained by him in the plane crash is suspect.

* Another significant fact that raises a serious doubt about the truth of Netaji's death in the plane crash is furnished by the unusual conduct of Habibur Rahman as evinced by his non-commendation of the above news. If Netaji had really died in the manner as alleged it was expected that he (Habibur Rahman) would as the only surviving member of INA immediately report about it, more so when it related to the death of his supreme commander, to his superiors in the army and his colleagues in Bangkok, Singapore, Saigon and Tokyo. His conspicuous silence cannot be explained in any way except that he was playing a very vital role along with the Japanese army authorities in formulation and execution of Netaji's escape plan.

The foregoing made Justice Mukherjee arrive at his momentous finding on “the basis of robust circumstantial evidence on record”:

On a conspectus of all the facts and circumstances relevant to the above issues it stands established that emplaning at Saigon on August 17, 1945 Netaji succeeded in evading the Allied forces and escaping out of their reach and as a camouflage thereof the entire make-belief story of the air crash, Netaji's death therein and his cremation was engineered by the Japanese army authorities including the two doctors and Habibur Rahman and then aired on August 23, 1945 through a statement prepared by Shri SA Ayer at the direction of the aforesaid authorities to give imprimatur of the INA to the death news of Netaji.

...The question whether Netaji thereafter landed in Russia or elsewhere cannot be answered for dearth of evidence. [42]

In spite of such well-grounded finding, the report got dismissed. Pranab Mukherjee made light of the arbitrary decision in the Lok Sabha on 18 May 2006 saying, “There are umpteen number of cases where the reports of the commissions have been rejected by the Government. Here is nothing new.”

There was certainly something novel about the Government changing its mind overnight over a nationally important issue. This is what happened in the Bose case. Pranab Mukherjee's elephantine memory failed him during his deposition before the Mukherjee Commission. He had no recollection of what Prime Minister Desai said in Parliament in August 1978. But Desai's was the most categorical, highest-level statement ever issued from the Government's side. It had four distinct parts:

1. Reasonable doubts have been cast on the correctness of the conclusions reached in the reports of Shah Nawaz Khan and GD Khosla.

2. Various important contradictions in the testimony of the witnesses to Netaji's death have been noticed.

3. Further contemporary official documentary records have also become available.

4. In the light of those doubts and contradictions and those records, the Government finds it difficult to accept that the earlier conclusions [of GD Khosla and Shah Nawaz] are decisive.

Compared to Desai, the other prime ministers have either remained mum or made equivocal statements. Prime Minister Nehru after making repeated claims in favour of air crash version—such as that there was overwhelming evidence for it—had to concede in 1962 that there was “no direct and precise proof” to back it. During his official visit to Renkoji temple, Prime Minister Vajpayee described it as a place holding Netaji's *smiritya* (memories), avoiding the Hindi word *asthiya* (mortal remains). There is no known statement of any other Prime Minister—from Lal Bahadur Shastri to Dr Manmohan Singh—so precise as that of Desai's.

The importance of Desai's statement was underscored by the Calcutta High Court in 1998. The

court declared that the “official stand” of the Government is that “there are doubts to the death of Netaji” and therefore there is a “need to have further probe”. The court also pressed that the official stand “as expressed in the Lok Sabha on 28-8-1978 is reiterated on 11-04-1979 by the then Minister of State of Home Affairs Shri Dhanik Lal Mandal”. Supporting the court was the government counsel who “categorically assured” the High Court that the Government of India “is maintaining even now that a further/fresh inquiry/probe is required and the information that Netaji died in the plane crash on August 18, 1945 is full of loopholes, contradictions and therefore inconclusive”.

The Calcutta High Court’s order led to issuance of a notification by the Government of India on 14 April 1999. Here the Government agreed to launch an “in-depth inquiry into a definitive matter of public importance”. It agreed with the court and set out the terms of references for the commission exactly in the same way the court’s order had outlined.

- a) whether Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is dead or alive;
- b) if he is dead whether he died in the plane crash, as alleged;
- c) whether the ashes in the Japanese temple are ashes of Netaji;
- d) whether he has died in any other manner at any other place and, if so, when and how;
- e) if he is alive, in respect of his whereabouts.

A plain reading of the terms established that the Government did not know what had happened to Bose and this was for the new commission to find out. Conversely speaking, if the Government had any opinion about any of the above, it would not have referred that point of inquiry to the commission. The option of issuing a white paper was always with the Government, and indeed it was considered by Home Minister LK Advani. Further, the Government had the chance to make its stance clear to the Mukherjee Commission. It never did.

I know what you are thinking: The BJP was in power then.

No! Dr Manmohan Singh was the Prime Minister for quite some time in early 2005 when Justice Mukherjee heard the arguments of deponents and lawyers. At that time the senior counsel appearing for the Government of India argued that "there were glaring discrepancies in the evidence" [43] and even took credit for the commission's finding evidence in Taiwan that Bose had not died there.

The Forward Bloc counsel, Keshab Bhattacherjee, pointed out that throughout the inquiry the Government never opposed "the averments made in several affidavits wherein specific statements are made to the effect that there was no plane crash". He submitted that in absence of any government affidavit opposing such claims, it was obvious that such statements were "deemed to have been admitted by the Union of India".

But after the Mukherjee Commission report was submitted with the conclusion that rather than dying in Taipei, Bose appeared to have escaped toward the USSR, the Government did a 180. In a somersault that can only be inspired by political considerations, Home Minister Shivraj Patil said the Government was reverting to the findings of previous inquiries set up during the Congress rule.

If there were any lingering doubts about the Government of India’s bona fides on the Bose disappearance issue, they were put to rest when Rudrajyoti Bhattacharjee, Sunil Gupta and others—whose writ petition had led to formation of the Mukherjee Commission—went back to the Calcutta High Court. The affidavit-in-opposition filed on behalf of the PMO and the MHA in October 2007 made it quite clear that the Government was scarcely interested in resolving the issue. The basic thrust in the affidavit was to cover up the matter by distortion and selective presentation of facts. The affidavit would have you believe, without much elaboration of course, that the British and American intelligence teams corroborated Bose’s death. It says there is no evidence/document to prove that Bose had a plan to escape and that he did not die in the plane crash.

The evidence is there, but jaundiced eyes can’t see it.

The Government said the witnesses appearing before the first two probes were recalling an event that took place 11 and 25 years earlier. “It would be well-nigh impossible for the witnesses to

remember every detail of the accident. It is reiterated that discrepancies do not disprove the air crash story."

My submission is: Why did the Government not tell this to the High Court and the commission earlier? No one is nitpicking, but the discrepancies were a wee bit too many to raise eyebrows of any impartial investigator. They were aplenty even before the intelligence teams which had scoured for evidence immediately after the news of crash came in. Habibur Rahman made contradictory statements within a month of the crash.

How could the so-called eyewitnesses, for example, ever forget for the rest of their lives the dramatic sequence of Subhas Bose coming out of the plane wrapped in fire and one of them risking his life to try and rescue him. Who was the one? Rahamn said he tried to save Netaji; Major Takahashi said no, he did it; Nonogaki said he and Rahman together did their best and Nakamura insisted the credit went to him alone. If four people claiming to have witnessed one major event of history give out four different versions, only a kangaroo court will give their account any credence.

The contradictions will pile up if one sits down to study the 21 volumes which contain the record of oral evidence tendered before the Khosla Commission. But where do you get them? The Ministry of Home Affairs held them close to its chest as a "Secret" record till the last year when Chandrachur Ghose and I snatched them away at the end of a long-drawn RTI tug of war. The volumes are still not available in any archive. They were given to the Mukherjee Commission after considerable delay so that, I suspect, the commission could not subject them to minute analysis and discover a whole range of anomalies.

Deponents and lawyers, including the one representing the Government, argued before Justice Mukherjee that "the evidence of the witnesses bristle with material discrepancies and contradictions both *inter se* and between the statements made before the committee, the earlier commission and other inquiring authorities of foreign governments". Section 155 of the Indian Evidence Act says "the credit of a witness may be impeached...by proof of former statement inconsistent with any part of his evidence which is liable to be contradicted". Rudra Jyoti Bhattacharjee referred to a court ruling which said that in case of contradictions in oral evidence, the court should look for documentary evidence. That's why Justice Mukherjee cross-checked the veracity of oral evidence by searching for supporting documents of Bose's alleged death in Taiwan. It is shocking that the Government should now find fault with this approach of the former Supreme Court judge, conveniently overlooking that from day one this was also the government approach.

To put things in right perspective, here's what Colonel Anderson wrote to the Intelligence Bureauin February 1946:

For final and positive proof, a British investigation team would need to be sent up to Formosa from Saigon and Hanoi to examine the hospital records at Taihoku. [44]

E. For final and positive proof, a British investigation Team would need to be sent up to Formosa from Saigon and Hanoi to examine the hospital records at Taihoku. As British Forces are now leaving P.I.C. it would appear that the despatch of such a Team if considered necessary must be regarded as urgent.



Copy to:- I.B. Govt. of India.

*Sd/- G. J. India
Lt. Col.
Offg. Comdt. C.S.D.I.C.*

In 1951, Dr BV Keskar, the Deputy Minister for External Affairs, recalled in Parliament a 1946 statement of Prime Minister Nehru that Bose had died and the main proof of it was a death certificate issued in Taiwan.

This conclusion, said Dr Keskar, had been confirmed from reports received from the Japanese government and their agencies and in particular by a statement of a medical officer of the Japanese army who stated that he had made out a death certificate, the cause of death being extensive burns and shock. [45]

Five years later, the same ministry, which was headed by Nehru, approached the British High

Commission over the inquiry of Shah Nawaz. It made a specific request for procuring Bose's death and cremation records from Taiwan.

CONFIDENTIAL

encl

Inward Telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office

F

FROM: U.K. HIGH COMMISSIONER IN INDIA

RPTD: TAMSUI
HONG KONG
BANGKOK }
TOKYO } (SAVING)
RANGOON }

C1852/1
C1951/2

D: Delhi 14.30 hours 3rd May 1956
R: 16.03 hours 3rd May 1956

CYPHER

TNA

No. 701 CONFIDENTIAL

Addressed Commonwealth Relations Office No. 701, repeated Tamsui No. M144, Hong Kong No. M145, Bangkok No. 7 Saving, Tokyo No. M45 Saving, Rangoon No. 3 Saving (Commonwealth Relations Office please pass Tamsui and Hong Kong).

In view of persistent though probably unfounded rumours that Subhas Chandra Bose leader of the Indian National Army, during the war was not killed as reported at the time in an air crash in Formosa but is still alive, Indian Government have appointed a committee to investigate and if possible establish facts. Committee is headed by Shahnaw Khan, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, and has two other members, Bose's brother and S.N. Mitra, I.C.S., formerly Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands.

2. Commission plans to visit Bangkok, Tokyo and Hong Kong and I believe Rangoon but for political reasons is unable to visit Formosa. Indian Government have asked whether H.M. Consul in Tamsui could seek out certain Formosan witnesses and obtain a copy of cremation certificate.

Indian government have asked whether HM Consul in Tamsui could seek certain Formosan witnesses and obtain a copy of cremation certificate. [46]

5. If any of papers listed below are available Indians would be grateful for relevant extracts (4 copies) with certified English translations both being authenticated by H.M. Consul:-

- (A) doctor's report on Bose's death at Nanmon Hospital circa 18th August 1945;
- (B) police report on death;
- (C) Cremation Permit issued by Bureau circa 20th August 1945.

Copy to:-

D.II

Foreign Office
Colonial Office

Mr. Mayell
Mr. K.G. Ashton

TNA

Copy to Foreign Office (Telegram Section) for retransmission to Tamsui.

If any of papers listed below are available Indians should be grateful for relevant extracts (four copies) with certified English translations both being authenticated by HM Consul:-

- (A) Doctor's report on Bose's death at Nanmon Hospital circa 18th August 1945;
- (B) Police report on death;
- (C) Cremation permit issued by Bureau circa 20th August 1945. [47]

Justice Mukherjee did exactly what the British investigators wanted to in 1946 and the Government of India did in 1956. And all he got was Ichiro Okura's death certificate and his name on the cremation permit. Would Anderson have been satisfied that it was "the final and positive proof"?

Our government should have been grateful to Justice Mukherjee for cracking the mystery. But the

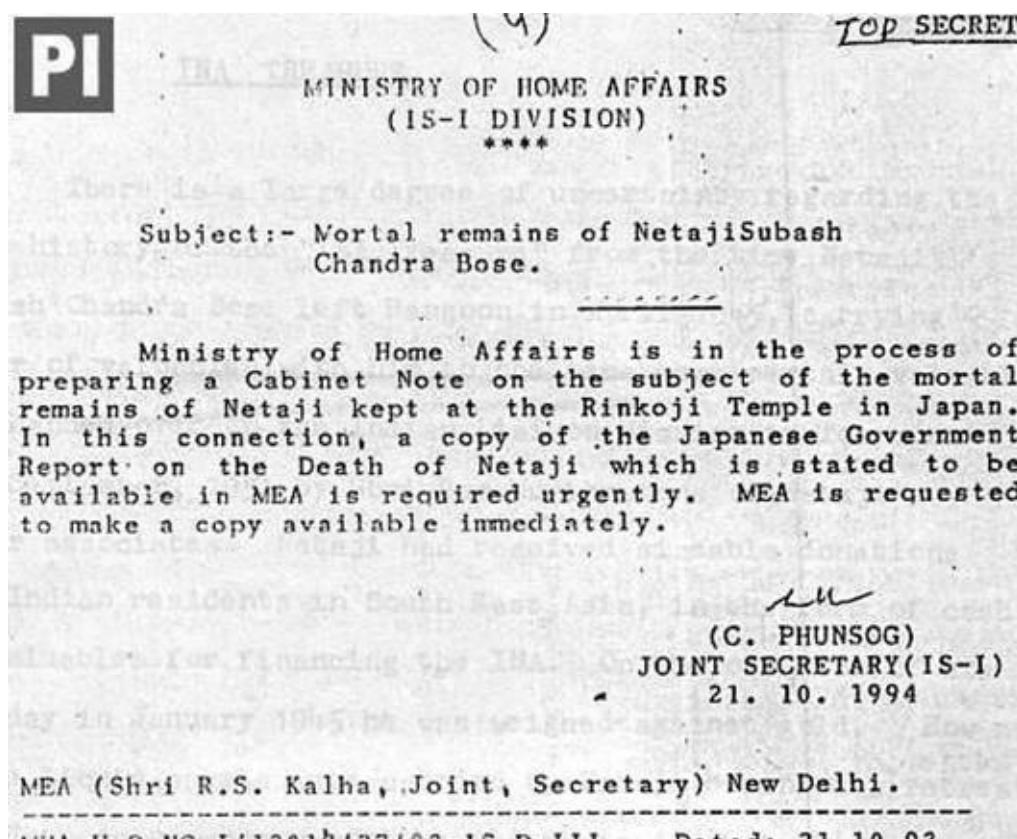
PMO and MHA's joint affidavit of 2007 made outdated, atrocious arguments. The excuse for the non-availability of any record with Bose's name on it was that "it was a war time and the Japanese surrendered to the Allied forces and as such, either no records were there or whatever records were there might have been destroyed, particularly when the Japanese were in control of Formosa up to 25th October, 1945".

The unstated motivation behind the reference to "war time" was GD Khosla's spin that in the "chaotic conditions" of August 1945 the Japanese lost their bearings and did not carry out even the basic routine jobs. By peddling this line further, the Government of India extrapolated to Japan and its people something which is the hallmark of everyday life in the third world nations, where people go berserk on the arrival of a train at platform.

Japanese became an advanced people generations ago. The Taipei city of August 1945 was, thank God, not Hiroshima or Nagasaki and the Japanese were never so out of their minds that they wouldn't do basic paper work about people dying in their military hospitals. So the contention that "no records were there" doesn't stand to reason. It doesn't even stand to facts. How would the Government of India classify the documents relating to Ichiro Okura's death and cremation if not as "records"? When the records for an ordinary soldier like Okura could be created in August 1945, what stopped the Japanese from creating those for Bose and Shidei?

The conjecture that "whatever records were there might have been destroyed" has nothing to stand on. Japan never said the records of Bose's death and cremation were destroyed. It only insisted that they were created in the name of Ichiro Okura.

So does the Government of India somehow regard the Okura record a proof of some sort of Bose's death? No way! Before Pranab Mukherjee set out on his "mission impossible", the then Joint Secretary (Internal Security), Ministry of Home Affairs, wrote a Top Secret letter dated 21 October 1994 to Joint Secretary (Asia Pacific region) in the Mukherjee-headed Ministry of External Affairs. He sought "a copy of the Japanese government report on the death of Netaji which is stated to be available in MEA".



In response, the MEA sent him the Gaimusho's 1955 letter claiming that a cremation permit issued for Okura was "believed to be" for Bose. On its receipt, the confused Joint Secretary telephoned the

MEA to say that his ministry "would like to have confirmation that the Japanese government had indeed confirmed" Bose's death. The MEA obviously did not share the Japanese government's belief that Okura record pertained to Bose. On November 10, the JS (AP) stated in a Top Secret note that

for us to state on this basis that the Japanese government had indeed confirmed the death of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose would be going beyond the scope of the Japanese government letter and have major internal ramifications for us.

P As instructed by FS, on receipt of MHA letter, a copy of letter from our Ambassador in Tokyo, along with its enclosures was forwarded to MHA. Subsequently, Shri C. Phunsog, Joint Secretary (IS(I)) rang up to say that they would like to have confirmation from MEA that the Japanese Government had indeed confirmed that Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose had died in the air crash in 1945. As will be seen from the enclosures attached with the Ambassador's letter at S.No.20, (Flag 'Z') the response of the Japanese Government is contained at para 2. [For us to state on this basis that the Japanese Government had indeed confirmed the death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose would be going beyond the scope of the Japanese Government letter and have major internal ramifications for us.] It is, therefore, submitted that while replying

The Government of India now insists that Bose died in Taiwan. So, wasn't he cremated there? Then why isn't his name there in the contemporary Japanese register detailing each and every person who was cremated in August 1945? Is the cremation record which the Government was itself looking for in the 1950s not relevant anymore?

According to the queer logic offered by the Government in the affidavit, the "non-availability of records" does not disprove that Bose died in the plane crash because there were people who said he had died. But the "non-availability of records" proves that Prime Minister Desai lied to the country when he spoke in the Lok Sabha in August 1978 that there were good reasons not to accept the so-called eyewitnesses' version. The "non-availability of records" also does prove, as per the Government thinking, that Bose never made it to the USSR.

Justice Mukherjee's visiting certain Russian archives, his not finding any relevant documents among the declassified lot and the inability of certain witnesses to throw any new light do not add up to mean that Bose never made it to the USSR. Obtaining classified information and records from a foreign nation requires a resolve on the part of the government seeking it. A foreign state will never easily give out a secret which might affect its interests. And certainly not without a high-level intervention. Before Justice Mukherjee visited Russia, Dr Joshi in a letter to the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pressed that "it would be necessary to approach the present Government of Russian Federation at the highest level".



DR MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI
Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)
CHAIRMAN
Parliamentary Standing Committee
on Commerce

URGENT

123, Parliament House Annex
New Delhi-110 001
Tel. : 23034123, 23011991

June 27, 2005

Dear Dr Manmohan Singh Ji,

This refers to my letter dated March 15th addressed to you and the reply of the Home Minister dated 3rd June, 2005 regarding the extension of time for Justice Mukherji Commission enquiring into the mysterious disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

In response to my letter the Government had extended the time and also permitted the Commission to visit countries for examining the witnesses and perusing the documents required to ascertain the veracity of the evidence furnished to the Commission.

In view of Dr. Purabi Roy's (a noted scholar) submissions to the Mukherji Commission regarding Netaji's presence in the then Soviet Russia, it would be necessary to approach the present Government of Russian Federation at the highest level to give access to the Commission to visit such documents in their custody, which are required by the Commission for drafting of the report. Since the time is short and the Commission intends to visit Russian Federation in the middle of July, I would request you to take immediate steps in this regard at your level.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Murli Manohar Joshi)

Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
South Block
New Delhi-110 011

There is nothing on record to show that our government ever made adequate, high-level attempts to get information from the Soviets and the Russians. In fact, the efforts made by other countries in similar cases make India's approach appear highly suspicious. [See Chapter 8: How India dealt with Russia over Subhas Bose's fate]

In the affidavit, the Government vehemently "denied and disputed" the opposing parties' charge "that the reports of the earlier committee and commission were resurrected" as a stratagem to dismiss the Mukherjee Commission report. The affidavit claimed that those reports—held sacrosanct by the Congress party and its proxies—"were never rejected by any authority in the Government of India".

The answer comes from the topmost government authority on "Bose died in Taiwan" theory. Thus spake Pranab Mukherjee in the Lok Sabha on 18 May 2006:

Sir, when this commission was established, the Government itself had rejected the two earlier commissions, namely the Shah Nawaz Commission [sic] and the Khosla Commission and that is why this commission was established.

Government contention: "Justice Mukherjee Commission appointed, *inter alia*, in deference to the judgment of the Hon'ble Kolkata High Court, contradicted the findings of the earlier committee and commission, but did not do so convincingly and conclusively. It was, therefore, not possible to accept same."

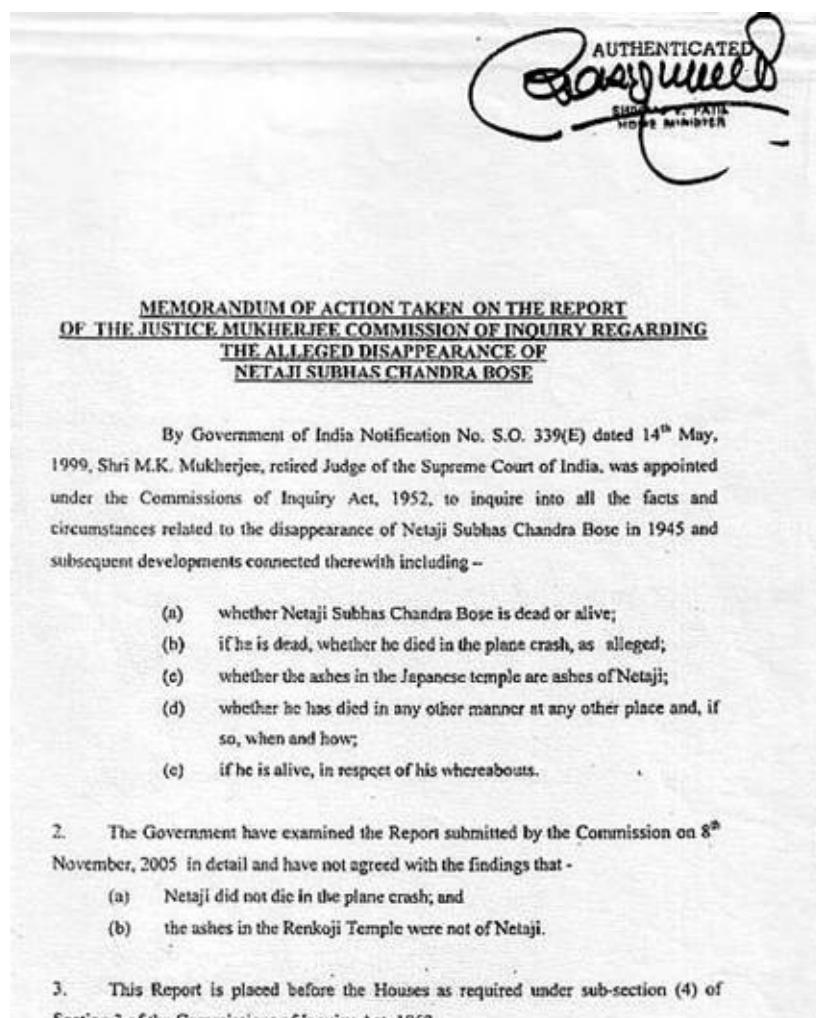
How could Justice Mukherjee have made himself more convincing? By bending rules? Writing flowery English? Or by hushing up evidence? Maybe badmouthing the Japanese would have been in order. Or, better still, vilifying Netaji as their puppet and pawn would have done some good. Exonerating the Government of all wrongdoings would have been a sign of political correctness on the former Supreme Court judge's part. It would have been fantastic if Justice Mukherjee had

published a juicy book based on his inquiry and released it before his report was tabled in Parliament. Penning a biography of the Prime Minister or Pranab Mukherjee alongside the boring inquiry would have been an excellent idea. If only Justice Mukherjee had bought a present in Taiwan or Russia for someone in New Delhi, he would not have to undergo humiliation there.

It is a great shame, but according to the Standard Operating Procedure adopted by the Congress-led government, anything which did not conform to its world view was not conclusive. “It took 21 years and nine commissions of inquiry for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots to get their first token of justice” [48] in shape of the Nanavati Commission report. In August 2005, the same Government of India, the same Shivraj Patil dismissed the findings of this commission. The “action taken report” in this instance said that the commission was itself not certain of the involvement of Congress leaders in the genocide and, therefore, “any further action will not be justified”. [49] Then, the Opposition members and the people of Punjab lunged at the throats of the ruling class and there was this complete about-turn. Patil assured the lawmakers in the Lok Sabha that “all the recommendations” of the commission would be implemented by the Government “as it is”. [50] It would seem the main reason the Government got away with the blatant dismissal of the Mukherjee Commission report was that the people, especially in Bengal, took it lying down.

“It is also reiterated that the report of the Justice Mukherjee Commission was examined in-depth and the action taken report reflects that,” trumpets the Government in the affidavit.

The one page memorandum of the action taken report carrying big signature of Shivraj Patil tabled in Parliament reflected only one thing: Whitewash. What else can you read into one-liners? Or are there some hidden details written with some sort of invisible ink supplied by the Intelligence Bureau?



The Government affidavit further says: “In compliance with the direction of the Justice Mukherjee Commission, Government of India produced all the documents before the commission which were

available."

The catch lies in the phrase "which were available". Check out the following comparative chart of a specimen of records made available to the Mukherjee Commission, and the ones which were not. Please note that except one all of these "unavailable" records were in existence when the Khosla Commission was wound up in 1974. NIC is an abbreviation for "Netaji Inquiry Commission" and NC for "Netaji Commission".

<u>Available: Records preserved for posterity</u>	<u>Unavailable: Records destroyed or missing</u>
1/10/70-NIC Personal file of Ghan Shyam, peon	Prime Minister Nehru's master file on the "Circumstances leading to the death of Subhas Bose"
3/2/70-NIC Accommodation for having session at Vigyan Bhavan	Top Secret letter dated 17 January 1952 for Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt
1/18/71-NC personal file of RC Sharma, peon	Secret file No 2 (64)/66-70 PM, Vol VI—Death of Bose
1/20/70-NC Personal file of Shiv Charan Lal, peon	Letter dated 7.8.1972 from RC Tandon, Joint Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, to Secretary Netaji Inquiry Commission, forwarding some documents
1/20/70-NC Personal file of SK Sengupta, peon	IB letter number 31/DG/56-II dated 4.1.1959
Write off of loss-orders of Secretary about loss of tray	Memorandum by the Director of Military Intelligence on statement by Gandhi
Trunk Call register for telephone 386220	
Telephone rent bill register from 1972-1974	
Register showing purchase of newspapers, etc for Netaji Commission	

The take in the government affidavit is that "the findings of the Khosla Commission were accepted by the Government of India and placed before the Parliament".

Accepted by the Government in the 70s it was for sure. But who told the court in 1997 that a fresh "probe is required and the information that Netaji died in the plane crash on August 18, 1945 is full of loopholes, contradictions and therefore inconclusive"? Who else but the learned government counsel. Did the Governmet disown him after he said that? No! Actually, the quotation could be rephrased as: "The findings of the Khosla Commission were accepted by the Government of India and the report placed for approval before a rump Parliament during the Emergency when all major Opposition leaders had been put into jails." Because Khosla's report was cleared by Parliament during the phase India ceased to be democratic, public confidence in it was bound to be shaky. Hence, the Government notification of 1999 admitted: "There is widespread feeling among the public that the issue of finding the truth about Netaji still remains."

Today, the Government of India upholds the Khosla Commission report as the final truth. Therefore, all those who are with the Government on this issue should know that they are also effectively in unison with the authorities in holding that:

* Netaji had "styled himself the Head of the State".

* Bose's proposal that the INA men should lead the charge into India was "the proposal of a zealous but impractical patriot".

* "Bose entering India with Japanese assistance could only mean one thing, viz. India would become a colony or a suzerainty of Japan."

As for the rest, they should tell their friends in Japan that the following is the true estimate of their national character as made in a report the Government of India regards as gospel. The Japanese people and their government should know that the Indians who back their view on Bose's death have nothing but utter contempt for all that they did for India's freedom. They are currently of the impression that those who do not support the air crash theory are being disrespectful towards Japan.

* "Despite the outward respect and honour with which the Japanese treated him, he [Bose] was looked upon as a puppet, a

tool which could be discarded and ignored, when deemed no longer useful.”

* Their “respect for Bose began and ended with his usefulness to them”. “They paid a certain amount of lip service” to him.

* The “true attitude of the Japanese towards” Indians was best summarised by the quote, “What is the harm in being puppets? You should be proud to be puppets of the Japanese.” [All quotes taken from Khosla’s report]

Lastly, the Government affidavit claims that the “Government of India have always acted **promptly, honestly and fairly** while handling a definite matter of public importance, namely, the disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in 1945”.

I give up. Maybe I should write to the Oxford and Cambridge universities. The sense I get after checking definitions of the highlighted words in their dictionaries is not what I get when I assess how our government actually handled the issue of Subhas Bose’s fate.

6. The search for Bose files

My friends and I did not sit idle after the arbitrary dismissal of Justice Mukherjee's report. Guided by the old saying "the truth will out", we began collating information and leads from both within and outside India despite financial and other constraints. The net outcome of these efforts has led to one unsurprising conclusion: As opposed to advanced nations which have amazing levels of transparency and sense of fair play, ours continues to live in another era.

Surely we have so many bright spots—the Right to Information is one of the best things to ever happen to us, the Central Information Commission is doing a brilliant job in overseeing it, government officials are sympathetic on personal level, the National Archives and Nehru Memorial Library staff at New Delhi are most cooperative, our media is fiercely free—but it will be a while before we get there.

A few years ago, I requested the National Archive of Australia for information on Bose. The reference officer there was generous enough to photocopy the relevant dossier and send it across to me free of cost. Chandrachur had the same experience recently with the National Records and Archives Administration (NARA) of the US. It takes more than just being rich to do so. People there respond to appeals, especially emotional. In March 1949 an Indian student in Chicago, VP Varma from Patna University, sent a handwritten letter to the Secretary of State seeking clarification about the rumour that Bose was executed by the Americans. The acting assistant chief in the Division of South Asian Affairs responded with the assurance that "the report that Bose was captured by the Americans in Japan is obviously unfounded". [1]

Anyone daring to write to the Home Minister of India in the 50s or 70s on the Bose issue risked the chances of the Intelligence Bureau sleuths furnishing the "answer" in person.

Even today, you write an email to anyone outside—government officials, researchers, journalists—and they reply. Here, inflated sense of importance takes precedence over courtesy. I sent out an email to several Indian and foreign journalists just before the Mukherjee Commission report was released. Only *TIME* magazine and the *Guardian* representatives answered. The British daily even carried an impressive story.

I went to a newspaper office in Kolkata and requested the person in charge that I wanted Netaji-related news items for such and such purpose. The fellow wouldn't budge from his seat. He would have jumped if I had asked for some trifling details about some actor or cricketer from his city. On another occasion, I rang up a senior Bengali journalist, regretted it and vowed never to put my little self in a position where I can be humiliated over so big an issue.

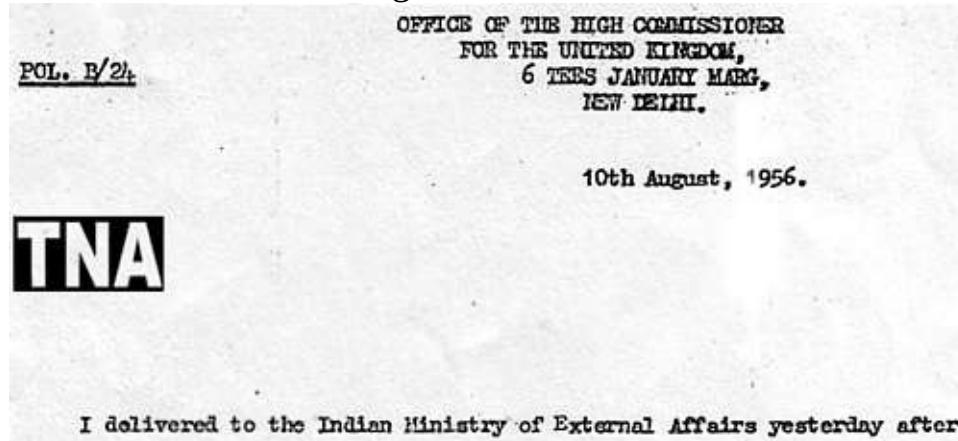
As far as I have understood, Justice Mukherjee's experiences mirrored the same pattern: Apathy at home; sympathy abroad.

That the Indian establishment is just not willing to open up is no news. What perhaps is that whenever the Mukherjee Commission and later we "Mission Netaji" friends tried to make it open up, out came the signs of cover-up. Nothing would highlight that better than the case of the missing Taiwanese/British inquiry file.

As discussed previously, in 1956 the Ministry of External Affairs approached the British High Commission in Delhi to make an inquiry about Bose's reported death in Taiwan. The British reverted a few days after Shah Nawaz's report was presented to the Prime Minister that there was no real proof of it. But from that time till today not a squeak about the Taiwanese/ British inquiry has been heard in

India from the government side. While filing affidavits, making statements and submissions before the Mukherjee Commission, neither the Ministry of External Affairs nor any other ministry referred to the Taiwanese/British findings as they furnished all relevant information, including details about the missing or destroyed files. It was as though the Taiwan 1956 inquiry report never existed.

Unfortunately for the Government of India it does. Declassified by Her Majesty's Government, the original papers can now be accessed by anyone at the National Archives in Kew. The last page in the British file clearly mentions handing over of not one but five copies of the Taiwanese report to the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi on 10 August 1956.



I delivered to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs yesterday afternoon five copies of the translation of the letter from the Governor of Formosa together with the police report and cremation certificate. I also gave them the two copies of the letter in Chinese.

That the MEA should have wished away all the five copies of a most credible report not supportive of the Government's view about Bose's death is an undeniable proof of highest-level conspiracy to hide facts from the people of India. Added to it is the rattling discovery by me that the Taiwanese report had been shown to Justice Khosla. And yet not a word about it is traceable in his report, which details in riveting prose all sort of absurdities with the hidden objective of turning the Bose mystery into a standing joke.

Khosla was clearly a party to the dirty tricks of the establishment in concealing the truth, and he earned encomiums from Shivraj Patil. Former Supreme Court judge MK Mukherjee, whom the former Home Minister rated inferior to former High Court judge GD Khosla, located the report during his visit to Great Britain and used it to bring down the air crash theory.

Information culled from the records of two commissions as well as the PMO records I accessed using the RTI also shows that in around 1956 a file was opened in Prime Minister's Secretariat, as the PMO was called in those days, on the subject "Circumstances leading to the death of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose". This file—No 12(226)/56-PM—was destroyed in 1972 along with several other irrelevant files, even though the Manual of Official Procedure in force at that time stipulated that the files of historical importance, especially those relating to issues agitating the public mind, would be kept in office for 25 years and then sent to the National Archives.

12(219)/56-PM	Monetary Reward to the workers of Sindhri Fertilizer Factory.	-do-
12(223)/56-PM	Coal Miners - New Housing Scheme for	Destroyed on 21-10-71 do- PK
12(225)/56-PM	Indian Delegation to H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh's Conference on the social responsibility of Industry.	Destroyed on 10-3-71 do- PK
12(226)/56-PM	Investigation into the circumstances leading to the death of Shri Subhash Chander Bose.	Destroyed on 6-5-72 do-
12(229)/56-PM	Loan of Rs. 1.45 crores granted by the Recd. of c. 3 '71 U.P. Govt. to M/S Sahm Jain Ltd. for a Soda Ash and Ammonium Chloride factory in U.P. - objection raised by the Central Govt. about the grant of -	do-



According to unverifiable claims, this file was the master file of all Bose files—personally maintained by Prime Minister Nehru. As a Cabinet minister, Dr Subramanian Swamy had the opportunity to see the relevant papers. He stated a few years back that this “Nehru’s file” had been destroyed on the orders of PN Haksar, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Private Secretary.

The file must have contained something very problematic for Haksar to himself get rid of it at a time it was required to be sent to the Khosla Commission. It was clearly an illegal act but Shivraj Patil’s “good” judge saw no wrong. He agreed with the Government averment that the file was “destroyed in the ordinary course of routine according to which old and unwanted files are destroyed to lighten the burden of the record rooms”. [2]

In contrast, Justice Mukherjee made attempts to know "the subject and contents" of this file and the circumstances under which it was destroyed. [3] In the course of this search, despite several reminders the Government did not send him even the rule book governing the destruction of official records in the relevant period. Meanwhile, Mukherjee discovered that Khosla’s job was sought to be done by Samar Guha. After he got wind of the file and its destruction, Guha wrote to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 3 January 1974. The PM replied that the “file contained only copies of certain documents which are still available in other files” and that is why it was was destroyed.

New Delhi,
January 9, 1974.

Dear Shri Geha,

I have your letter of the 3rd January regarding the files supplied to the Motaji Inquiry Commission.

A misunderstanding seems to have arisen about the file that has been destroyed because of the subject heading given to it. I can assure you that this file contained only copies of certain documents which are still available in other files. This file was destroyed only because it contained copies.

I received your letter of the 21st December also. But since it mainly concerned the Ministry of Home Affairs, I passed it on to my colleague, the Home Minister, with a request to send you a copy.



Yours sincerely,



(Indira Gandhi)

With such an assertion by the Prime Minister herself on the record, the Mukherjee Commission was encouraged to direct the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs to furnish "authenticated true copies of all the documents, copies of which were lying in PMO's File No 12(226)/56-PM, since destroyed, as also authenticated true copies of all those files which contain the said documents, the copies of which were lying in the said destroyed file as stated by the then Prime Minister".

On receiving the above letter, the MEA lobbed it into the PMO's court, the MHA clammed up and the PMO sent a reply which Justice Mukherjee described as "not compatible" with what had been asked for. The reply, he noted, "adduces no cogent reason for their inability to send their documents called for by the commission". In plain English, the PMO was just waffling.

Justice Mukherjee was all the more puzzled by the PMO and Cabinet Secretariat making contradictory statements. The PMO Director stated that the file 12(226)/56-PM contained agenda paper/Cabinet decision regarding its destruction, and it could be obtained from the Cabinet Secretariat "since records of Cabinet proceedings are kept permanently" there.

From : Ms. Archana Ranjan,
Director
Prime Minister's Office
South Block,
New Delhi.-110011.

To: Shri P.K. Sengupta
WBHJS (Retd.)
Secretary,
Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry
B' Block,(Third Floor)
11/A Mirza Ghalib Street, Calcutta 700 087.



Sir,

I am directed to refer to your letter No.JMC/Meeting/48/95 dated 23rd May, 2000 and to forward the photo-copies of the files/records concerning Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose/INS as per the list enclosed. Two files which are classified as Top Secret, are being sent separately.

2. The file No.12(226)/56-PM which contained agenda paper/cabinet decision regarding "Investigation into the circumstance leading to the death of Shri Subhash Chandra Bose" was destroyed in 1972 in course of routine review/weeding of old records since records of Cabinet proceedings are kept permanently in Cabinet Secretariat, from where they may be procured.

But a Home Ministry affidavit speaking for the Cabinet Secretariat claimed that the Secretariat was not having in its possession any files/papers concerning Bose's fate. Mukherjee doubted if the file was indeed destroyed.

The curious case of missing and destroyed Bose records requires some elaboration. Is it possible for the Intelligence Bureau to destroy certain records after they have been considered as evidence by the Khosla Commission? Why are the pictures of the plane wreck in Taipei—a vital “evidence” of Bose’s “death”—not to be found in the secured government vaults today? Is it because that putting them to scrutiny will help demolish the myth of the air crash? How could the Ministry of External Affairs tell the Mukherjee Commission that it can't find “any documents of records or files relating either to the proceedings of the Shah Nawaz Committee or the exhibits/records/documents filed before it”. [4]

One standard excuse in all these cases would be that it is hard to locate 50 or 60-year-old records. Such a response would float easily on the waves of cynicism that surround us. “Ya, they’re right. Such old papers are bound to get lost.”

A small human interest story about a military ruler is in order here. As former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf embarked on his India visit in April 2005, his hosts scurried to give him one gift he would always cherish—the record of his birth. When he was born in pre-partition India, Musharraf was a nobody, born in a family that had nothing special about it. And yet there was the great Indian hope that records pertaining to his birth would be found. So, nudged by the PMO, half a dozen Delhi government employees were put on the search for relevant entries in bulky 12 ledgers kept in New Delhi Municipal Council’s birth and deaths certification office. A spokesman later proudly informed the media that the NDMC “has all records from 1917 intact”. [5]

Thanks to such meticulous record keeping, Dr Manmohan Singh was able to present General Musharraf and his siblings' birth registration records when he arrived in Delhi. Now, if the NDMC is

maintaining intact all and sundry records concerning ordinary mortals born since 1917, how can you force it down your gullet that many classified Bose records maintained by the central government have gone missing or that they were destroyed to “lighten the burden of the record rooms”?

I remember a seasoned IPS officer telling me derisively that “the PMO is not your newspaper’s office!” after I bounced it off to him that many Subhas Bose-related records from the highest office in the land had vanished. “You can’t saunter in there just like that, talk to anyone on anything, bring in anything and go out with anything! How can classified records disappear?” the officer moved his head sideways dismissively.

Mine moved approvingly. I could see the logic behind his barb even with a scant knowledge of official procedures. This is elementary. Going by the Manual of Official Procedure, which has been in force for the last many decades, official records/files in India are divided into three basic categories. Of these the first two comprise records “fit for permanent preservation”. Category A records have value either for administrative purposes or their historical importance. Overlapping with it are Category B records—those of historical importance specifically. This is where one can safely put the Bose records.

The manual clearly mentions that this category includes “papers relating to a well-known public or international event or *cause célèbre*, or to other events which gave rise to interest or controversy on the national plane”. [6] Both the Category A and B records are required by the rules to be reviewed 25 years after their creation. They are sent to the National Archives in case they are no longer required to be kept classified.

Now what is classified information? It is what the Government has developed or received confidentially and has decided to keep out of public domain for the larger public good. Any record, file, tape, DVD etc. containing classified information is given one of the three security markings to commensurate with the damage its unauthorised disclosure will cause to India’s interests. When it is determined that the damage could be “exceptionally grave”, the file is stamped “Top Secret”. “Secret” corresponds to “serious damage” and “Confidential” to “damage” to national interest.

Consequently, any classified information is not made public by the Government unless there is some pressing situation. Unofficially though, it happens all the time through the leaks. Remember the recent controversy about the possibility of Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee’s office having been bugged till it was ruled out by the Intelligence Bureau? The IB inquiry was so secretive that even the Home Minister had no idea about it till he picked up the *Indian Express*. But for the “sources” sharing secret information and records with the journalists, the fourth pillar of democracy would collapse.

One can question the justification of classifying a particular file under any of the three heads, but when a file has been stamped as such, it is handled, processed, stored and even destroyed with utmost care according to well laid down rules by officials who have the legitimate “need to know” to complete duties assigned to them by their superiors. These rules are framed by the Ministry of Home Affairs and detailed in the Manual of Departmental Security Instructions, which itself is a classified record. Surely our Government is dead serious about secret records it holds.

To shatter a general perception about government record rooms, the Ministry of Home Affairs maintains the bulk of classified records, including the Bose records, in its custody in a well-guarded, probably underground, location in the North Block. It is known to the officials, but not too many journalists, as “T-Branch” or simply “Treasury”. The MEA has a section called NGO—an abbreviation for unlovely term Not to Go Out of the office—under the charge of Director (CNV), who is usually a Joint Secretary. Many years back a project was started to scan the NGO files from 1949 onwards.

A little bird told me that the most sensitive among the Indian records are those which are under the personal custody of the Prime Minister. It sounds like the Indian version of what the CIA calls

Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) and American conspiracy theorists think is “Above Top Secret” information. Whatever it is called in India, it ensures absolute secrecy with no chances of a treacherous top official or minister laying his hand on it. Keeping records in the PM’s personal custody, his official residence or elsewhere, creates “safe houses” for storing information whose very existence cannot be revealed by the PM to anyone in supreme national interest.

Sometimes to even admit the existence of a record would mean to give away the secret to be protected. For argument’s sake, and to stretch my imagination, suppose the PMO were to tell the Mukherjee Commission that the Prime Minister had the custody of a record containing the minutes of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s meeting with Subhas Bose at an undisclosed location, that very admission would have rendered the existence of the commission redundant, even if the Government were to add that the record couldn’t be declassified in national interest.

When a court, commission of inquiry or even RTI applicant asks for a specific record, it is looked for in the PMO record room. No one can ask what is there in the PM’s personal chamber or at his official residence. The intelligence agencies function beyond the peripheries of law and nothing stops the PM from entrusting them with the safekeeping of highly sensitive information. The Intelligence Bureau’s archive is not located in either North Block or its main office adjoining a prominent 5-star hotel in New Delhi. The PMO’s record room in the South Block has nearly 29 thousand classified files at present. There is no way to know how many more are kept in the PM’s residence or elsewhere, and in what format—paper, electronic or whatever.

I do not expect anyone will say this publicly, but there are people so prejudiced, so rabidly opinionated that they would argue in private that records relating to Bose’s death and other connected matters are not worthy of preservation for it would be a “useless and wasteful exercise” for a “poor country like ours”, which has many other, far more important things to pay attention to.

To expose the nonsensicality behind such utterances, allow me to present to you a bouquet of notings taken from still secret files relating to Subhas Bose. What you see now was made by the late JN Dixit in 1965. Then a First Secretary at the Embassy of India in Japan, he saw a file detailing official account of Bose’s death, missing INA treasure etc. and commented:

2. This file is, and would be of historical interest. I feel that we should send it back to the Historical Division of the Ministry and after due scrutiny and weeding out, those portions of file which are of permanent interest, should be passed on to the National Archives.
3. If Ambassador agrees, we will send the file back to India by diplomatic bag.

J.N. DIXIT
(J.N. DIXIT)
9.12.1965



Ambassador

These papers are interesting and of considerable historical value. From what I can judge

In case the would-be Foreign Secretary and National Security Adviser Dixit’s “inexperience” in 1965 is an issue for those who won’t agree come what may, here’s in the fine print what the Ambassador has penned below Dixit’s noting: “These papers are interesting and of considerable

historical value."

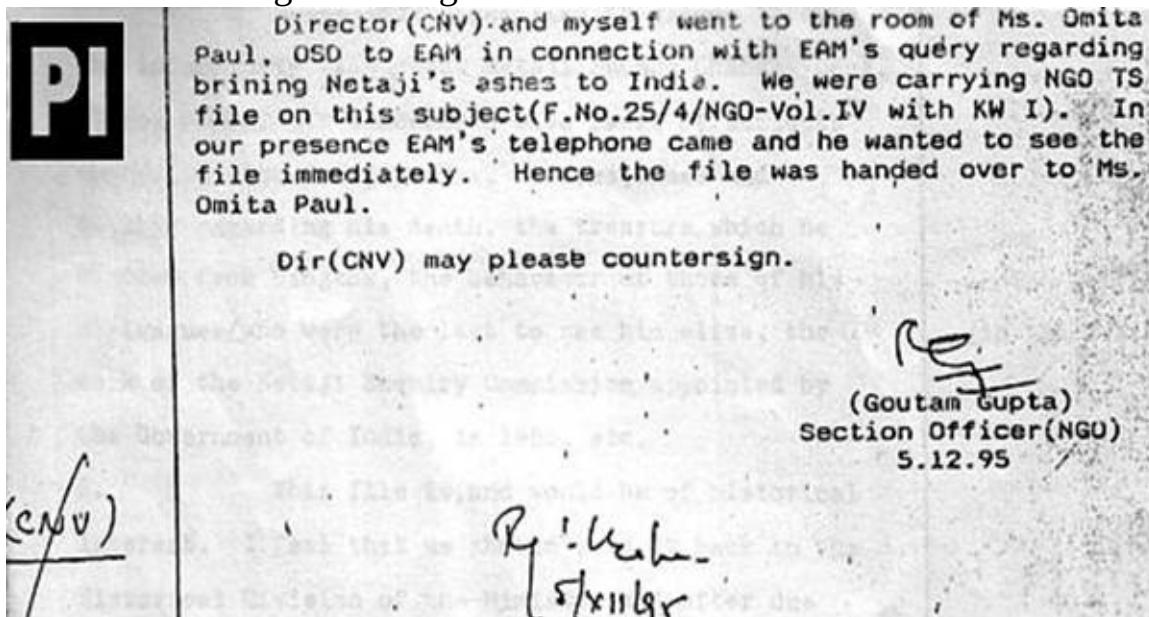
Exemplifying that the classified files are shared strictly on the "need to know" principle is a Shah Nawaz Committee-era noting by a MEA Deputy Secretary. AJ Kidwai writes on 29 February 1956:

I have shown all the material in the file of the section regarding the circumstances of Netaji Bose's alleged death to Shri Shah Nawaz Khan but I have not shown the NGO files to him yet... There is a long memorandum received from the Japanese about the circumstances of Netaji's death. This I have shown to General Shah Nawaz and Deputy Minister. FS [Foreign Secretary] has directed that it should be shown to all the members of the Bose inquiry committee.

The Foreign Secretary under discussion on his part observed secrecy as a fetish. In a Top Secret letter to Bengal Chief Minister Dr BC Roy on 11 February 1956, Subimal Dutt could hardly conceal it:

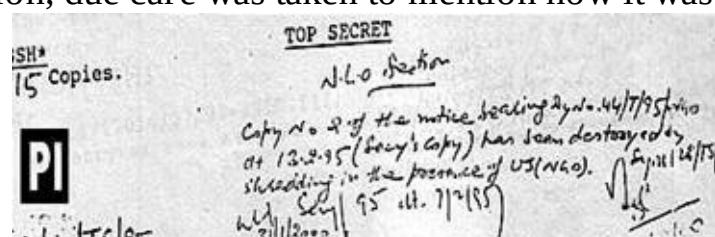
I send herewith, for your personal information, a copy of a note which the Japanese foreign office has handed to our Ambassador in Tokyo on the circumstances relating to the death of Netaji Subhas Bose. It is our intention to place the report before the committee which we shall be sending out shortly. Meantime, we shall be grateful if the secrecy of the document is preserved.

When classified files move, their movements are duly noted at every stage. So strict is the procedure that even if a file changes hand in the room of Cabinet minister, the movement is recorded by the official parting with it. Let's pick a more recent example. An MEA officer hands over a TS (Top Secret) file in the room of External Affairs Minister (EAM) Pranab Mukherjee and doesn't forget to put down the whole thing in writing.



The officer had better note it down and the CNV Director had to countersign it. For if the file had been misplaced by the OSD or anyone else for any unforeseeable reason, the officer would have had it. If any classified file or paper were to get out of a government office without proper permission, or go missing or stolen, it would quite naturally pose serious implications for national security. Therefore, it can lead to severe consequence for the persons responsible. The office may even lodge an FIR with the police.

The destruction of classified records too is done according to set procedures. An official just can't tear them apart and throw the parts in a bin. When a copy of a notice—just the notice—concerning a Top Secret note for the Cabinet on Bose's fate was destroyed in the 1990s in the presence of an Under Secretary from the NGO section, due care was taken to mention how it was destroyed.



Copy No 2 of the notice bearing...No 44/T/95 NGO dt 13.2.95 (Secy's copy) has been destroyed by shredding in the presence of US

Thus, when it comes to classified records, things are as professionally managed in India as in the developed nations. The Government of India has a proper approach towards storing, moving and destroying classified files, including those concerning Subhas Bose. With that being the true state of affairs, it can be easily inferred that the disappearance and destruction of Bose-related records could only be the result of a conspiracy hatched by those within the Government.

Moreover, I can vouch from my personal experience that the highest office in the land is still clutching several secret files on Bose close to its chest. In October 2006, I requested the Prime Minister's Office under the RTI Act to confirm if it was holding classified records/materials on Subhas Bose, and if yes, provide me the lists of classified and unclassified files. I also enquired whether the PMO had any plan to transfer the Bose records to the National Archives. In its reply, the PMO sidestepped the issue of classified records and furnished a list of 11 unclassified files—six of which related to the disappearance controversy—and stated that “an exercise was underway to review classified files held by PMO for declassification and on declassification such files would be sent to National Archives”. If the Guinness Book of World Records has an entry for “longest-running government review of files”, here is a chance for Netaji’s admirers to get his name there.

I brought the silence of the PMO on the list of classified files to the notice of the Appellate Authority in the PMO. I was told in December 2006 that my appeal had been “carefully considered” and on “verification of the classified files held by PMO, it is held that their disclosure will prejudicially affect relations with foreign countries”.

In January 2007, Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah heard arguments of then PMO Director and mine and decided to personally vet the list of files. In February, Habibullah was shown a list containing titles and filing numbers of 35 classified files of which seven were “Top Secret”; three were “Confidential” and the rest “Secret”. Two more files were as good as secret for they were still lying in the PMO despite having been declassified.

13.	2/64/79-PM	Death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – Appointment of an inquiry commission to go into the circumstances of – INA treasures etc
14.	2/64/80-PM Annexure	Death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – Appointment of Enquiry Commission to go into the circumstances of – and papers reg. INA treasure, etc.
15.	2/64/86-PM	Death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – Appointment of Enquiry Commission to go into the circumstances of – and papers reg. INA treasure, etc.
16.	800/6/C/3/88-Pol	Death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – Appointment of an enquiry commission to go into the circumstances – papers regarding INA treasure etc.
17.	800/6/C/1/89-Pol	Netaji Subhash Bose
18.	870/11/P/17/90-Pol	Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – disappearance regarding – reference from Prof. Samar Guha, MP
19.	800/5/C/1/91-Pol(V.1)	Bharat Ratna Award – Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Subhash Chandra Bose, JRD Tata, Morarji Desai
20.	800/5/P/2/91-Pol	Bharat Ratna Award – Policy papers about – posthumous conferment guidelines – Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose
21.	870/11/P/10/91-Pol	Netaji Subhsash Chandra Bose – disappearance regarding – reference from Prof. Samar Guha, MP
22.	870/11/P/16/92-Pol	Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose - disappearance

Habibullah, a former top PMO official himself, directed the release of a truncated list containing details of 31 files, accepting the PMO’s contention that disclosing the titles of four files having references to foreign states would impact India’s relations with those foreign states. [7]

And, for more than the last three years, Chandrachur has been hitting his head against the wall called Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the records/materials used as exhibits by the Mukherjee

Commission. When we had first approached the MHA seeking exhibits of the Shah Nawaz Committee and Khosla Commission, the ministry feigned ignorance about them for neither the committee nor the commission had appended the list of exhibits with their reports. Another grand logic was that it was difficult to locate old records.

Such excuses were not going to wash when Chandrachur filed request for the Mukherjee exhibits. This commission had been wound up only in 2005 and thereafter all the material collected by it, including the papers received from the Government, were properly packed in steel containers and sent to the MHA. Therefore, locating these records was as easy a task as asking the concerned official to pick out records listed on the exhibit list provided at the end of the commission report.

Still, we are yet to get all the exhibits, though Chandrachur has managed to get more than 20,000 pages from the MHA. For all of you Bose mystery buffs out there, please be informed that the MHA is a veritable Aladdin's Cave! But the magic lamp isn't there.

Before moving on to my experiences with the foreign authorities, I would do better to outline those of Justice Mukherjee. His commission made attempts to access still classified or inaccessible information held in the UK, the USA and Taiwan.

The former judge visited London and Taipei and was quite pleased with the way he was treated there. While in London, thanks to House of Lords member Peter Archer, Mukherjee came to know about the existence of some classified records. In late September 2001 Archer met Alexander Irvine, the then Lord Chancellor, and briefed him about the case. According to the UK's Public Records Act of 1958, the Keeper of Public Records, under whom the National Archives functions, is answerable to the Lord Chancellor On 1 December 2001, Irvine wrote to Archer that "all the material on Subhas Chandra Bose, previously retained by the Cabinet Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has been passed to the Public Record Office and is open for public inspection". He added that

a few relevant papers from the files of the intelligence and security agencies are retained by those agencies, with my approval; however, these papers do not contain any additional information relating to Subhas Chandra Bose's death that is not available at the Public Record Office or the British Library. They are retained as a matter of principle, because the peacetime file of intelligence and security agencies are not released, rather than because of their particular content. [8]

At the close of his letter, the Lord Chancellor drew Archer's attention to two recently declassified files, one of which related to the 1956 inquiry in Taiwan, which Justice Mukherjee was going to find immensely useful.

"I am sorry it has taken so long to obtain an answer from the Lord Chancellor to our request," Archer then wrote to Mukherjee as he forwarded him the chancellor's letter. He informed the judge that he was not hopeful that the records still held classified could be made available to him. "If the British government were minded to dissimulate, they need not have told us of their existence. For myself, I accept the assurance that they do not contain any information which is not available already. If I can assist further, please let me know." [9]

Mukherjee wrote back: "Nonetheless, those papers in the retained files may, hopefully, furnish some materials regarding the alleged disappearance of Subhas Chandra Bose and thereby remove all sorts of speculations and doubts in that regard. May I, therefore, request you to kindly impress upon Lord Irvine to give us an access to those retained papers." [10] In May 2002 Archer wrote to Mukherjee that his "powers of persuasion have not secured their release" and advised that "there may be greater success if diplomatic representations were made between governments". [11]

In Delhi, Mukherjee requested External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha to take up the matter with the British government. The steps taken were not sufficient for the first truly non-Congress government. Vikas Swarup, the Counsellor (Political) at the Indian High Commission in London at that time—the celebrated *Slumdog millionaire* author of today's—wrote to the head of India Section in the South Asia Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and got the same answer as Lord Archer had received.

On Netaji's issue, "the party with a difference" did not turn out to be much different after all. Sinha's predecessor in the South Block was probably immersed deep in the thoughts of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and could not spare even one for Bose's fate. When Lok Sabha MP Moinul Hassan Ahamed asked a question about Bose in Russia, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh did not tax himself much. On 1 March 2000 he parroted an answer which had been previously drafted for a Congress minister. Not a word here or there. A fine example of the continuity of official policy, no matter whichever dispensation is holding the reins of power.

Justice Mukherjee made a push for accessing Bose-related records kept in the US archives, as well as those still classified. Subsequent official contacts brought out some bright ideas from the US side. Indians run out of them when Bose is involved. On 23 June 2003, Deputy Chief of Mission Albert Thibault advised the MEA that the commission could "select an Indian scholar or a graduate working in the United States to perform such research" [12] in NARA, the world's largest archives. Taking a cue from Thibault's letter, the commission requested the MEA to engage some suitable scholar in the US who, either "for the love of Netaji or some enumeration", could pick out relevant records.

I don't know about love, but money talks. The ministry could have easily hired an expert researcher at the NARA as their contact details were available on the Maryland-based archive's website. The commission repeatedly reminded the Government about finding a researcher in the US. And a wannabe superpower, would you believe, could not do this simple thing.

The only relevant declassified records that eventually reached the commission came on the tip-off of former CBI Director SK Dutta—the seniormost former government servant ever to publicly reflect on the Bose mystery. I had the pleasure of prodding him to. Regarding the secret records in America, the MEA rested its case telling the commission that "classified documents of the US Government can be requisitioned under the US Freedom of Information Act only by giving specific details of the documents; and...this is a tardy and complicated process". [13]

The biggest complication was the lack of intention. A little later, I located two classified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) records sitting in Delhi with the help of Sarat Bose's granddaughter Madhuri Bose-Gaylard. Using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), I sought copies of these two records. The agency turned the request down because the release was likely to harm the US interests. I appealed that they should be released for the sake of Bose's admirers world over, including in America, with necessary censorship of the names of agents and the method employed to collect information. The arguments that do not cut ice with our Government were accepted by the CIA. The two records were duly released and they showed that in 1950 rumours were in circulation at high levels in India that Subhas was alive, and probably in the USSR.

I made another FOIA attempt to access more CIA-held information in view of a declassified, heavily redacted (sanitized) agency record California-based Friends of India Society International had obtained and sent to Indian newspapers in 1994. Hardly anyone back then cared to look at what it was, though it made quite an interesting reading, if nothing else.

1.1
27 FEB 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR : Chief, [REDACTED]
ATTENTION : [REDACTED]
FROM : Deputy Director of Security
SUBJECT : [REDACTED]

O Subhas Chandra BOSE

1. Reference is made to your telephonic request of 19 February 1964 that the Subject be interviewed by a representative of this Office.

A memo dated 27 February 1964 from a Deputy Director of Security to a chief of some unknown section conveyed the assessment of an informant seeking an interview with the higher-ups in Washington, DC. The informant believed that "there now exists a strong possibility that Bose is leading the rebellious group undermining the current Nehru government".

I did not trash this report out of hand—because intelligence reports are not based on bazaar gossips—but given its incredible content and the fact that the CIA regarded it as “unevaluated” information, the veracity of report was open to doubts. I sought to clear them through an FOIA appeal to the agency.

To get a quick answer, I limited its scope to the “finished intelligence reports”. That is the class of high-end information used for national-level policy deliberations by the US policymakers. The idea was that if this or any other reports were taken seriously, they might have been processed further to create finished intelligence reports. But it seems they were not. The agency processed the request under the provisions of the FOIA and the CIA Information Act and “did not locate any records”, that is finished intelligence reports, on Subhas Bose created between 1960 and 1970.

Mr. Anuj Dhar

NOV 21 2007

INDIA

Reference: F-2007-02063

Dear Mr. Dhar:

This is a final response to your 21 September 2007 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for “any finished intelligence reports between 1960 and 1970 on or relating to Subhas Chandra Bose.” We processed your request in accordance with the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended, and the CIA Information Act, 50 U.S.C. § 431, as amended. Our processing included a search for records as described in our acceptance letter existing through the date of that letter, 3 October 2007.

We did not locate any records responsive to your request.

Although our searches were thorough and diligent, and it is highly unlikely that repeating those searches would change the result, you nevertheless have the legal right to appeal the finding of no records responsive to your request. Should you choose to do so,

The approaches I made to different British ministries under the UK’s Freedom of Information Act yielded similar results. Both the British Cabinet Office, which includes the Prime Minister’s Office, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) informed that they were not holding any record with any bearing on the fate of Bose. The Ministry of Defence also stated that it “does not hold the information you require; documentation of that age that has survived is held at the National

Archives".

In fact, all the offices directed me to make the search at the archives in Kew. Following an appeal to the Cabinet Office for a review of its decision, Howell James, Permanent Secretary, Government Communication, was good enough to write personally that the Cabinet Office was not holding any relevant information and that I "could obtain good results from the records held in the National Archives".

CabinetOffice

Howell James CBE
Permanent Secretary, Government
Communication

70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Telephone 020 7276 0650
Fax 020 7276 0822
E-mail howell.james@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk



23 October 2006

Anuj Dhar Esq.

India

Dear Mr. Dhar,

**REVIEW OF REQUEST UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT
2000**

Thank you for your e-mail of 2 October 2006 requesting an internal review of the handling of your Freedom of Information Act request of 31 August. You thought a more vigorous search might yield more information concerning the death of Subhas Chandra Bose.

I have carefully reviewed the handling of your request. A further search has also confirmed that the Cabinet Office does not hold any information relevant to your request.

Under the UK's Freedom of Information Act, any information held by a public authority is exempt information if it relates to secret intelligence service and ties with friendly foreign nations. Some information pertaining to Bose's fate, which is a sensitive issue in Great Britain's friend India, would naturally have been handled by the intelligence services like MI5 and MI6, which are beyond the periphery of the British FOIA. Therefore, much as I believe that the responses of the British authorities to me were absolutely truthful within the ambit of FOIA, I won't be surprised if it turns out that the British intelligence agencies are holding some records on Bose, apart from those papers whose existence the Lord Chancellor admitted to Peter Archer.

The British intelligence had good reasons to keep a tab on Bose. Published diaries of Guy Liddell, the head of the Security Service's counter-espionage division during World War II, refers to rounding up of two Russian agents in Afghanistan who had been "working for" Bose, "who wanted them to facilitate his journey to see Stalin in Moscow". [14] Post-1945, if the CIA could keep track of rumours relating to Bose years after his reported death, it is inconceivable that the British should have remained disinterested. For instance, the following January 1949 CIA report I obtained under the FOIA even notes a rumour about "dead" Bose's link with the RSS

CLASSIFICATION		RESTRICTED	REPORT NO.																																															
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY		RESTRICTED	W/1001																																															
INFORMATION REPORT																																																		
COUNTRY	India			DATE DISTR.																																														
SUBJECT	Rumor Concerning Subhas Chandra Bose			NO. OF PAGES																																														
PLACE ACQUIRED	Calcutta			NO. OF ENCLS. (LISTED BELOW)																																														
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<small>THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS INFORMATION AFFECTING THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE SPYSHIP ACT OF 1917, SECTION 1 AND 2, AS AMENDED. ITS TRANSMISSION OR THE REVELATION OF ITS CONTENTS IN ANY MANNER TO AN UNAUTHORIZED PERSON IS PROHIBITED BY LAW. REPRODUCTION OF THIS FORM IS PROHIBITED.</small>					THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION																																													
SOURCE																																																		

Some people [redacted] believe the recurring rumor that Subhas Chandra Bose is still alive. According to their story, Bose is at present active in the underground RSSS movement.

Anyhow, I felt privileged to be able to receive information straight from Her Majesty's Government and the CIA. Pity I can't make similar approaches here with my own IB or R&AW. They never declassify anything and one can't file RTI request to seek information from the Indian intelligence agencies, unless there is some human rights issue involved.

I want to be realistic about it. If the Prime Minister's Office and the ministries of Home and External affairs are holding so many classified records about Bose, would it not be silly to presume that the IB and R&AW don't have anything shedding some light on the issue that has troubled the Indians for such a long time? The IB in particular must have generated many more records on different aspects of the Bose mystery than that are currently available in one way or the other. I have in mind the post-1947 era when it was quite obvious for the IB to keep an eye on claims about Bose being alive and a lot must have been reported on this issue.

If the CIA could be interested in chasing rumours, the Indians had far too many reasons to go after them. I bet if our current IB chief or any of his living predecessors could publicly assert that the IB did not track such a sensitive matter from 1947 onwards.

But what if some retired IB Director denies it?

Well, that's already been done. When clarifications on the Bose mystery were sought from the incumbent and retired directors before the Khosla Commission, a whole range of truthful to doubtful statements came forth. White lies were uttered by a man whose unassuming presence belied the authority he once wielded as the Director, Intelligence Bureau (DIB). No one could have thought that that fragile, bespectacled man with avuncular persona was once India's chief spook BN Mullik. During his examination in August 1972, the legendary Bhola Nath Mullik lived up to his name in an unexpected sense. It is a curious paradox to have your first name "Bhola"—Hindi for *naïve*—when you are the big daddy of spies.

A middle-ranking police officer at the time of India's independence, Mullik joined the Intelligence Bureau in September 1948 as a deputy director. Two years later he became the director and remained in that position for an unimaginable fourteen years—at a time when there was no R&AW and external intelligence was also IB's responsibility. Today, the DIBs change every two years or so.

As the head of Indian intelligence, Mullik met Prime Minister Nehru virtually each day and was one of his closest confidants. Post—"retirement," Mullik was something of a national security adviser.

He finally called it quits in September 1968. Such an extraordinary man of such unrivalled experience should have known a lot, but his responses to the questions put before the commission—which are luckily on record—give impression as if Mullik had been living in a cave all the while the Bose mystery was raging in India.

In a brilliant flash of inquisitiveness, the commission's counsel TR Bhasin tried to extract from Mullik that the IB must have looked into the gamut of issues linked to Bose's mystery.

"Any matter which agitated the public mind or created a sensation or created a stir or a feeling in a portion of the public opinion, would come under the purview of your intelligence department?"

"Not necessarily", Mullik replied. "For example there may be agitation about the spurt in prices. But anything having an effect on the security of India would directly become charge of the Intelligence Bureau."

"I was not on the economic aspect," Bhasin reminded him.

GD Khosla intervened. "About that he has already said. Anything that agitated the public would become subversion. For example, he said spurt in prices."

"Very clever answer," Bhasin complimented Mullik and resumed.

"Now, when you joined as Director of Intelligence Bureau in July 1950 and from there onwards is it correct that the question of Netaji's alleged death continued to agitate public mind?"

"It did."

"Did the Intelligence Bureau deal with this aspect?"

"No. During the entire period that I was Director of Intelligence Bureau, we were never asked to make inquiry about this aspect."

SHRI T.R. BHASIN: Did the Intelligence Bureau deal with

this aspect?

SHRI B.N. MULLICK: No. During the entire period that I was

Director of Intelligence Bureau, we were

never asked to make enquiry about this

aspect.



Mullik was repeatedly asked the same question and every time his answer was the same.

"May I take that you had something to do in probing into mystery of baba of Shaulmari?"

"We made no inquiries about the baba of Shaulmari. I am talking about my time."

"You were never asked by the Government, by the late Prime Minister Pandit Nehru about baba of Shaulmari?"

"As far as I remember, I was never asked by the late Pandit Nehru about the baba of Shaulmari."

"On your own, did you not consider it as matter of any importance?"

"Of my own, I did not consider it as a matter of importance."

SHRI B.N. MULLICK: We made no enquiries about the Baba of Sholmari. I am talking about my time.

SHRI T.R. BHASIN: Supposing if there was responsible statement made on the floor of the Parliament that Director of Intelligence has submitted report, that would be incorrect.

SHRI B.N. MULLICK: In my time, it would be incorrect.

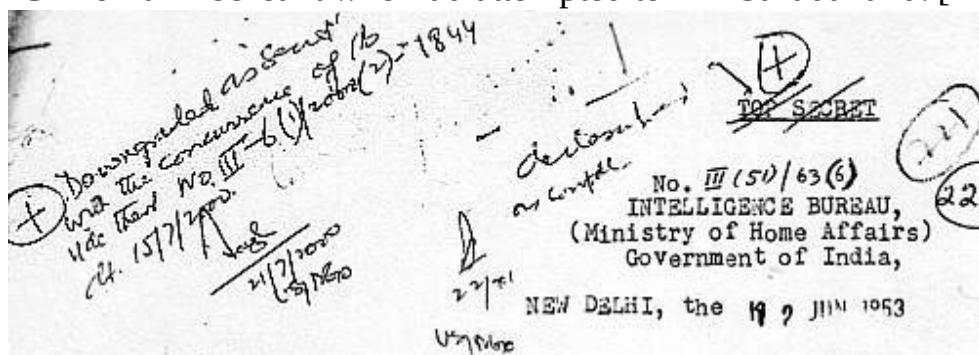
Mullik remained stuck to his guns even when Forward Bloc's counsel AP Chakravarty rephrased the same question.

"And the Shaulmari ashram situation had created such a thing in Bengal and Uttar Pradesh and in other parts of India, here also, everything and did you not receive any report in these circumstances?"

"I do not remember to have received any report about the Shaulmari ashram." [15]

What Mullik asserted on oath was not truthful because the official records now available tell another story.

K Ram, Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister, wrote a letter to Mullik on 23 May 1963. It said: "Please see the enclosed letter which has been addressed to the Prime Minister by Shri Ranjan Das, Secretary, Shaulmari Ashram. I should be grateful if you will kindly have suitable inquiries made into this matter and let me have a report for the Prime Minister's information." [16] On 12 June 1963 Mullik sent Ram his reply marked Top Secret. He enclosed an investigation report received from Bengal CID on a miscreant who had attempted to kill Saradanand. [17]



My dear Ram,

Please refer to your D.O. No. 2(64)/56-63-PM dated the 23rd May, 1963.

2. I am enclosing a note on K.K. Bhandari, which has been sent by the West Bengal C.I.D.

Yours sincerely,

Anuradha
12/6/63
(B. N. Mullik)

Shri K. Ram,
P.P.S. to Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's Secretariat,
NEW DELHI.



Now, what was the need to mark this innocuous letter or its enclosure "Top Secret"? If the Bose mystery or an offshoot of it were so irrelevant that Mullik did not feel the need to discuss after 1950, why make use of the highest level of security grading?

That's because the Bose mystery in reality was a highly volatile matter and hence a Top Secret issue—details about which could not be given out to anyone, courts of law and commissions included.

Mullik could not have told the Khosla Commission that the IB was indeed trailing Bose after his death without queering the pitch of official stand that the story had really ended in 1945.

It is for this reason of volatility that this letter of Mullik was deemed “Top Secret” till 2000, when under a “favourable” Vajpayee regime it was downgraded to “Secret”. Finally it was cleared for public disclosure in December 2007 after the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs okayed a release of selective Bose papers under the Right to Information to Mission Netaji.

On 7 September 1963 K Ram wrote to Mullik again. This time through a Top Secret letter, asking Mullik to throw light on Shaulmari case, simple and straight. “I have just now received another letter on the same subject from one Uttam Chand Malhotra...I am sending this also to you so that you may have necessary inquiries made regarding the activities of the Shaulmari Ashram.” [18] Mullik’s reply of November 16 made five points, the last of which said:

In his letter, Shri Malhotra has asked the Prime Minister to officially recognise the Shaulmari sadhu as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. This claim is quite false and the Shaulmari sadhu himself does not claim any connection with Netaji. Enclosed is a copy of the English translation of the Bengali leaflet published from the Shaulmari ashram in which it has been categorically stated that Shaulmari sadhu is not Subhas Chandra Bose. This should falsify Shri Malhotra's claim. But unfortunately, there are people in India, including some in leading positions in public life, who want to exploit Netaji's name. They have been propagating since the last 14 years that the Netaji would return. A propaganda was even started when the Chinese invaded our country last year that Netaji was coming with the invading army. [19]

A propaganda was even started when the Chinese invaded our country last year that Netaji was coming with the invading army. This group, whose leadership has been taken by the All-India Subhasbadi Janata, still goes on propagating that the Shaulmari Sadhu is none other than Netaji, though, as I have mentioned above, the Sadhu himself is quite annoyed with this propaganda and categorically denies that he is Netaji.

Yours sincerely,

D.W. MULLIK
13/11/63

(D. W. MULLIK)



Shri K. Ram,
Principal Private Secretary
to the Prime Minister,
New Delhi.

Wasn’t it Mullik who had written in his 1971 book *The Chinese betrayal* that “the DIB should never have anything to explain. He must ever stand self explained”? And there Mullik was, in a Top Secret letter signed by him, leaving no room for any doubt that the IB not only inquired about Shaulmari sadhu but also kept a tab on the Bose case no matter what he said on oath before Khosla.

As any junior-level intelligence officer can tell, the IB Director’s personally signed notes are distilled from heaps of material. So for this one document there must be several reports detailing each and every aspect mentioned in it. Like, what was the propaganda during the Chinese attack and who all were behind it.

Grilled further, Mullik told the commission that the state intelligence units could have looked into the Shaulmari issue. He nevertheless proclaimed that the IB had nothing to do with it for it did not concern national security. “Anything concerning the security of India would bring the Intelligence Bureau into picture,” he said.

But according to still classified records, the IB did take a keen interest in Shaulmari sadhu till he died in 1977. On 8 October 1963, the IB sent a memo to Special Superintendent of Police, Intelligence Branch, West Bengal over a criminal case against Shaulmari sadhu and his disciples. Another memo [No 6/DG/66(24)] was sent on 17 September 1966 and resend on 18 October 1966. In its response, Intelligence Branch, Lord Sinha Road, Calcutta, conveyed to IB that “Sadhu Saradanandji left Shaulmari for UP in April 1966”.

~~SECRET~~

Intelligence Branch,
13, Lord Sinha Road,
Calcutta, the 9 November, 1966.
No. D. 1/14026/762-61/Genl/I.

(S)

To

Shri A.N.Trivedi,
Joint Assistant Director,
Intelligence Bureau,
New Delhi

Sub: Shoulmari Ashram - Shifting of -

Ref: Your Memo No.6/DO/66(24)dated 17.9.66 and
remainder dated 18.10.66.

PI

Sadhu Saradanandaji left Shoulmari for U.P. in April 1966,
being accompanied by Dr. Raman Kanta Das and some other disciples.
He is now reported to be staying at Ukhimath. Since the year 1963.

A Secret memo No 6/DG/68(6) dated 18 December 1968 from Devendra Singh, Joint Assistant Director, IB, informed the West Bengal Intelligence Branch that the baba had been in Madhya Pradesh for six months and made this strange request:

We would be grateful if you could please trace the whereabouts of the sadhu. A note on the recent activities of the Shaulmari ashram may also kindly be sent to us.

What sort of concern for the "security of India" could have attracted IB's attention to Shaulmari sadhu after the controversy around him had waned away and he was running from one place to another for survival?

Something like this was put to Atma Jayaram, who was the IB chief when he was examined by the Khosla Commission, a day after Mullik's deposition. But like Mullik, Jayaram was of little help in clarifying the issue. The record of his testimony indicates that the IB was not being exactly cooperative. For a start, Jayaram wouldn't give a straight answer on the Bose mystery and initially gave the line that Shaulmari episode wasn't looked into. All those who want to master the art of waffling may please go through the following carefully:

"Has your department been dealing with the subject of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose?" was Bhasin's simple question.

"As director of intelligence branch I can only say that the intelligence department has wide possibility and whatever the government wishes to know, we will do it but it is difficult for me to say what we do or what we do not."

.....

SHRI T.R.BHASIN: What are you now ?

SHRI JAYARAM: I am now the Director of Intelligence Bureau.

Q: Since when ?

A: Since 12th November 1971.

Q: Who was your predecessor ?

A: Mr. M.M.L. Hooja.

Q: Has your Department been dealing with the subject of
Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ?

A: As Director of Intelligence Branch I can only say that
the Intelligence Department has a wide responsibility and
whatever the Government wishes to know, we will do it
but it is difficult for me to say what we do or what
we do not.



Now Khosla took over. "Have you ever been asked specifically to make any inquiry relating directly or indirectly with Netaji since you took over as DIB?" he put to Jayaram.

"Since I took over, I have not been asked," he replied.

"You were not asked but did you of your own accord and for good reasons direct or conduct any such inquiries?"

"No. Since I took over my office."

"Can you say that the intelligence department has not at all been dealing with any news concerning Netaji?"

"I cannot say that but we have presented whatever material we have."

"Not producing old files but doing a positive act. What (we) want to know is have you ever, your department, done inquiry?"

"Not that I know of."

"Can you say that your intelligence department has never conducted any inquiry into baba of Shaulmari Ashram?"

"I can only talk from my memory. This subject did come up some years ago and when we use the word inquiry, not in the form of police inquiry."

"I am talking as a layman!"

"Inquiries will be done by the police organisation. In this particular case by West Bengal Government and they would send their reports or pass their reports both to the Government and to us."

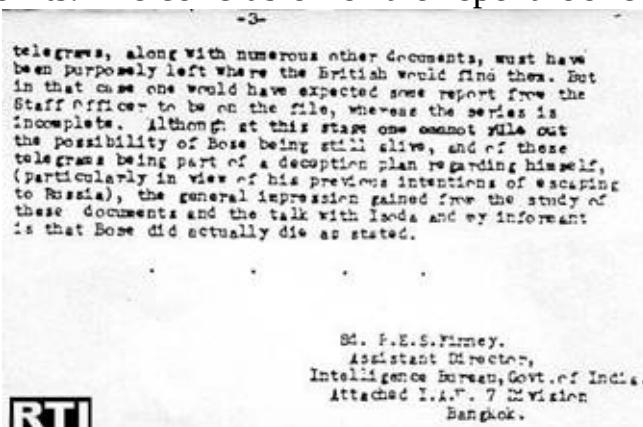
"There were certain inquiries?"

"Certainly."

This partial disclosure provoked Bhasin to put to Jayaram: "When the Government of India has accepted Shah Nawaz Committee's report that Netaji is dead then how is it that the intelligence department goes after every news when it appears that Netaji is not dead and he is alive?" Jayaram's non-answer to this was: "Whenever any report appears it is not necessary that we should go after that. We are not directed by Government to do anything. Intelligence organisation may do on its own." [20]

It is my mortification to accuse the Intelligence Bureau of dissembling over a matter of utmost public importance. Not only did its serving and retired employees lie before the inquiry panels, the organisation also altered an important record to shore up evidence in favour of the air crash theory.

Jayaram's reference that "we have presented [to the commission] whatever material we have" was to a dossier of 1945-46 vintage reports, which was originally compiled and supplied to Shah Nawaz by Mullik himself. The first report in the dossier—which contained only those reports which appeared to support the air crash theory—was from PES Finney. Dated 5 September 1945, this report ran into three pages and comprised 10 points. The conclusion of the report looked like this:



Although at this stage one cannot rule out the possibility of Bose being still alive, and of these telegrams being a part of deception plan regarding himself, (particularly in view of his previous intentions of escaping to Russia), the general impression from the study of these documents and the talk with Isoda and my informant is that Bose did actually die as stated.

* * * *

Sd. P.E.S. Finney,
Assistant Director,
Intelligence Bureau, Govt. of India,
Attached I.A.U. 7 Division
Bangkok.

Both Shah Nawaz and GD Khosla used this report to assert that even the wartime intelligence inquiries had concluded what they did. Khosla gladly made the report an exhibit, assigning it number 6 A. The image you have just seen is from this exhibit.

The claim was patently false because Finney's report of September 5 had not determined as such. The four stars at the end of the Khosla Commission exhibit No 6 A represented deletion. Khosla and Shah Nawaz knew what the missing chunk was about; they were shown a Ministry of Defence file titled INA 273. The file contained a copy of Finney's report, inclusive of the two last points deleted from the copy supplied by the Intelligence Bureau. A reading of these points reversed the impression generated by the doctored document. After enumerating the general impression, Finney had actually detailed a further line of investigation to assess its validity and suggested circulation of "any conclusive information, one way or the other" because he could foresee that the inquiry would take a long time.

File INA 273 is available for public consultation at the National Archives in New Delhi for it was declassified in 1997.

whereas the series is incomplete. Although at this stage one cannot rule out the possibility of Bose being still alive, and of these telegrams being part of a deception plan regarding himself, (particularly in view of his previous intentions of escaping to Russia), the general impression gained from the study of these documents and the talk with Isoda and my informant is that Bose did actually die as stated.

11. The following line of investigation is suggested :
 - (a) tracing and examining of staff officer TADA in Japan.
 - (b) examination of Swami in Penang.
 - (c) Further examination in detail of Lieut.Gen. Isoda.
 - (d) examination of Hikari personnel in Saigon.
 - (e) search of Hikari documents in Saigon.
 - (f) examination of Chief-of-Staff or other staff-officers of Southern Army in Saigon who know about these telegrams.
 - (g) tracing and examination of Col. Habibur Rahman.
 - (h) search of photographs, remains or ashes, etc. of Bose in Saigon, where they may have been sent, or in Tokyo.
12. Considerable time is being spent on these enquiries, and it is therefore requested that any conclusive information, one way or the other, should be circulated as soon as possible.

Sd/-
Asst. Director,
Intelligence Bureau,
Govt. of India,
attached I.A.U.
7 Divn.
Bangkok.

NAI

What Khosla did after reviewing file INA 273—also containing a report about Bose's possible presence in Russia—is the real eye-opener. Rather than taking the IB to task for supplying him a doctored document, he formally devalued the file by gratuitously leaving a note in it which said, "There is nothing in this file which can be said to have any relevance to the inquiry". [21] The note was classified as "secret" and that's rather outrageous because judges do not create classified records. That is the prerogative of the government servants. The slip showed which side Khosla was really on.

(1)

I have gone through the Secret file very carefully and find nothing in it which can be said to be admissible in evidence. The file contains a number of extracts from notings on various files. These, at most, amount to views of persons who prepared these notes. In some of these notes, a belief is expressed that Subhas Bose is dead. In a few others, there is an expression of doubt in the matter. There is only one piece of evidence on this file and that is the statement made by Dr. Yoshimi Saneyoshi. This statement was recorded on the 19th October, 1940 through Nanagalki Yoshio, Interpreter. This statement, if it is proved, can be used for the purpose of contradicting or corroborating the testimony of Dr. Yoshimi as made before this Commission, but for no other purpose.

There is nothing else in this file which can be said to have any relevance to the inquiry because, at best, the notings expressed the views of various individuals, and these views or opinions are inadmissible in evidence.

Sel ✓
(C.D. Khosla)
22.7.1071

If this was not enough, serving and retired intelligence officials appearing before Shah Nawaz and Khosla bolstered the impression created by the Finney's doctored report with their misleading statements. HK Roy, an inspector attached to the Finney-Davies team, told the Shah Nawaz Committee that Finney's report "was definite that Netaji was dead". BN Mullik made one untruthful statement after another before the commission. For instance, he said that "the only time I had a talk with Pandit Nehru about Netaji" was in 1950-51 and made the following remark about his assessment of the pre-1947 reports.

I gathered the impression that at that time the Intelligence Bureau came to the conclusion that Netaji had died as a result of plane crash. So, one day I talked to Pandit Nehru that these agitations are happening and we had this report in the Intelligence Bureau. He said he knew about this but he has been requested by Sarat Chandra Bose not to make it public due to family complications. [22]

Sarat Bose died in 1950 thinking that his brother was alive and one need not be the Director of Intelligence Bureau to see through a false statement coming from Nehru—unless Mullik himself was cooking up one.

Khosla also examined Kalipada Dey, who was part of Finney's team as an inspector, and used his evidence to support Finney's doctored report. "The witness went on to say that the substance of the police report was that Netaji had died due to air crash at Taihoku on the 18th August. This is borne out

by the copy of the report supplied to the commission.” [23] The other reports, such as those based on the re-interrogation of Habibur Rahman and JK Bhonsle in 1946, never reached non-government lawyers, courtesy Justice Khosla.

Justice Mukherjee followed the simple procedure of asking all ministries and organisations which could possibly have records on Bose to state their positions through sworn affidavits. R&AW did not file any affidavit itself but on its behalf the Ministry of Home Affairs affirmed that the spy agency has no record about Bose. After some delay, a Joint Director of the IB filed an affidavit. It was stamped “secret” and attached to it was a copy of the dossier supplied to the previous panels. This director also informed commission that the IB had 76 other files on or relating to Subhas Bose. Of these, the following IB files are available on paper format.

17/XI/83	Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose	A note on Hemendra Nath Pandit, Journalist, Calcutta. He made a request to examine the contents of two suit cases of Subhash Chandra Bose.
15/I/87(13)	Enquiry relating to Subhash Chandra Bose	Regarding exploitation of Netaji's name by political leaders and others.
32/IM/88	Demand for bringing back the ashes of Subhash Chandra Bose from Japan to India.	Demand for bringing back the ashes of Subhash Chandra Bose from Japan to India.
32/IM/90	Enquiry relating to Subhash Chandra Bose.	Regarding a memorandum from Keshav Prasad Sharma, General Secy, Indian Revolutionary Socialist Party(MI), Allahabad on the subject.
IV/6(395)/93	Subhash Chandra Bose	Controversy regarding bringing of Netaji's ashes to India from Japan.

The list of files on microfilm includes:

Policy of Central Government regarding re-employment of INA personnel in public service (file created in 1947)

Report addressed to Combined Inter-service Historical Section regarding non-availability of photographs of the remains of SC Bose (1950)

Sarat Chandra Bose's allegation against Indian embassy (1962)

INA papers released in 1961 by a former Joint Director, like note on life and activities of Bose, public statements on his death

Note on the issue “whether Netaji is still alive or not”. Comments and views of different political parties. (1970)

I have reasons to think that the IB must be holding records additional to those it disclosed to the commission. For example, not listed anywhere is one report filed in the early 1960s. Former IB Deputy Director VK Kaul categorically told me that as a young officer he spied on JK Bhonsle, ascertained his views on Bose's death and "submitted a full account of the matter" to BN Mullik. "It was seen by the highest officers before being returned to me as the originator for filing. It may be still in the old files," Kaul stated in a written statement. [24]

Also not listed in the IB affidavit are the Rajiv Gandhi-era records detailing its discreet inquiries into claims relating to the property of Provisional Government of Free India.

INTELLIGENCE BUREAU
(Ministry of Home Affairs)

MHA may please refer to their endorsement on U.O. No. 2(64)/87-PM dated 5-3-1987 received from PM's Office (original placed below) regarding transfer of Rs. 114 crores to the Government of India from Burma, Japan and Singapore for construction of Netaji Memorial in Delhi.

2. A note based on discreet enquiries is enclosed. It is suggested that further check - up may be made with Ministry of Finance/Reserve Bank etc., if deemed necessary.

PI

2.
(S. C. Mehta)
Joint Director

MHA - (Ms. S. Chauhan, Joint Secretary)
DIB U.O. No. IV/6(72)/87-S/71 dated the

18 अप्रैल 1987

And I am absolutely flabbergasted that none of the IB people who appeared before Shah Nawaz and Khosla panels referred to the man who was the best-informed Indian about the early inquiries into Bose's reported death.

Kalipada Dey told all sort of things to Justice Khosla but never uttered a word about "Rai Bahadur" Bakshi Badrinath, who was the only senior Indian officer on the case. In fact, Dey, Roy, Pritam Singh and Nagina Singh, all members of the Finney-Davies team, were only inspectors. Mullik knew Badrinath personally and had entrusted him with secret missions to Kashmir. Badrinath's elder son Air Vice Marshal (Retd) Kuldip Bakshi was generous enough to show me a certificate signed by Mullik when his father retired in the 1950s. It was clearly mentioned in it that Badrinath had even worked on Bose's disappearance in 1941. Unable to understand the value of that document at that time, I made the mistake of not keeping a copy of it. But I did make copies of Badrinath's personal diaries for 1945-46.

TUESDAY	Wednesday	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
19 APRIL 1946	20 APRIL 1946	21 APRIL 1946	22 APRIL 1946
SUMMARY	SUMMARY	SUMMARY	SUMMARY
On the morning went to M.I.D.O.'s office accompanied by Mr. Compt. Karimullah Khan. Met Mr. Roy and Mr. Dey. Both with Singhamalal taking notes with his camera & took also Kuldip, Akbar Ali Khan - Mr. Kamal Khan & Chawla. Attended a meeting at Range House addressed by Patel sir.	Called on Adm. Bellary and 10/14. Then returned to take notes of Mr. Roy. In the afternoon saw Compt. Karimullah in his office. Return home. Dined.	Kamal Khan arrived for Delhi Court case in my hotel; we occupied Room No. 25 which I paid Portage. Coffe break off.	19 APRIL 1946
SUMMARY	SUMMARY	SUMMARY	SUMMARY
Attended M.I.D.O.'s office in the morning & submitted my first report. Then accompanied Capt. Singhamalal to see Tolson, Eddie Kennedy & Goff. Also with him went to his office & then returned to M.I.D.O. office where he remained during the day.	Attended M.I.D.O.'s office & disposed of correspondence. Saw Mr. Roy in his house after visit to M.I.D.O.'s office. He has written also had been brought from Haslak.	On the morning went to Haslak and left off.	20 APRIL 1946
To night went to a single seated room.	Paper, Legs	Paper, Legs	Paper, Legs
19 APRIL 1946	20 APRIL 1946	21 APRIL 1946	22 APRIL 1946

The diaries contain pointers about Badrinath's investigation in tandem with Finney, Davies, Hugh Toye and others. The Air Vice Marshal told me that his father submitted "a bulky report" and all we have now is only a page referring to him at the National Archives in a file Khosla kept secret from all independent lawyers, and which also never reached the Mukherjee Commission. Only the IB can tell where are the other Badrinath records.

Kuldip Bakshi also told me that his father remained in contact with his former colleagues after

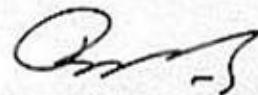
Independence. I could never get any information from Phillip Finney's family because I could not contact his son Chris. The younger son of Badrinath was in the IB as well and so the retired old man could have been easily contacted and asked to give evidence before the first two panels. Badrinath passed away in Delhi in 1985. Come to think of it, it shouldn't have been difficult to trace Finney either, for he outlived Badrinath by one year.

I can also relate what Barun Sengupta testified before the Mukhejee Commission during his examination on 23 November 2000. He said he had himself seen "a report with an intelligence officer in Delhi" in the 1970s. He refused to divulge the name of his source as any journalist would. The report shown to Sengupta quoted Rahman telling a "British intelligence officer that he was not with Netaji in the aircraft which crashed". Where is that report now?

Since the Intelligence Bureau is not covered by the Right to Information, one cannot request it under the act to state its position over matters just discussed. The Research and Analysis Wing—our external intelligence organisation—is also beyond the preview of RTI. But by a fluke, it responded to my 2006 request to the Prime Minister's Officer seeking clarification whether or not it was holding any classified records on Bose. The response was that "R&AW does not have any information pertaining to Netaji".

I am directed to refer to your letter dated 21.12.2006 addressed to AS(SR) and appellate Authority, Cabinet Secretariat, Bikaner House(Annexe), New Delhi on the subject mentioned above and to inform you that the R&AW does not have any information pertaining to Netaji. As such no list as requested by you in point 2 can be provided. It might be added that we are under no obligation to provide this information under the Right to Information(RTI) Act, 2005.

Yours faithfully,



(P.N. Ranjit Kumar)
Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of India

It could be that by making this unprecedented RTI response the organisation stifled any controversy which might have erupted in case it had remained mum. In any case, the answer, while appreciable, had some room for doubt. Not because some people in private tell me something else, but because I know for sure that a letter was written on 18 March 1994 by Special Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, to R&AW chief on disclosures about Bose made in Russian media on the basis of classified KGB records. Would you believe that the R&AW did nothing about it?

Like everyone else, I am absolutely proud of my country's security agencies and their valiant and unsung officers. I do not dispute the need for utmost secrecy in the matters of intelligence because national interest warrants it.

At the same time, there is no justification for our Government as a whole to conceal any direct or indirect information on Subhas Bose from the people. The disclosure of information in this case will only serve the national interest because the Indian public has an overriding right to know. That is why no exception should be made for our most efficient intelligence agencies. They must have hoarded a lot of information relating to the Bose mystery over the last few decades.

7. Ashes which turned to bones

The nip in the air wasn't just due to the onset of Japanese winter when the Indian embassy car pulled in close to the entrance of Renkoji temple on 24 October 2002. First Secretary C Rajasekhar and Second Secretary T Armstrong Changsan walked in, going past the bust of Subhas Chandra Bose, looking sepulchral, on their way to perform a task no Indian official had ever attempted before.

Justice MK Mukherjee had come closer to it a year earlier during his visit to the temple. But either due to the reluctance on part of the temple authorities and the Indian embassy, or because of a pure oversight, he couldn't. His trip to the temple had been organised by the embassy on a holiday. No carpenter was around to open up the wooden box reverentially placed on the altar of a cupboard. The box, wrapped in cloth with "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose" written across it, contained his alleged ashes.

Temple priest Koshi Mochizuki and his wife stood attentively with the Indian officers as the square box full of controversies was opened. Out came yet another. The Indians saw no ash in it; there were big pieces of burnt, grayish bones and a bundle of brown paper. The bundle contained charred remains of teeth. A closer look at the bones revealed that there were chunks from a skull. The officers had the bones turned and noticed big fragment of a jaw.



This sombre episode was one of many forming the long tale of Renkoji remains. So long that it has so far taken several classified files to record them.

The first post-independence development happened almost six years after the air crash we now know never happened. In March 1951, the Government received a letter from former INA man JK Bhonsle, now a minister, saying that Bose's ashes were lying in a Japanese temple. This prompted the Ministry of External Affairs to direct its newly established liaison office in Tokyo to carry out an investigation.

The liaison head KK Chettur reported back former Indian Independence League official Munga Ramamurti's assertion that he and SA Ayer had been handed over the urn containing ashes at the entrance of the Imperial Japanese Army HQ in September 1945 and that they had later deposited the urn with the priest of Renkoji temple.

VC Trivedi became the first Indian official to visit the temple. Then a First Secretary and would-be ambassador and noted disarmament expert, Trivedi observed that any "further verification was obviously impossible". New Delhi was promptly informed through a telegram.

SECRET

O.T.P.

CCB No.3421.

TELEGRAM: **SECRET**
From: India, Tokyo,
To: Foreign, New Delhi.

11
DTO APRIL 281430.
DTR APRIL 281850.

IMPORTANT

IMPORTANT

No.33 CS.

RTI

M.RAMAMURTI only source available confirms AYER and himself having received ashes September 1945 and entrusted them to* custody of RENKOJI Temple Horinouchi Suginaniku Tokyo. TRIVEDI has visited temple and seen casket. Further verification obviously impossible.

Then followed SA Ayer's covert visit to Tokyo. Ayer's enquiry, though more about disposing off the INA treasure, paved the way for the Government of India to take charge of the ashes. In June 1951 Chettur invited the Renkoji priest Kyoei Mochizuki, the father of current priest, to his residence and officially requested him to keep the ash casket.

Thereafter, Chettur informed New Delhi that the ashes "presumed" to be of Bose were enshrined in the Renkoji temple but under the charge of Ramamurti. In New Delhi Prime Minister Nehru was briefed. Through Secretary, Commonwealth Relations, he instructed Chettur on July 18 "not to get mixed up with Netaji's ashes at least for the present". However, three months later, on 24 September 1951, Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt wrote to Chettur that

the Prime Minister desires that you should immediately take over charge of these ashes from Ramamurti, without publicity, leaving them undisturbed in the temple until further instructions. This transfer of custodianship will be without prejudice to final decision, which will be taken later, as to whether the ashes are genuinely those of the late Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

In late November 1953, Nehru received a moving letter from Kyoei Mochizuki. The priest was under genuine impression that the ashes he was guarding were Bose's remains and was consequently not pleased with the turn of events. He complained: "I, a stranger to the late Netaji, was asked to keep the ashes by people who were strangers to me including Indians of whom I have never heard since that time."

Mochizuki meant Ramamurti and Ayer. He added: "Frankly speaking, I must inform you that, in spite of many inconveniences and troubles I underwent in keeping the ashes, I have never received any help privately and officially." Nehru was to read something else into this. The priest continued:

Now Japan is not under occupation. The peaceful relations between Japan and India have been reestablished. So, it is meaningless and pity for the late Netaji that his ashes should be kept in a temple of a foreign country, lonely and secretly, after all his vain efforts to bring about the independence of India and happiness of Asia.... I should be much obliged if you would kindly understand me, and send me, directly, if possible, any suggestions you may have as to the disposal of the late Netaji's ashes.

Nehru saw the letter and told Deputy Secretary Leilamani Naidu, daughter of Sarojini Naidu, that the priest must be thanked for guarding the ashes. "He should also be told that, at the proper time, we shall send for the ashes and have them in India. But, for the present, we should like him to keep them under his safe custody."

Naidu conveyed the PM's views to Ambassador MA Rauf in December 1953 with this instruction:

In the priest's letter, some reference is made to his not receiving any help privately or officially. The Prime Minister would therefore like you to help him in any way you think proper, including financially in so far as any money might be required for the purpose.

In the absence of Rauf, embassy staffer Ranbir Singh read the letter and carried out the instruction. On 14 January 1954, he informed Naidu that "though repeatedly pressed to accept financial assistance,

the priest made it very clear that he had kept ashes, voluntarily, because of his high regard for Subhas babu, which, in itself, made it impossible for, him to accept any money".

As Singh put it, the issue was highly emotive. Mochizuki had told him that guardianship of the ashes was "a source of worry to him" and he was hurt by the irreverence displayed by some visiting Indians. He demanded that the embassy should make a public announcement that Bose's ashes were kept at his temple. This wasn't possible for the embassy. "Any official statement", Singh reasoned, "would raise a storm of protest among some of our more obstinate fellow-citizens here."

Mochizuki, a likeable old man, agreed to continue to maintain the status quo. He left a good impression on Singh, who nevertheless, added one rider which was not true so far as the Japanese policy on India in pre-1945 days was concerned.

11. The Renkoji temple is fairly large and is well looked after. I am quite convinced that Mochizuki-San does not require financial assistance to look after the ashes. He is a pleasant man of about 60 and I have little doubt that his genuine regard for Subhas Babu derives from his sincere, though metaphysical and ill-founded, belief, that Japan's Asian venture, if successful, would have been the fulfilment of a noble and humanitarian purpose

12. I shall be grateful for instructions.

Ranbir Singh

PI

Shrimathi Leilamani Naidu,
Deputy Secretary,
Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

*Ranbir Singh
(Ranbir Singh)*

Post-Shah Nawaz inquiry, Mochizuki became restless. In July 1957 he wrote to Nehru "whether the Government of India would now, in view of the inquiry committee report, like to consider the question of bringing the ashes back". He was this time told by the embassy officials that the controversy "had not yet ended" for several Bose family members and so the ashes could not be taken to India.

In November 1957 the aging priest again wrote to the Prime Minister, saying "Netaji's soul is anxious to return to his fatherland as soon as possible". He was backed by the Japanese government. The Indian embassy was told that it was "not the custom In Japan for ashes to be kept continuously in temples". The embassy official spoke of the fix the Indian government was caught in:

There has been no request from either Mr Bose's family in Austria or his relatives in India and they may be embarrassed by having these ashes in India since, among Hindus, the ashes are cast into a river or otherwise scattered.

A decade later, octogenarian Mochizuki renewed his request, expressing his "inability to take care of the ashes adequately in view of his age and the possibility of his retiring from the temple".

Handling the situation on the ground this time was First Secretary JN Dixit. In a Top Secret letter dated 26 September 1966 addressed to KR Narayanan, Director (East Asia), MEA, the would-be Foreign Secretary and National Security Adviser remarked:

This is not the first time that the matter has been raised with the ministry. In the late fifties...a similar request was made by this embassy and at that time the late Prime Minister, Mr Nehru, had ruled that taking back the ashes would not be practical because Netaji's family was not convinced of his death and were not ready to acknowledge the genuineness of the ashes. He had desired that the present arrangement with the Renkoji temple should continue.

Nearly nine years have passed since then and still we have not taken any step to do something about these ashes, nor have we given any subsidy or grant to the temple of the priest in Tokyo for keeping the ashes properly. I would be grateful if you could have this matter examined by the concerned authorities and suggest some tangible solution to the problem that we now face because of the Japanese priest's request.

with the Rinkoji temple to continue. Nearly 9 years have passed since then and still we have not taken any step to do something about these ashes, nor have we given any subsidy or grant to the temple or the priest in Tokyo for keeping the ashes properly. I would be grateful if you could have this matter examined by the concerned authorities and suggest some tangible solution to the problem that we now face because of the Japanese priest's request.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely,

(J.W. Dixit)



Mr. K.R. Narayanan,
Director,
Ministry of External Affairs,
New Delhi.

The predicament was thrashed out by senior Ministry of External Affairs officers, especially Narayanan—the President of India from 1997 to 2002. Narayanan made the following observation on 21 November 1966:

The question of the disposal of the ashes of Netaji now kept in Tokyo temple is a very complicated one. As far as the Government is concerned, they have accepted the findings of the Shaw [sic] Nawaz Khan Committee and have no difficulty in treating the ashes as those of Netaji. It is, however, a different matter for the family of Netaji who still believe that he is alive. I, therefore, doubt very much whether the family will accept the idea of the ashes being kept in the Netaji museum in Calcutta. ...Far from agreeing to the ashes being brought to India, and exhibited in the museum, the relatives, family as well as politicians might raise an agitation against the Government for trying to assert that Netaji is dead. Therefore, unless the family gives its consent, it would not be appropriate to try to bring the ashes to India now.

Thinking of a win-win formula, Narayanan mooted: "It seems to me that the only thing we can do at present is to give financial assistance to the priest who is now looking after the ashes in the temple. I shall be grateful if FS will see this and give his advice."

intended to show that he is no more. Far from agreeing to the ashes being brought to India and exhibited in the museum, the relatives, family as well as politicians might raise an agitation against the Government for trying to assert that Netaji is dead. Therefore, unless the family gives its consent, it would not be appropriate to try to bring the ashes to India now. It seems to me that the only thing we can do at present is to give some financial assistance to the Priest who is now looking after the ashes in the Tokyo temple. I shall be grateful if F.S. will see this and give his advice.



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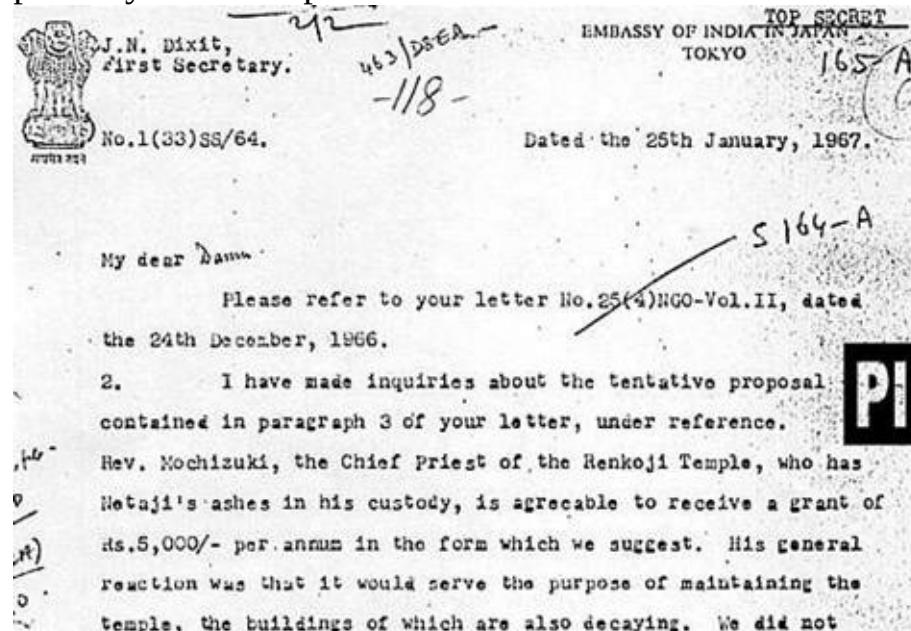
Narayanan
(K.R. Narayanan)
Director (East Asia)
21/11/66

The Foreign Secretary was agreeable. Writing back to Dixit on 24 December 1966, AK Damodaran, then a Deputy Secretary, summarised the ministry's plan to tackle the problem:

It seems to us therefore that the only thing we can do at present is to give some financial assistance to the Tokyo temple. We were thinking in terms of a grant of Rs 5,000 per year which could be handed over in the form of a grant to the temple and the priest in appreciation of their loyalty towards India and Netaji. If the grant is offered in this manner and not as consideration for looking after the urn itself, there is just a chance that the temple authorities might agree to continue to look after the ashes. We have not yet approached the Finance Ministry about this but have reasons to think that their response might be favourable. We would, therefore, not like you to make an offer now but would be grateful for your comments on the

proposal.

Dixit, now signing in his nickname "Mani", wrote to "Damu" in his Top Secret No. 1(33)SS/64 dated 25 January 1967 that the priest was agreeable to receiving the grant "in the form we suggest" and that this would "temporarily solve the problem".



In February 1967 further discussions took place on the subject in the ministry. A February 22 noting by SP Krishnamurthy of the East Asia Division in the MEA repeated Narayanan's prescient warning that "the grant if made without any stipulation is likely to be taken as permanent by the recipients and it might be difficult to stop the same in future even after the need for making such payments has ceased to exist". He, therefore, directed to "make it clear to the recipient that the grant is being made for an initial period of three years subject to review later".

Following this, Damodaran, who died in 2012 as a famed diplomat, elaborated in a note that "we may now initiate action for providing the amount of Rs 5,000 in the discretionary grant allotted to this ministry". The same was promptly approved by the Ministry of Finance. A few days later, SP Krishnamurthy wrote:

With a view to avoid political and other complications, it has been proposed that the temple priest be given payment of Rs 5,000 per annum for some years, ostensibly for the renovation and preservation of the temple. The payment is not proposed to be directly linked with the priest agreeing to retain the custody of the ashes but to be given in consideration of temple authorities' loyalty towards India and Netaji for a number of years.

This view of the officials certainly marked a change from the previous one, a replica of the World War II perspective of the Anglo-Americans that had nothing to do with India's own primary interest to get rid of the colonial rule before anything else. A Secretary from the Indian embassy dropping in at a meeting at Renkoji temple in 1958 "discovered that it was sponsored by a number of war criminals. Among those present were ex Lt Gen Oshima, the last Imperial Japanese Ambassador in Berlin, and ex-Lt Gen Kawabe, who commanded the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma". Little did the secretary appreciate that if it wasn't for those "war criminals", he would not have been occupying that official position at such a young age. He could still be toadying under a white man, probably happily.

The first grant to the Renkoji temple was made on 28 March 1967. JN Dixit's Top Secret No 305-FS/67 noted that

the payment was made in cash in the presence of the Administrative Attaché of this mission. ...We made the payment conveying that it was only an ad hoc grant in recognition of the services rendered by him to Netaji's ashes, for upkeep of the temple. Care was taken to avoid conveying the impression that such payments are to be an annual affair. The receipt bearing the signature and seal of the chief priest is being kept on record in the classified file on the subject.

On April 3, the letter trail resumed again with Dixit relaying the ambassador's view that "we must continue to compensate the temple in this form till we are in a position to accept Netaji's ashes back in India".

On April 9 the ministry agreed with the ambassador that “we should certainly review this question early enough every year in consultations with the embassy”. “And if you feel that the grant is necessary, we do not think there will be any difficulty in getting the sanction in view of the unusual political significance of the subject.” Dixit insisted vide his Top Secret No 349-FS/67 of April 17 that “we would see that the present arrangement of giving grant to the Renkoji temple continues by making it an annual feature in our budget estimate”.

After the expiry of the three-year period, a fresh sanction was issued in 1971-72, when the Khosla Commission had been functioning. The next year the Ministry made no such payment and neither did the temple priest raise any questions about it. This situation made the ministry wonder if it was not the time to stop making the payments.

The matter was discussed by Deputy Secretary PK Budhwar in a note dated 6 December 1973. He brought it to his superiors’ as well as Indian embassy’s notice that it should be considered “whether we should continue making such payments in respect of an item whose authenticity would also appear to be in some doubt”. Responding to Budhwar’s contentions, P Johari, Minister, Indian Embassy in Tokyo, made some forceful points in his Top Secret No TOK.461(3)/74 dated 8 May 1974:

Let me say straightaway that we feel very strongly that the payment of Rs 5,000/- per year should continue till such time as we are in a position to take the ashes back. While there is no commitment on our part in this regard, there is a moral obligation to compensate the old and sick priest of the temple for looking after the ashes of Netaji with care and devotion. In reply to your queries, there has been no reaction so far from the priest to the stoppage of payment in 1972-1973. However, you must remember that the priest is almost 90-years-old and in very poor health. This could, perhaps, explain his lack of reaction. There is no guarantee that his successor would also not react if the payment were to be stopped permanently.

Johari reiterated that “we would, therefore, very strongly urge that the sanction for the financial years 1972-73 and 1973-74 be issued without any further delay. You will appreciate that if the Japanese government gets to know that the payments have not been made and if this information is leaked, it could cause acute embarrassment.”

As far as the Japanese are concerned, they would like us to take the ashes back. You will appreciate that it is hardly possible for us to advise you on the political implications at the present juncture in India. This would have to be examined by the Ministry of Home Affairs in the light of the findings of the Khosla Commission. All we can say from here is that the sooner a decision is taken in this regard the better.

The MEA had no options but to resume the payments. Year after year they were made and yet, in a stupendous testimony to the Indian official secrecy, no one in the country, no newspaper whatsoever, ever got a clue.



K.V.N. Menon,
First Secretary (HOC):

D.O.No.TOK/753/TS/69-II

EMBASSY OF INDIA
TOKYO

(215)

July 19, 1974. (6)

P.22
P.215/4

Dear Shri Rangarajan,

Please refer to your d.o. letter No.F.25/4/HOC-Vol.II dated the 22nd June, 1974, regarding annual payment to the Chief Priest of Renkoji Temple for looking after the ashes of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. As directed by the Ambassador, I met the Chief Priest at the Temple and paid to him an amount of ₹480,000. The receipt he gave me, has been kept here on the relevant file.

2. Necessary certificate as required under Ministry of Finance O.M. No.17(50)/E.II(A)/59 dated 12.3.1960 will be furnished to the Ministry in due course.

Yours sincerely,

K.V. Menon

(K.V.N. Menon)

Shri L.N. Rangarajan,
Director (IF),
Ministry of External Affairs,
New Delhi.



TOP SECRET

The arrangement lasted for the rest of 1970s and the entire 1980s. The Janata Party government carried on with its predecessor's view that "no useful purpose would be served by bringing the ashes back to India at present as this might create unnecessary tensions".

In the Rajiv Gandhi-era, several demands were made to bring the ashes to India. One of Sarat Bose's son and possibly the first Bose family entrant to the Congress party after 1947, Dr Sisir Bose, openly came out in favour of it in a letter to Prime Minister Gandhi on 20 September 1985. Most of such demands, however, lacked punch, and at times even the basic understanding of the matter. On 2 April 1987, TN Kundra, convener of the Freedom Fighters Relief Committee wrote to the PM that the

controversy regarding the death of Netaji is almost dead now. His family members were not prepared to accept that ashes (believed to be of Netaji) kept in Hikari Kikan [sic] in Japan are of Netaji. ...Will it not be desirable that an early action be taken to bring the ashes in India?

The Government did not agree. Responding to a similar letter, then External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao wrote on 10 May 1989 that "it is worthwhile to await the emergence of a clear national consensus on the question which alone can enable the Government to take a final decision in the matter". A more elaborate 1990 PMO note stated that "consensus has not yet developed in favour of bringing the ashes back to India and there are strong feelings among a section of the public about the facts surrounding the death of Netaji".

Five years later a crisis was in the making. The Japanese who had through the years venerated "Bose's remains"—especially members of the Bose Academy—decided to mark the 50th anniversary of his death as the last. For the first time the Indian government weighed the tough choice situation of taking the ashes out of Renkoji temple. To make things all the more complicated, the Government was planning to mark Bose's centenary year in 1997. A situation in Tokyo and some pomp and show at home could well have revived the controversy.

The matter was therefore accorded high priority and with the approval of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao placed before the Union Cabinet for a decision on 6 February 1995. The nodal

ministry in the Bose case, the Ministry of Home Affairs, factored in view of all concerned, to define the problem in a "statement of implementation schedule" issued by Home Secretary K Padmanabhaiah.

PI

TOP SECRET

Ministry of Home Affairs
F.No.I/12014/27/93-IS(D.III)

STATEMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Subject: Proposal to bring the mortal remains of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose from Japan to India.

=====

Gist of decision required	Projected benefits/results	Time schedule or manner of implementations/reporting to Cabinet Secretariat
Whether the mortal remains of Netaji should be taken possession of and brought to India or the status quo should be maintained.	To forestall a crisis in the birth centenary year of Netaji.	To be decided as per directions of the Cabinet.

=====

L. B.
(K. PADMANABHAIAH)
HOME SECRETARY

In his note presented to the Cabinet, the Home Secretary detailed that

the Bose Academy members are reportedly thinking of disbanding the academy and having the last memorial service in 1995 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Netaji's death. Because of this and also since the birth centenary of Netaji is due in 1997, the issue of what action is to be taken regarding the mortal remains of Netaji has now acquired some urgency. There has been wide media coverage in Japan focussing the concerns expressed by the war veterans of the academy over the Government of India's lack of interest in taking the ashes to India. If no decision is taken in 1995, India may be asked by the Bose Academy to take charge of the mortal remains of Netaji. It would not be possible for India to refuse to take possession of the mortal remains. Therefore, a decision is required to be taken well in advance as to what is to be done with these mortal remains.

Taking the lead, the Ministry of External Affairs under the able leadership of Pranab Mukherjee overcame decades of indecisiveness to prepare a grand plan to bring the ashes to India. It opined that there were "widespread sentiments that Netaji's birth centenary in 1997 should be befittingly commemorated" and there was no better way to do that than to get Ichiro Okura's ashes to India.

The ministry proposed the following course of preparatory action:

(i) Promotion of consensus in favour of burying the controversy and bringing back the ashes from Japan--respected public figures and others to be discreetly encouraged to make statements, including in Parliament, requesting the Government to bring back the ashes; or

(ii) alternatively, establishment of a Committee to commemorate Netaji's birth centenary with participation of public figures of various political opinions, who would give the call for bringing back the late leader's ashes to India.



The consensus in the Cabinet during the meeting on February 8 was in favour of the views outlined by the Committee of Secretaries. The CoS had reasoned:

a) *The Bose Academy had not issued an ultimatum regarding the handing over of the ashes but merely made a representation on the grounds that its members were rapidly aging and by not be able to discharge their present duties; and*

b) *The Government of India was paying for the upkeep of the mortal remains in Renkoji temple and the management could be persuaded to continue with this arrangement if the upkeep charges were increased.*

Hence, “no particular advantage lay in taking a decision on this at a juncture since the birth anniversary was due only in 1997”.

Therefore, a view could be taken in the matter in 1996-97 and till such time status quo should be maintained. The temple management may be persuaded to continue with the upkeep of the ashes and, if necessary, the maintenance charges being paid to the temple may be suitably increased to meet the increased cost.

The Cabinet eventually decided “that the ashes would not be brought back to India for the present but that the dependability of the arrangement in Japan should be examined” and that India could raise the annual upkeep contribution for the Renkoji temple from ₹ 600,000 to ₹ 1 million.

Accordingly, Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar on 3 April 1995 apprised Ambassador Kuldip Sahdev in Tokyo of the Cabinet’s decision and sought a detailed reply on how the ashes were being maintained in the temple and what could be done if they were to be removed from there. Drawing from the ambassador’s response, Haidar sent a four page Top Secret response to Padmanabhaiah.

(16)

विदेश सचिव
विदेश मन्त्रालय, नई दिल्ली-110011
FOREIGN SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
NEW DELHI-110011

TOP SECRET

No. 25/4/N60 (Pt.)

19 June 1995

Dear [Redacted],

Please refer to your letter No. F.1/12014/27/93-ISD. III dated 31 March, 1995 and subsequent letter of even number dated 6 June, 1995 from Special Secretary, Shri V.K.Jain regarding the remains of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose.

2. As suggested by you, we have consulted our Ambassador in Tokyo and would like to convey the following information :

i) Present arrangements: The ashes are currently kept in an urn on the right side of the main altar in the Renkoji Temple in the outskirts (but within the city) of Tokyo. The Shrine is looked after by Rev. Yasufumi Mochizuki, whose father was the priest of the shrine earlier and

PI

Discussions with the priest, Rev Mochizuki show that he is quite happy to carry on the work of looking after the ashes. The presence of the ashes gives his temple some additional importance and some additional income by way of the Yen 600,000 that we donate annually for its upkeep. It might be desirable to increase this contribution, perhaps to Yen one million (Rs. 3,67,782 at this month's official exchange rate. Last year, Rev Mochizuki told our Embassy that he has absolutely no problem in continuing this work. He also said that his father received the ashes with the blessings of the governments of Japan and India and that he has no intention of doing anything without the full consultation and approval of these two governments.

As regards contingency plans, these can be drawn up once the type of contingency is known. In case the ashes are removed from the temple but not returned to India, the only location for housing them would be the embassy...In the event of a sudden unforeseeable contingency, it would be possible to lock the ashes in the strong room in the embassy. Our ambassador feels, and we agree, that the most desirable solution might be for a consensus to be reached in India for the ashes to be brought back with full honour and ceremony. Till that becomes possible, the best option may be to continue the status quo as long as possible despite such inadequacies as have been observed over the last fifty years.

In September 1995, Haidar's boss Pranab Mukherjee visited Tokyo to discuss this issue with his Japanese counterpart. The latter said that there was no inconvenience involved in retaining the ashes in Japan, but felt that it would be better to return them to his homeland and to his family. The next course of action, as described in a classified record, is as follows:

EAM said that he would consult Netaji's daughter as the nearest surviving kin.



7. EAM visited Germany in October 1995 and met Dr. Anita Pfaff, who said that the ashes should be brought to Germany if their return to India was a matter of controversy. To this, it was pointed out that Japan was not in favour of moving the ashes to any third country. She also discussed the possibility of a suitable memorial for Netaji in India. EAM made no comment on this.

It obviously was a misleading statement. The nearest surviving kin was not Anita but her mother. Pranab met Emilie, raised the issue and was told that his presence was no longer desirable.

Anita, for some reasons, was for bringing the ashes to India. After her mother's death in 1996, she moved along this line, and, as per official records, visited India "twice in order to build up a consensus in favour of the return of the ashes". In January 1998 she met Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and "expressed the hope that the new government would take account of her wishes and bring back the ashes to India".

In April 1998, just before a court order was to end the official efforts to try and bring Ichiro Okura's ashes to India, the Prime Minister's Office assessed the options at hand. PP Shukla, the Joint Secretary to Prime Minister, in a Top Secret note titled "Return of Netaji's ashes to India" recapitulated the difficulties in the way of the transfer of the ashes to India and went on to comment that

a decision needs to be taken on whether the ashes are indeed those of Netaji and, if so, whether they can now be brought back to India. From the above, it is clear that there is no particular urgency in settling this matter. However, a view needs to be taken on how to deal with this issue in the future.

INTERNAL /
TOP SECRET



Subject: Return of Netaji's ashes to India

p: 1-2/c

Ambassador Lambah had written to Principal Secretary to PM on the above subject, on the basis of a recent discussion he had with Netaji's daughter, Dr. Anita Pfaff. Principal Secretary had sought MEA's views, which have been received in the form of a brief note enclosing their files on the subject.

Finally, no discussion on the Renkoji temple remains would be complete without addressing the question of their possible scientific examination. The idea that Bose's remains should be subjected to DNA test to resolve the mystery has been in vogue for the last two decades. In an interview to the *Times of India* on 17 May 2005, Lakshmi Sehgal, after having been exposed as perjurer before the Mukherjee Commission, lectured that "the simplest thing to do is to take the ashes kept in the Renkoji temple at Tokyo and run a DNA match with Anita Pfaff, Netaji's daughter". [1]

If only it was that simple. What Lakshmi Sehgal was suggesting in 2005 was considered by the Government at least a good ten years earlier. On 28 October 1995, the *Statesman* (Delhi edition) under the heading “Government to authenticate Netaji’s ashes by DNA test” informed its readers that the Government had decided to go for a DNA test after two American experts opined that “it would be possible to verify the authenticity of the ashes from the tooth”.

Thereafter, the prospects of a “mitochondrial DNA analysis of the ashes presumed to be of Netaji” were discussed in a 1996 Under Office note No. I/12014/27/93-IS (D.III) the MHA sent to the PMO. The content of this Top Secret note and any subsequent developments are not known.

The only Bose kin to have gone deeper into the question of DNA test is Surya Kumar Bose, a disbeliever in the air crash theory like his father Amiya Nath Bose. In January 2000, Surya consulted Prof Mark Stoneking at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany. Prof Stoneking had previously worked for the FBI and helped expose an impostor trying to pass herself off as Anastasia, the youngest daughter of the last Russian Tsar. He told Surya Bose that he was not very hopeful of a successful DNA test on the ashes in Renkoji Temple because any pieces of bones left behind after a cremation are usually so badly charred that all DNA molecules are damaged.

Regarding the possibility of a mitochondrial DNA test involving his aunt Anita, Surya was given to understand that since the mitochondrial DNA is inherited through the maternal line, “it would be imperative to find a living maternal relative of Subhas Bose to provide a reference sample”.

In this case Subhas Bose’s daughter Anita Pfaff’s DNA reference would be of no use. Also, this type of DNA test has another drawback—mitochondrial DNA is not necessarily a unique identifier. So, even if we were to assume that the “ashes” in Renkoji temple are Netaji’s, a DNA test may in fact prove the opposite. [2]

It is to the credit of Justice MK Mukherjee to have made a most vigorous and closest ever attempt to get the Renkoji remains tested scientifically. However, these efforts did not succeed, essentially due to the inaction on our Government’s part. Here’s a rundown of what happened:

After Justice Mukherjee visited Renkoji temple, he asked the embassy to get the ash box opened and photograph its contents. The photographs received were forwarded to the Director, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and Director, Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics at Hyderabad. The CCMB Director wrote back that if the bones were collected from the burnt ashes it would not be possible to isolate DNA from the bones for DNA test, “but if those were remains of bones (not burnt bones), then presence of the DNA was likely to be there though in a degraded form but still usable for establishing identity”. [3]

The director clarified that India did not have special laboratory facility needed for conducting such a DNA test. In view of this response, the commission asked the embassy to get the Renkoji remains examined afresh by experts to see whether or not they contained pieces of unburnt bones. The embassy replied that they would get it done quickly. And then a hush fell over.

In the meanwhile, the commission reached out to a number of DNA experts in India, Japan, Europe and America over the feasibility of a DNA test on the remains. Sir Alec Jeffreys of the Department of Genetics at the University of Leicester (UK) expressed doubt about the success of a DNA test on bone sample which had been subjected to high temperatures. Regretting his inability to do the job in his laboratory, Sir Jeffreys—the pioneer of the forensic use of DNA—told the Mukherjee Commission to contact one of the national forensic service laboratories in the UK for they were fully tooled up to perform the complex analysis required in the case.

The commission sounded off the MEA on 27 January 2003 about Sir Jeffreys’s opinion and asked for the particulars of the national forensic service laboratories in the UK. The ministry still did not break its silence.

Terry Melton of Mitotyping Technologies in the US came up with a workable idea in his correspondence with the commission. Stating that the Renkoji remains were unlikely to yield a DNA

profile, he nevertheless agreed to hold a standard forensic mitochondrial DNA test. Melton “recommended a thorough anthropological evaluation of the remains” and “apprised the commission of his requirements for performing the DNA analysis and stipulated certain preconditions which included the anthropologist’s report being made available to him prior to his proceedings to do the job”. [4]

In March 2003, the commission appraised the MEA of Milton’s views and directed them to do the needful. A few days later the MEA replied that they were referring the matter to the Ministry of Home Affairs for an advice. Justice Mukherjee’s patience was wearing thin, so he wrote directly to the MHA. It took the ministry four long months just to tell that it was up to the commission to take a decision regarding DNA test.

With the Ancient DNA Facility having reportedly become functional at CCMB, Hyderabad, the commission again approached its director. But he opined that the photographs of the Renkoji remains showed existence of completely burnt bones leaving very little hope for the survival of DNA. Anyhow, he advised that a molecular biologist should be requested to sort out the potentially less charred pieces of bones and bring them to India in a sealed plastic bag at room temperature. In view of CCMB’s latest advice, the commission went back to the MEA and requested it to “let the commission know whether the Renkoji temple authorities would accede to a request of allowing an expert to be deputed by the commission” to carry out the task.

Almost six months later the MEA gave commission a non-answer, which took the work to nowhere. On 20 May 2005 the commission asked the ministry to persuade the Renkoji temple authorities “to accord their consent to selection of potentially less charred bone pieces”. [5] This letter “evoked no response”. The commission’s final report stated:

In such a helpless situation the commission issued a reminder also on July 4, 2005 to MEA with a copy forwarded to the MHA for taking necessary action in the matter. No reply from either the ministry having been received by the commission till the time of writing this report, it could not proceed further with the matter. [6]

Fifty-five years after the Shah Nawaz Committee report reasoned that “if the ashes are taken to be genuine, Renkoji temple cannot obviously be their final resting place”, it is time we did something about them. The scientific tests, as and when they are carried out in an independent foreign lab, would not show them to be of Bose—for they are of Ichiro Okura. Therefore, the best way to dispose off the remains would be to respectfully shift them to Tokyo’s Yakusuni shrine—the final resting place for the Japanese war dead.

8. How India dealt with Russia over Subhas Bose's fate

Some ten years ago the daily I grew up reading startled me with a full-page story with a double-decker headline “Bose was in Russia: ‘An Indian ambassador met Netaji in Moscow’”. The kicker explained it all away: “New research suggests Bose did not die in the Taihoku plane crash and lived for at least five more years, somewhere in Russia.” [1] I scrolled down to find some revolting allegations about Jawaharlal Nehru’s complicity in Subhas Bose’s non-appearance and Pranab Mukherjee’s bid to cover up the matter in the 1990s. I pondered the issue over till an afterthought swept through. “God forbid, those conspiracy theories I’ve been hearing should be true!”

For a large number of Indians, anything in print and speech with Subhas, Stalin and Siberia in it evokes a frightening imagery. It is this capacity to provoke a national nightmare of international proportions which makes the Russian angle to the Bose mystery its most scandalous side. The chilling charges that it has set off in the last few decades persist in the internet age and are fodder not merely for the scoundrels.

My not so prominent ears have heard a former Congress MP rattle off in the same way as a former R&AW officer. They said the same thing my uncle and high school teacher would years ago in New Delhi. Oh, c’mモン you must have heard similar things if you too have an ear for history and mystery!

If I’ve got you thinking, let me guess what’s on your mind now. “Leave all that aside. Let’s talk facts!”

Well, yes, let’s get them straight.

It comes through clear from the extant pool of information that several months before his disappearance, Subhas Chandra Bose had been planning to go over to the Russians. Except Habibur Rahman, the man who kept the secret (Appendix VI), all those close to Bose during his last known days eventually conceded that he was USSR-bound at the time of his reported death.

The earliest known contours of Bose’s plan appeared in October 1944 when he, according to Shah Nawaz Committee report, “visited Japan for the third and last time to meet the members of the new Government of Japan and discuss important matters with them”. [2]

Anand Mohan Sahay blurted out during his interrogation at the CSDIC that in late 1944 or early 1945 when he called on Japanese Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, his deputy and the India section head in Gaimusho, he was told that Bose “had wished on his last visit to Tokyo to contact the Russian ambassador [Yakov Alexandrovich Malik], but that he was unable to do so because of the lack of Japanese support”. Later Bose himself told Sahay that “he had asked the Japanese Army authorities to arrange a passage for him to Russia via Manchuria”. [3]

According to the Shah Nawaz Committee report, Bose’s plan to move to Russia with Japanese assistance eventually received a setback in June 1945. He cited a document produced by Debnath Das, saying that in June 1945 Tokyo had informed Bose that the Japanese government deemed “it almost without hope of success to get directly in touch with the Soviet Government on behalf of Your Excellency and it has no intention of doing so”. [4]

Further evidence is clear that not only the plan was on subsequently, it even received the backing of the Imperial Japanese Army. Das himself told the Khosla Commission that he was unaware of the negotiations between Bose and the Japanese after the June jolt. Also testifying before the same

commission was one of the Japanese officers who participated in those negotiations. Morio Takakura said that in June 1945 he joined a meeting in Bangkok where Bose, Terauchi and Isoda had thrashed out the situation arising out of Tokyo's inability to directly deal with the Russians on Bose's behalf. About the outcome of this meeting, Takakura, a colonel in 1945, had this to say:

There was a decision among Japanese military circles that it will be better for Mr Chandra Bose to go to some area where he could have freedom of action than coming to Japan...for instance, Soviet-Manchuria border.... The HQ at Tokyo accepted the plan of Netaji for his going to Russia via Dairen and the HQ selected Lt Gen Shidei to accompany Netaji. [5]

Takakura's evidence on this point was corroborated by Isoda. He too testified that at Bangkok on 16 August 1945 he and Bose had worked out the last minute modalities of his transfer to Manchuria. He told Justice Khosla that Bose was on his way to Russia.

Commission: What was the object of Chandra Bose going in that plane? Where was he going and for what purposes?



Shri Isoda: The purpose of his flight was to go to the Soviet Union and with the aid of the Soviet Union he was to continue his independence movement.

That was the aim of his mission. After reaching

Isoda's cross-examination by Balraj Trikha brought out the Japanese intent to carry out the task surreptitiously:

"Now you were in great hurry to see that Netaji left early to a safe place to hide from the Allies?"

"Yes, I suggested to him strongly."

"And these plans of Netaji going from Bangkok to Russia were kept a top secret?"

"It was kept a secret." [6]

The two Indians who attended or knew of the August 16 Bangkok meeting were Habibur Rahman and Bose's confidential secretary Major Bhaskaran Menon. Bhaskaran told the Khosla Commission that he remembered Bose sending a secret message to the USSR, which he could not have done without some sort of prior contact with the Russians. Thirty years later in Chennai, a gravely ill Menon affirmed before a Mukherjee Commission official that "from April 1945 onwards Netaji had discussion on a number of occasions with General Isoda in his private room about his plan to go to Russia through Manchuria". [7]

In a sort of dying statement, Menon reiterated what he had testified before GD Khosla, but it was not taken seriously. After the meeting in Bangkok Bose grew restless like Menon had never seen him before. He spent the rest of the day and night issuing instructions, clearing unsettled issues as if it was his last day at work. He did not sleep and Bhaskaran was on his toes throughout taking dictations of frantic messages. And then Bose dictated something whose meaning would dawn upon Menon later on. "I am writing all this to you on the eve of a long journey by air and who knows an accident may not overtake me." [8]

Like Menon, Colonel Pritam Singh too lived long enough to depose before all the panels and stood his ground till his death in 2010. His belief that the air crash "was a mere cover story to cover up the journey of Netaji to Russia with the help of the Japanese" was based on his exchanges with Rahman and Japanese intelligence officials. Singh had remained by Bose's side till August 17 evening and expected to follow him to the USSR. He told the Mukherjee Commission that a day earlier Bose privately informed him that his negotiations with the Russians through the Japanese foreign minister had been successful, and the Russians had given the assurance that he was welcome to come over. Pritam Singh evidenced that Bose was preparing for a long haul.

Then Netaji told me that contact had already been established with Russia and we should try to move towards that direction. He further told me that, in that event, we might have to stay outside India for about ten years or even more, depending upon the world situation. [9]

And, as to what advantage lay for the Japanese military in sending Bose to Russia, most revealing was the statement Hikari Kikan interpreter Kinji Watanabe had made to PES Finney in 1945:

Bose's point was: "In order to destroy our common enemy, Britain, both Japan and the Provisional Government should try every possible means and help each other. Therefore, I earnestly request Tokyo to act as 'go-between' and let me approach Soviet Russia. Once I have been given an interview with the Russian ambassador, I have perfect confidence in my success in persuading Russia to help our independence movement and at the same time I am sure that I can do something to improve the relations between Japan and Russia, and it might serve to decrease the menace Japan is feeling on the Manchurian side. I trust if I succeed it will result in killing two birds with one stone. And if my trial proves unsuccessful, I shall only lose my face, that's all. I am nothing but head of a revolutionary government.... [10]

How GD Khosla and MK Mukherjee reflected on the plethora of evidence on Bose's plan to go to Russia is a study in contrast. The former theorised that while Bose "had contemplated the possibility of obtaining Russian sympathy and aid", he lost the clue in the tumult of the situation.

He had not yet made up his mind about what exactly he wanted to do or what was best in the circumstances. Even the two alternatives he was considering (after rejecting the easy but ignominious course of a subservient surrender along with the Japanese) were not quite clearly defined and his plans were vague and amorphous, as of necessity they had to be, in the chaotic conditions prevailing after the Japanese had capitulated. [11]

Justice Mukherjee, on the other hand, reasoned why a please-all evidence for the plan was hard to come by:

It is trite that a stratagem including the matter of its execution ingenuously and meticulously hatched in secret cannot, owing to its very nature, be proved by direct evidence unless one or the other member of the party thereto divulges the secret. It can, therefore, be proved by circumstantial evidence and the individual or detached acts or omissions of the planners including their dialogue.... [12]

The former Supreme Court judge saw "overwhelming evidence" for Bose's escape plan. Not factored in by him while drawing this conclusion were pre-independence, legally inadmissible intelligence reports quoting Russian diplomats' claim that Bose was in the USSR in 1946. Mukherjee was also not shown by the Government of India some important post-Independence official records. Such as Ayer's secret report revealing that Terauchi had taken the responsibility to send Bose to the Russians.

Justice Mukherjee's report, as we know, was dismissed by the Government whose persistent view has been that no such plan was ever on the table. It doesn't think that Bose could have pulled it off and that the Japanese, who were just using him, would have obliged him. And that is why the Government never ever felt the need to ascertain facts from the Soviets—until their final hour—which would have been the only way to know whether or not Bose it had actually made to the USSR after 18 August 1945.

Just how grave this passivity on the part of our Government has been would be better understood if we juxtapose the Bose case with the tragedy of Raoul Wallenberg—a young Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis in 1944 before his disappearance from Budapest in January 1945.

Wallenberg was initially reported dead and then it emerged that he had been abducted by the Red Army. Just as it happened with Subhas Bose, the rumours of Raoul Wallenberg's presence in the USSR began swirling thereafter. And just as Bose's kin and admirers strove to get at the truth, Wallenberg's influential family, admirers and the people he had rescued began making efforts to find out what had become of him. It started with Raoul's mother Maj Von Dardel taking up the issue with the Swedish government.

From this point on, the two cases begin looking different. That is because the intentions of the Swedish authorities were not mala fide. The moment it got the leads that Raoul Wallenberg could have been alive in the USSR, the Swedish government wasted no time in contacting the Soviet authorities.

The Swedes did not enjoy the sort of close relations which the Indians did, but that did not come in

the way of their quest for truth. Eight written and five oral official approaches concerning Wallenberg were made in between 1945 and 1947.

India was effectively in the Soviet bloc in post-Stalin period. There was nothing under the sun we did not discuss with our Soviet friends. Only one issue wasn't officially touched—not even with a bargepole.

In March 1945 the Swedish legation in Moscow was instructed “to request information energetically” from the Russians “about conflicting rumours In March 1945 the Swedish legation in Moscow was instructed “to request information energetically” from the Russians “about conflicting rumours concerning the whereabouts of...Wallenberg”. In April the legation was told to request the Russians for “a careful investigation”. [13] Present-day researchers lament that but for the callous Swedish ambassador in Moscow, the saviour of so many people could have been saved through those initial efforts.

But Ambassador Staffan Söderblom had implicit faith in the Soviets pretending to know nothing about Wallenberg. “Russians are doing everything they can already,” [14] he wrote once. “I am afraid that with the best will in the world the Russians are unable to shed any light on what happened....” His opinion on another occasion was that it is “possible that Raoul Wallenberg has been killed in some kind of car accident”. There was in his mind a veritable reservoir of cynicism. To him, Wallenberg’s mother was “wasting her strength and health on a further search”. [15]

People here haven’t been talking much differently over Subhas’s fate.

In June 1946 Söderblom was told to raise the issue with Joseph Stalin himself. He made a mess of the meeting by expressing his “personal opinion” that Wallenberg had died of an accident. “You say his name was Wallenberg?” [16] Stalin asked Söderblom and jotted down the name on his pad.

Persistent Swedish approaches made the Soviets come out in August 1947 with their first ever high-level formal reply. Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Vyshinsky wrote that an extensive search of the records had shown that “Wallenberg is not in the Soviet Union and is unknown to us”. [17] He also suggested that he “had either been killed in the battle for Budapest or kidnapped and murdered by Nazis or Hungarian Fascists”. [18]

Such an answer would have ended all further questions from Sweden but there were outcries from the Swedish public and media. Their government stood by them and kept on raising the issue. The Soviets retaliated in 1948 through the semi-official foreign ministry weekly *New Times*, which decried the “fables” and “filthy campaign” about Wallenberg’s presence in the USSR.

Two years earlier, an article in *Pravada* had in similarly vituperative fashion “denounced as ‘a stupid fairy tale’ a report that Subhas Chandra Bose...is in Soviet Russia”. This was closest to the first official Soviet reaction on the Bose case. Journalist David Zaslavsky dipped his pen in caustic ink and wrote that the theory was “a fabrication of dishonest newspaper buffoons endowed with an imagination which is as quick as it is dirty”. [19]

For the Wallenberg case, things began to change in 1955 when many of the Germans and Austrians captured by the Soviets during the war were released. Proactive Swedish authorities traced out some of them and obtained their testimonies concerning Wallenberg. They said they had contacted him in prison through wall tapping. Even this thin evidence infused confidence in the Swedes. The yearning for the truth made them go back to the Soviets. Moscow’s harsh response this time was that “it was impossible to accept the testimony of war criminals whose information was in disagreement with the results of their own thorough investigation”. [20]

Sweden ignored this aggressive political posturing. When Prime Minister Tage Erlander visited Moscow in 1956, he put the Wallenberg issue high on bilateral agenda despite strong Soviet objections. Erlander handed over to the Russians the “testimony from German and other prisoners of war, making it perfectly clear that Raoul Wallenberg had been in prison in Moscow at least between

1945-1947". [21] A declassified Soviet record shows Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov noting that "Erlander persistently asked us to find a solution to the situation in order to settle the matter" and that "the Wallenberg issue was such an irritating element in Soviet-Swedish relations that it might have a negative effect on them". [22]

Cornered by the Swedes, the Soviets finally owned up the basic truth: Wallenberg was indeed in the USSR after 1945. In 1957 USSR Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's bombshell of a letter referred to Wallenberg's death following a heart attack a decade earlier in Lubyanka prison at the KGB's HQ. Supporting this claim was a document, copy of a 17 July 1947 memorandum written by Lt Col A Smoltsov, chief of health services at the prison, stating that Wallenberg had died on that day and his body had been cremated. All that the Soviet had said up to that time about not knowing anything about Wallenberg, thorough investigation, extensive search of records *et al*, was part of an elaborate, state-sanctioned hoax.

The Swedes did not give up still. Various accounts available to them showed that Wallenberg had lived beyond 1947, when he was just 34. There was the case of Prof Nanna Svartz of Sweden meeting Russian Prof Aleksander Miashnikov in Moscow in January 1961. Svartz raised the issue "close to the heart of the Swedes" and Miashnikov went on to tell her that he had actually treated Wallenberg at a mental hospital. When she got back home, Svartz narrated the account to Erlander. The Swedish PM acted promptly, and at the highest level. On 25 February 1961 Swedish Ambassador Rolf Sohlman met USSR top man Nikita Khrushchev to hand him over a letter from Erlander containing the professor's account.

In contrast, the case of Subhas Bose as it was pursued by India would make your heart sink. In spite of the knowledge that Bose could have made it to the USSR, New Delhi never officially utilized even a jot of its diplomatic and political clout with Moscow to find out the facts so long statesmanly Jawaharlal Nehru and his family of "world leaders" were at the helm.

The 1950s and 1960s were the decades of denial, precluding the possibility of replicating the Svartz episode in India. Humiliation and intimidation was in store for those who tried to sensitise the authorities. An unverifiable account involved globetrotting Dr Satyanarayan Sinha. He claimed that he had implored the Prime Minister at a diplomatic gathering to informally raise the Bose issue with the Soviet ambassador. "But Nehru...dismissed that suggestion as a 'talk of *chandukhana*' (gossip in a den of opium addicts)." [23]

An on-oath account comes from Ardhendu Sarkar, a post graduate in mechanical engineering from the UK and former chief engineer of the Heavy Engineering Corporation. Sarkar testified before the Mukherjee Commission, and elaborated to me personally, that while on a deputation in Soviet Russia in the early 1960s, he had been told something mind-boggling by his senior at Gorlovka machine building plant, near Donetsk in Ukraine. BA Zerovin had spent some time in a gulag. Zerovin was not his original name. He was a German Jew, who had been brought to the USSR, sent to a Siberian camp for indoctrination, given a new identity and married to a Russian.

Sarkar got on intimate terms with his senior and in one of their moments of camaraderie Zerovin let it slip to his colleague from Bengal that he had met Subhas Bose in Berlin and "again in 1948" in a gulag somewhere beyond the end of trans-Siberian Railways in the vicinity of the Ural Mountains. According to Zerovin's account, "Bose" was apparently being treated fine, given a car and was moving around with two guards. In their short exchange, "Bose" told Zerovin that he expected to go back to India soon.

After letting out his secret, Zerovin realised that he had spoken too much. He cautioned Sarkar to keep it to himself in their mutual interest, so long as he was in the USSR. But Sarkar "naïvely" walked into the Embassy of India in Moscow—if you met him, you would believe that he did—and got it all off his chest before a Secretary. The Secretary was not amused. "Why have you come to this

country?" he asked Sarkar and lashed out at him peremptorily. "Does your job involve poking nose in politics?!" Sarkar's blood ran cold. The Secretary saw fear in his eyes and advised him not to "discuss this with anyone".

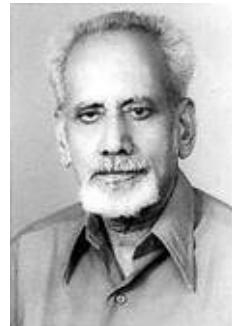
"Just do your work and forget what you've just said," he rebuffed Sarkar as he sent him off. Sarkar returned home in a state of shock and never opened his mouth till his children had settled down.

Evidently, there were many others who never ever spoke out for fear of retribution.

Wrinkles of angst and helplessness formed on former Ministry of External Affairs officer Rai Singh Yadav's battered face as he thought back to the time when a Russian diplomat in Europe had teased him. "Your Quisling was with us!"

"Our people did not want to disturb relations. They knew Netaji was in Siberia. He had been left out in the cold!"

This was a one-time director of pre-R&AW era Information Service of India of the MEA talking.



What Yadav told me about a friend of his was harrowing. "He sent for me when he was on his death bed. He said, 'I don't want to go to my funeral pyre with this. Hear this carefully'."

I listened with increased interest.

"Release this information when India is ready to ask questions about Netaji," [24] were the words of Tibetologist Ram Rahul, whose distinguished friends included a judge of the US Supreme Court and a low-profile former Soviet official. Babajan Gouffrav and Rahul had struck a chord in their first meeting in Tashkent thanks to Rahul's fluent Uzbeki, Gouffrav's mother tongue.

Time was when Gouffrav was a man of influence in Moscow due to his closeness to the Soviet *vohzd*. "Only Lavrenty Beria and Gouffrav could intrude into Stalin's privacy," Rai Singh continued his account. Gouffrav was also associated with the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow.

"He knew a lot."

Singh's heart thumped as the professor unburdened himself in his last moments, letting out the admission of deceased Gouffrav, who visited India several times. "Netaji had crossed over to the Soviet Union in 1945 via Manchuria." [25]

Nearly 45 years after this supposedly happened, the Soviet Union was swept by *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Swedish government, public-spirited bodies such as the American Jewish Committee and Wallenberg's tenacious kin and indebted admirers made the most of the times by renewing their efforts to gain information about Wallenberg.

In October 1989 Raoul's sister Nina Lagergren was invited to Moscow and handed over the original copy of Smoltsov memorandum and some of her elder brother's personal effects the Soviets claimed had been "unexpectedly found when old wooden shelves in the KGB archives were being replaced and the sack carrying these items fell to the floor". [26] Sweden's timely activism led to the formation of a Swedish-Russian Working Group in 1991 to look deep into the Wallenberg issue.

Did anyone in India think of Bose at that time?

Still classified Ministry of External Affairs records paint a pathetic picture. It had occurred to Samar Guha—certainly not any learned MEA official—that it was worthwhile to raise the Bose issue

with the moribund Soviet state, open more than ever to releasing its secrets. Guha lobbied hard with the VP Singh government, writing to the PM on 17 May 1990 and also pressing the points to his foreign minister so that a “high-level investigations into secret documents” on Bose in the USSR and other countries could be undertaken.

The United Front government acted fast, though the message it sent to the Soviets was somewhat wimpish. On May 21 the Indian embassy appealed to the Soviet foreign ministry to try and “explore the possibility of transferring relevant materials on Bose to the National Archives in New Delhi”. Even this weak message was strong enough to cause a flutter. On 20 June 1990 the *New York Times* reported that the VP Singh government was considering a new investigation. “There have been recurrent accounts of his being seen in the Soviet Union after that date.” [27]

In response, the Soviets in August 1990 sent six documents detailing the 1941 deliberations between the Soviet and German embassies in Afghanistan on how to take Bose out. The MEA estimated that these records “did not shed any further light on Netaji’s fate”. In May 1991 another bunch of selected records arrived from Moscow. Acquiescing Ministry of External Affairs in an “I-told-you-so” tone noted that it too “threw no additional light on the fate of Netaji or his possible presence in the Soviet Union after his disappearance in 1945”.

Some more pressure from Guha and like-minded people would bear down on the ministry before it would make its first unambiguous approach to seek information on Bose’s fate from the Soviets. This was done through a *note verbale* dated 16 September 1991 sent by the embassy to the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The note was based on a letter from lawmaker and Guha’s compatriot Chitta Basu, suggesting that Bose might have found his way to the Soviet Union after the reported plane crash. Basu’s All India Forward Bloc, the most prominent offshoot of Bose’s original Forward Bloc, had made direct appeals to the Soviet government previously but without any luck. Guha’s letters to Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhael Gorbachev had remained unacknowledged.

Looking back, the person who had thus far been successful in eliciting a Soviet response was the man who had got on Nehru’s nerves. Dr Satyanarayan Sinha created a sensation before the Khosla Commission charging that Bose had been held captive in a Siberian gulag and Prime Minister Nehru and others winked at this. Khosla was probably right in calling Sinha a “braggart”, but Sinha’s allegations—like he was accosted by USSR Delhi embassy officials who threatened to execute his Russian contact—outraged the Soviets. On 3 November 1970 the embassy released the USSR’s first and last statement on Bose’s disappearance. It was tersely stated “with full responsibility” that the Soviet authorities “had absolutely nothing to do with the fate of Subhas Chandra Bose”. [28]

The 1991 *note verbale* sought from the Russians “any material available in the archives of Soviet organisations, including security organisations, which could shed light on the fate of Netaji”. It was sent barely a month after the *coup d'état* attempt in the USSR, when the Indian stock in Moscow was at its lowest thanks to Prime Minister Rao’s statement in favour of the August Putsch. So, if the Government was hoping to get some positive response, this was just not the time. Perhaps the Government did not want any.

Now, the Soviet/Russian officers who handled the Indian query must have made one snap judgment: The Government of India was not too keen on the issue. Because if it were, the Indian embassy would have elaborated the details available to it, rather than making the case solely on the submissions of a politician relying wholly on publicly available information. To underline the importance it attached to the issue, the Government of India would have declassified its own records—just as the Swedes had done in the Wallenberg case—and then made an approach at a higher level.

The Indian External Affairs Minister could have written to his counterpart, or spoken on the sidelines of some important meeting. Instead, what the Indians had done was to simply issue an unsigned *note verbale*, a “Demi-Official” (DO) letter that is. Columnist Jay Bhattacharjee—the

Cambridge-educated grandson of Bose's teacher Beni Madhav Das—taught me the relevant French and diplomatic nuances:

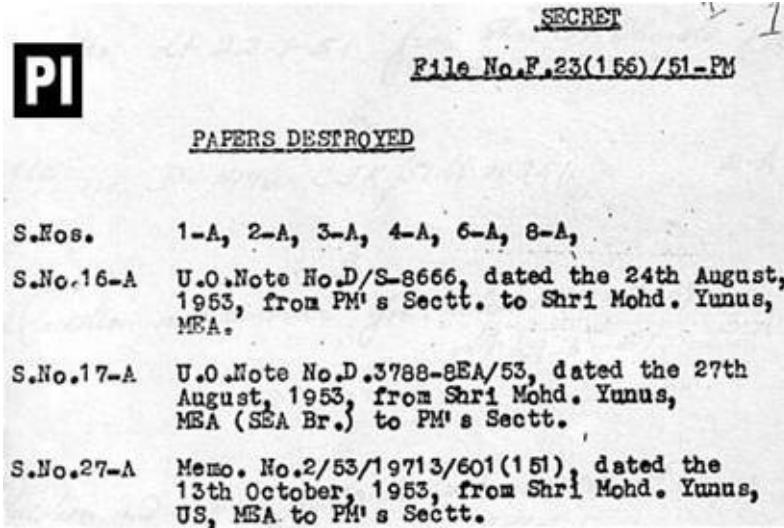
Note verbales are used when one of the parties does not want to communicate in a fully official manner with the other party. Therefore, what is sent is an unsigned letter/communication/note to the other side. It usually means that it should be used in a semi-official manner. Often, a note verbale summarises a discussion/meeting that has been held confidentially or not as part of the regular diplomatic schedule. An official communication between two sovereign countries is usually referred to as a démarche.

I saw a secret MEA noting defending the dispatching of *note verbales* to Russia over the Bose case for it is “the most formal method of communication between States”. This, I believe, undermines the seriousness of the issue involved. I don’t want to get into linguistics, but may I ask why this “most formal method” was not utilized in 2007 when then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee was frisked at the Moscow airport? Why did the ministry issue a *démarche* to the Russians instead? Because what had happened at the airport was a serious matter, constituting an insult to all of us, and, therefore, we needed to tell the Russians that we were quite unhappy about the incident.

You don’t have to be a diplomat to know that when a government wants to get something done by another government, it makes direct approaches, preferably through top officials, envoys or ministers. A recent example is of the arrest of Pakistani singer Rahat Fateh Ali Khan by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence in Delhi in February 2011. Following this, Pakistan made “frantic efforts” to secure his release. The Foreign Secretary of Pakistan called up the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad around midnight. If that government had issued a *note verbale*, the singer would not have gotten out so quickly.

Obviously, the worldly-wise officials of the Government of India know what does the trick. Actually, it all depends on what the issue is and who are the affected parties. In 1985 just before Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was to arrive in the United States on a state visit, President Ronald Reagan granted a presidential pardon to Adil Shahryar, an Indian serving a 35-year sentence for offences that included an attempt to blow up a ship.

How did that happen? Shahryar’s devastated father Mohammed Yunus scrambled to get his only child out. He was able to pull some strings, for he was “a former foreign service official and long-time sycophant to the Gandhi family”. [29] In fact, it is on record that Yunus handled matters related to Bose. Some of the Nehru-era papers where his name appears were found to have been destroyed illegally.



Yunus tried various ways in which the Government also helped him. His friend and Hollywood legend Charlton Heston wrote to the US Attorney General. Their correspondence shows that the Indian officials did their bit to get Shahryar released. One official in Delhi even took a swipe at the US, telling Heston that America was “a strange country, where a man could shoot the President and get off scot-free, while another could launch a failed fraud and get thirty-five years”. [30]

Our officials lose their tongues to cats when it comes to Netaji.

Shahryar was not set free until, the story goes, Rajiv Gandhi had made a personal intervention. Why he did that is the stuff of conspiracy theories.

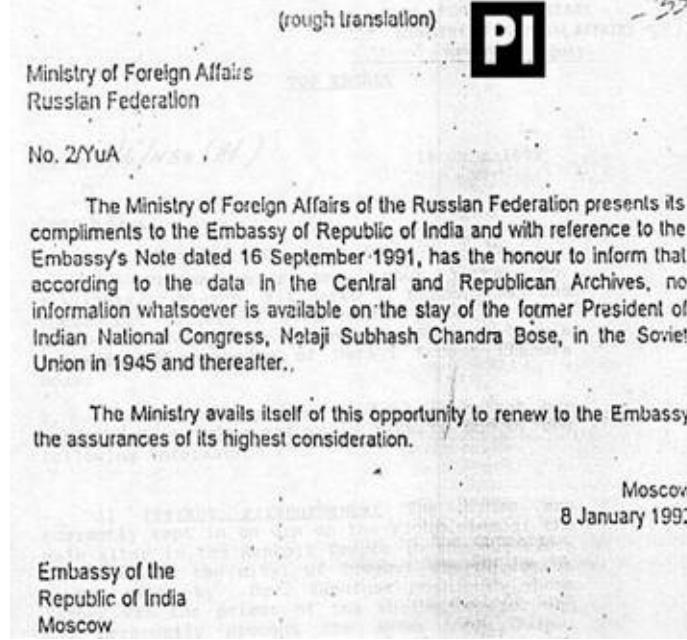
The issuance of a mere *note verbale* in the case of Subhas Bose signalled to the Russians that the Indian side did not consider the issue a very serious matter. Otherwise, what does it really take to say a few words politely to a minister or ambassador of an extremely friendly foreign nation?

"Your Excellency, may I draw your kind attention to the old issue about Subhas Bose. Some of our people and media continue to insist that he was in the USSR after his reported death. We have some circumstantial evidence. We will be most happy to present a dossier containing intelligence reports and other records for your government's consideration. It is being alleged that Bose perished in a gulag. We would like these rumours to end in our mutual interests, for the sake of friendly relations between our people and governments."

Wallenberg was just a junior official, but his heroism made the Swedish Prime Minister pitch in for him. Subhas Bose, head of the Provisional Government of Free India in exile, deserved far better efforts than what were made by the ungrateful lot who reaped the harvest of his struggle.

The 1991 *note verbale* was unlikely to yield anything and it did not. On 8 January 1992, the Foreign Ministry of Russian Federation, which had replaced the USSR, sent a flat denial:

According to the data in the central and republican archives, no information whatsoever is available on the stay of the former president of Indian National Congress, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in the Soviet Union in 1945 and thereafter.



The Russian note bore striking similarity to the Soviet formulation over Wallenberg matter—he is not in our country and is unknown to us. New Delhi, however, took the Moscow missive as gospel. In August 1992 Prime Minister Rao decided that the “question of whether Netaji is dead or alive or the circumstances of his disappearance, need not be reopened”. Foreign Secretary JN Dixit moved to squash Samar Guha’s inquisitiveness, writing to him in November that “our own enquiries with the Russians, pursuant to your suggestion, indicate that they themselves accept that Netaji died in the plane crash in 1945”.

Other indications were in the air as well. In Russia, a palpable unease was growing over resurgence in the interest in Subhas Bose both in India and at home. A 1990 article on Bose in official mouthpiece *Soviet Land* was introduced by the magazine editor in a most telling manner:

For a long time Soviet researchers were not allowed even to mention this passionate patriot and staunch freedom fighter because of the complexity of his destiny.... Glasnost is removing many blank spaces in Soviet history and in the USSR's relations with foreign countries and restoring the truth about various events and personalities. Thus, quite a few complicated episodes in Soviet-Polish relations have been brought to light.

The reference to Soviet-Polish relations was about a matter more damning than the Wallenberg

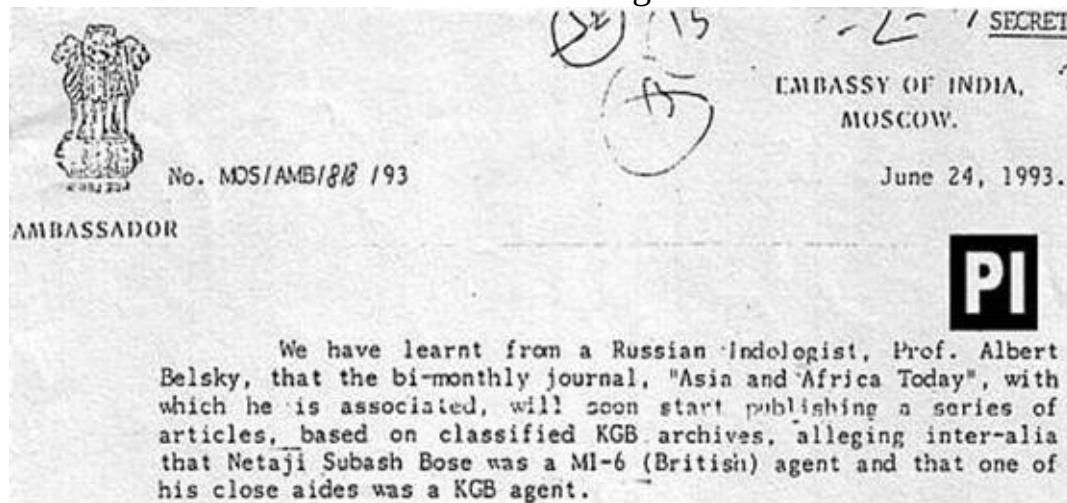
affair. For nearly half a century the Soviets feigned ignorance about the slaughter of virtually the entire top Polish brass, some 22,000 officers, in 1943. They had once even set up a commission which after what they called "rigorous inquiry" fixed the blame for the Katyn Forest massacre on the Nazis. So long Poland remained in the Communist bloc, the demands for the truth were successfully suppressed. Then Poland became democratic and its people and government did what the Swedes had done for Wallenberg.

The outcome couldn't have been more dramatic. Mikhail Gorbachev went on TV to accept the Soviet guilt. The same Gorbachev who, according to a story in *Hindustan Times*, had once "evaded a direct answer" to a researcher's query about Bose, "and is alleged to have said it was up to both governments to solve the issue once and for all". [31]

In 1992, journal *Echo Planiei* carried an essay titled "The life and death of Netaji Bose" by a former Tass correspondent in India. Again the editorial comment hinted at the hidden subplot. It said that the officials in New Delhi and Moscow were "keeping silence as regards the true fate of Bose" and that Moscow had "confirmable documents" as to what the "true state of affairs" actually were.

Alarmed by such reports, Russian authorities tried to deflect the attention through a leak. Victor Touradjev, deputy editor-in-chief of the Russian journal *Asia and Africa Today* was clandestinely shown some of the records on Bose kept in the KGB archives. He found the papers "scrappy" and the information contained by them "chaotic", but—probably nudged by the officials—Touradjev made up for the gaps by coming up with a fantastic thesis. The death mystery was sought to be trashed and the British were dragged into the picture.

The Indian embassy came to know what Touradjev was up to. On 24 June 1993 Ambassador Ronen Sen informed Foreign Secretary Dixit that the journal "will soon start publishing a series of articles, based on classified KGB archives, alleging *inter-alia* that Netaji Subhas Bose was a MI-6 (British) agent and that one of his close aides was a KGB agent".



Asia and Africa Today had limited circulation but was subscribed to by libraries, academic institutions and scholars in Russia and abroad. "If such a sensational story appears in the journal, it will be picked up immediately by journalists based in Moscow. Some Indian journalists have already got wind of it," Sen wrote. He was worried about the spillover effect.

From time to time, there has been media speculations on Netaji's visits to the then Soviet Union in 1941 and during and after 1945. The Russian foreign ministry had informed us in January 1992, on the basis of the documents available in their central and republic archives, that there was no evidence that Netaji had stayed in the Soviet Union during or after 1945. We had also sent to MEA some archival documents obtained from the Soviet foreign office in 1990. None of these materials contained even hint of such scurrilous allegations.

Ambassador Sen twisted the Russian intimation about having no "information" about Bose to their having no "evidence". "Evidence" is one thing, "information" another. Anyway, Sen directed the Counsellor (Information), Ajai Malhotra, to check up facts and try to persuade Touradjev "not to publish articles containing charges about a highly respected national leader".

PIEmbassy of India
MoscowMeeting with Mr. V.K. Touradjev, Deputy Editor-in-Chief,
"Asia and Africa Today", at 1200 hrs. on 29 June 93

As desired by the Ambassador, I called on Mr. V.K.Touradjev, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the monthly journal "Asia and Africa Today" at 1200 hrs. on 29 June 1993. After exchanging pleasantries and exploring the possibility of further cooperation between the Mission and the journal "Asia and Africa Today". I enquired from Touradjev whether "Asia and Africa Today" would soon start publishing a series of articles, based on KGB archives, alleging inter-alia that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was an MI-6 agent and that a close aide of his had worked for the KGB.

Malhotra—now India's Ambassador to Russia—met Touradjev, who confirmed that his forthcoming articles portrayed Bose as a British agent and were based on "KGB archives which he had been privileged to personally examine and which had been shared with him by contacts he had in the Russian intelligence service".

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agents in Kabul, letters addressed by British Intelligence to their Soviet counterparts, plus other stray correspondence which he had come across in the KGB archives.

I specifically queried Touradjev as to whether his two articles contained references alleging that Netaji had been a British agent. If so, this would be quite unfortunate, given that Netaji was a widely respected national leader whose memory was deeply cherished by the people of India.

Touradjev told Malhotra that "his articles did not bring out that Netaji was an MI-6 agent, in the sense of his being a 'paid functionary'". In Touradjev's views, his assessment actually made Subhas "go up in his esteem, since, it showed that he (Netaji) had contributed to the defeat of Fascism". He even claimed that "to the best of his knowledge the Russian intelligence service did not possess a separate file on Netaji. In his view, this would seem to show that Netaji had never visited the Soviet Union since, at least in earlier years, a file was usually opened on every foreigner arriving in the country".

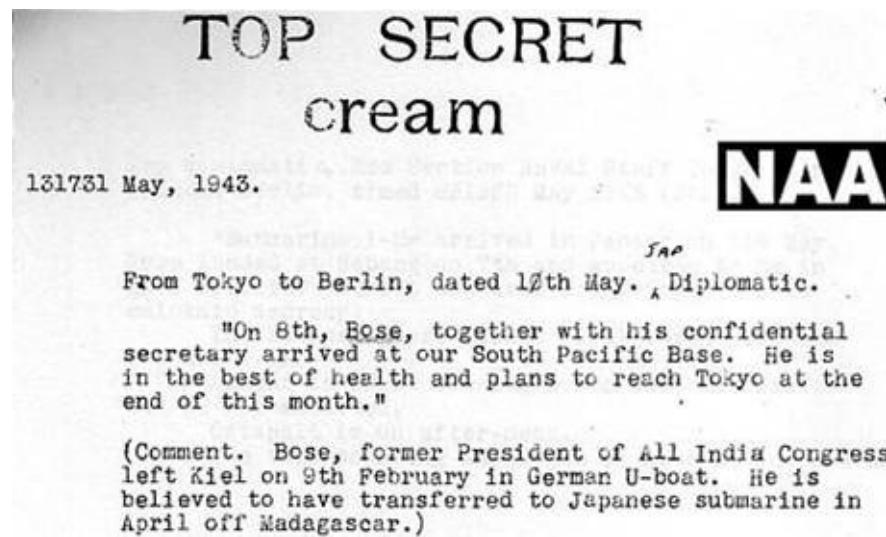
The Russian did go ahead and publish his pieces in the journal in the autumn of 1993. He wrote that his "careful and intent study of the archival documents of the KGB" had convinced him that "Subhas Chandra Bose collaborated with the English Secret Intelligence Service [MI6]". Touradjev based his hypothesis on two pieces of information which appeared to him as converging. The first related to Bose's 1941 escape from Kolkata to Kabul. It seemed so incredible a feat to Touradjev that he suspected that it could not have materialised without British collusion. Most likely Touradjev picked up this conjecture from something on file because in February 1941 the incredulous Soviet ambassador in Kabul had thought along the same lines for a while. According to a German record captured by the Americans after the war, he suspected the "English intrigue behind Bose's wish" to seek a safe passage through "for the purpose of creating a conflict between the Soviet Union and

Afghanistan". [32]

Touradjev built the old theory up with his own fanciful ideas reflecting his ignorance about Bose. "It is again clear why the English colonial authorities kept silence for so long about Bose's flight." He posed why the British did not capture or kill Bose during his submarine voyage from Germany to the Far East, when they were in the know of his movement. "How did this highly secret information come to the English?" he asked before providing an explanation: "There is also enough ground to assume that the person who informed them was Bose himself." [33]

Touradjev got it wrong. Bose had worked out his escape from Kolkata in such an ingenious way that by the time his disappearance was discovered, he had already crossed Peshawar. According to Suresh Bose, his younger brother "was an arch secret service man, with a dogged determination in carrying out his plans, always unmindful of the difficulties and consequences that they would entail". [34]

The Allies came to know of Bose's undersea voyage because they had broken secret German codes. Bose was not targetted for it would have sabotaged their overall strategy to defeat the Nazis. The Bose file in the National Archive of Australia also shows that even the Japanese secret telegrams were being intercepted by the country's navy during the war. This is what the item no 12 of series B5555\O shows:



The most incriminating detail for Touradjev was that the man who took Bose from Peshawar to the Russian border, Bhagat Ram Talwar, later "became a collaborator of the Soviet intelligence service and simultaneously a highly secret agent of the British Secret Intelligence Service". "The main secret and all the smallest but very important details are concealed in the English archives," Touradjev now claimed. He wrote that the Indians should demand from the British "to make their secret archives public, which can reveal the entire truth about Subhas Chandra Bose". [35]

Something did emerge in 2005 and it served as a reminder that the colonial British wanted to get rid of Bose. Prof Eunan O'Halpin of Dublin's Trinity College stumbled upon records proving that the British foreign office, which controls the MI-6, "had ordered the assassination" of Bose "just after he had made his 'grand escape' from Kolkata". [36] Adding more insight was Anthony Paul, a leading columnist for Singapore's *Straits Times*. Paul referred to his talk with an acquaintance in the MI-6. On his asking whether James Bond creator Ian Fleming's "fantasies had any basis in fact, whether London ever really licensed its agents to kill", the officer replied that "there have been rare, very rare exceptions" [37] and named Subhas Bose as one of the two possible targets.

There's one 007 connection worth mentioning. The man who's said to have inspired Fleming's fictional character—his spy brother Peter Fleming—once handled Bhagat Ram Talwar as the head of counter-intelligence organisation called GSI(d). Talwar's linkages with several intelligence services had been exposed before Touradjev's writings appeared.

Unbeknown to the Indian media, *Asia and Africa Today* disclosures caused much consternation in the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs and Research and Analysis Wing during 1993-94. Shockingly, some of the official records that I saw appear to peddle the view that "Bose was an MI-6 (British) agent...[because] one of his close associates was a KGB agent". This implied calumny in the government records consequently became the main reason for Home Secretary Kamal Pande to make a startling statement in a 2001 affidavit before the Mukherjee Commission. Pande refused to hand over certain classified Bose records because their disclosure would "hurt the sentiments of the people at large and may evoke widespread reactions as these documents if disclosed may lower the image of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose".

My own feeling is that with this blood-curdling averment the Home Ministry besmirched Bose's image and hurt public sentiments. When the Home Secretary put it down in writing on a sworn affidavit that there were records which would spoil Bose's reputation, he actually conveyed that there was something terrible behind it all.

I fail to see the logic behind the Government's stand that since Talwar was a traitor it somehow dented Bose's credentials. If you accepted this logic, someone might say that since we know now—thanks to unassailable declassified CIA and State Department records—that during the 1971 war one minister of Indira Gandhi's Cabinet betrayed India's war plans to hostile Richard Nixon administration, Prime Minister Gandhi's image stands tarnished as well. No, it doesn't. The minister betrayed Prime Minister Gandhi's trust and committed high treason. Bhagat Ram Talwar was not Subhas Bose's childhood friend. He was one small operative of communist orientation and Bose knew many like him.

Rather than going hyper about Touradjev's crass assessment, the government officials should have dismissed it out of hand. Actually, in 1988 Touradjev's article was translated and reproduced in a special commemoration volume brought out by Kolkata's Scottish Church College, Bose's *alma mater*. No one took the demeaning inferences seriously.

The official records further show that the Indian officials did not attach any importance to Touradjev's reproducing in his article the complete text of a letter that officially did not exist previously. Whatever overtures Bose made towards Soviet Russia were shared by him with his aides in bits and pieces. No one had the complete picture. A missing link surfaced when Touradjev found in the KGB archive a letter Bose had written in October 1944 to Yakov Malik, the Soviet Ambassador in Tokyo, seeking USSR's support for India's freedom. The letter bore a comment from the Commissiar of State Security (NKGB) to the chief of the 5th division of the first command of NKVD—the forerunner of the KGB. Bose had written to Malik that he wanted "to pay a visit to Your Excellency and find the way through which your Government can help us for success of our struggle for freedom". [38]

The least our government could have done was to request the Russians to send this document of historic value to the National Archives in New Delhi. Many renowned Bose experts continue to hold that such a letter—which bolsters the evidence for Bose's plan to escape to the USSR—was never written or received by Malik.

On a positive note, and giving Touradjev the credit for this remarkable discovery, he was good enough to testify before the Mukherjee Commission that there are records on Bose in the KGB archives—a term loosely used for the archives of the FSB and SVR, housing old KGB, NKVD-era documents.

Reverting to the exchange of *note verbales*, in March 1994 the Indian embassy received a "non-paper" from the Russian foreign ministry. It revised their note verbale to say that "according to the data of the central archives of the former USSR and the Russian archives, no evidence of stay of the former president of the Indian National Congress, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in the Soviet Union in

1945 or in subsequent years, had been found". That is, there was some information but it could not be construed as evidence. The modification was probably made necessary by the *Asia and Africa Today* articles. Or did it have something to do with Ronen Sen?

The second Indian *note verbale* was sent on 27 July 1995. This time the ministry would have appeared to the Russian officers as acting as a proxy for Samar Guha, who was the one, according to the note, asking for clarifications from the Russians. The note requested that "all material available on this subject be examined for a final determination on whether or not Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose entered or stayed anywhere in the territory of the former Soviet Union in 1945 or subsequently". The Russians sent a forceful reply:

As a result of the investigations carried out at the central archival collection of the Federal Security Service of Russia, and the Russian Centre for Retention and Perusal of Documents of Modern History, no information whatsoever has come to light on the stay of Subhas Chandra Bose on the territory of the former USSR in 1945 and in subsequent years.

Forwarding this *note verbale* dated 27 October 1995, head of the Third Asia Department in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Kotov, went a little overboard. He made a sweeping assertion that "we can be sure that Netaji has never set foot on Russian soil" and that "extensive research carried out upon the latest request of yours hardly leaves any doubts to this effect".

How can that be? How could Ambassador Kotov say that Bose never set a foot on the Russian soil when it is a historical fact that he had passed through Moscow on his way to Berlin in 1941? It's quite simple. Touradjev's KGB records-based article tells us: "On March 15, a visa with number 064033 was put up in the passport of an Italian citizen O Mazzotta with Bose's photograph, allowing him to pass through the USSR without halt. The order for issuing the visa was given personally by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, A Ya Vyshinsky." [39]

So there you are. Touradjev further wrote that when a British envoy at Kabul later on asked the Soviet ambassador if "he knew anything about Bose and whether any visa had been issued to Bose to cross over to Germany", the British diplomat was told that the "Soviet embassy at Kabul had no information about Subhas Chandra Bose". Touradjev commented: "Formally it was true: the visa in fact was received by an Italian engineer Oralndo Mazzotta." [40]

Maintaining records under assumed, coded names or even numbers is not alien to governments. It comes quite handy when you have to deny the existence of certain information and yet be able to give out a legally tenable response. Wallenberg researchers came across evidence that the Soviets "employed a system of assigning numbers rather than names for special prisoners" and "during interrogations, prisoners were often registered under false names". [41] Justice Mukherjee was told in Russia that if Bose had been assigned an assumed name upon his entry into the USSR, no records about him under his own name would ever be found.

The formal Russian denials were buttressed by an inspired newsstory whose trail went back to the ubiquitous Pranab Mukherjee. Senior journalist Suman Chattopadhyay wrote a polemical article titled "*Netaji bhaktader tandab—andha biswaser grase subuddhi*" (Vandalism by devotees of Netaji—good sense in grip of blind faith) in the *Anandabazar Patrika*. Chattopadhyay's own eyes had been opened to the truth at a "meeting in the Indian Embassy in Moscow in which one Russian historian, Mr Vergov, had stated that there was no question of Netaji going to Russia". When questioned by the Mukherjee Commission in November 2000, Chattopadhyay started dropping big names:

Pranab Mukherjee, the then foreign minister of the country, showed me a letter in Russian language in which it was stated that there was no document relating to Netaji after 1945 in the archives of Russia. Later it was corroborated by Mr Ronen Sen, the then Indian Ambassador to Russia. [42]

So, going by Chattopadhyay's statement, Pranab Mukherjee perhaps made an unauthorized disclosure of information received in confidence from a foreign state. As to why he could have done that would require going back to the mid-1990s when the Russian angle to Bose mystery was

grabbing headlines in India. The genesis of this resurgence lay in a 1993 agreement between Kolkata's Asiatic Society and Moscow's Institute of the Oriental Studies to organise research in Russian archives to probe the missing links in Indian history. The agreement enabled Dr Purabi Roy, Sobhanlal Dutta Gupta and Dr Hari Vasudevan to scour through the Russian archives. There, while interacting with Russian scholars, the Indians got convinced that the Russian archives were holding secret records on Bose's presence in the USSR beyond 1945.

Dr Hari Vasudevan visited the KGB's central archival office and "was 'aggressively rebuffed'" for asking about files on Bose. "I was told no requests would be entertained without considerable official pressure from India," [43] he told *Hindustan Times*. The problems did not get resolved when the scholars sought intervention by the Indian embassy.

What baffled the Asiatic Society team the most was the studied indifference of New Delhi. According to one member of the team, the then Indian ambassador in Moscow, Ronen Sen, made it clear that beyond the note verbale "that was as far as the embassy could go". [44]

The researchers turned to the Asiatic Society for help. Its general secretary, Chandan Roychowdhury, rose to the occasion. Normally, people sitting in some important position show you the door if you ask them for help on the Bose matter. On behalf of the society, Roychowdhury wrote letters of request to External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of State for External Affairs Salman Khurshid, and then to Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao—a self-proclaimed "follower" of Bose—seeking access for the scholars to the Russian archives. Not everyone displayed the rudimentary courtesy of replying that they had received letters from such a reputed organisation.

In September 1995, Roy, Vasudevan and Roychowdhury launched a never-before media offensive on the Bose issue. The *Statesman*, Delhi edition, carried report "Documents on Netaji lying in KGB vaults" on 14 September 1995. The report stated that "the scholars...regretted that in most cases, they were not allowed to study the required files and documents. The problems were further accentuated due to 'restrictions' imposed by a section of officials of the Indian Embassy in Moscow."

The *Times of India* quoted Dr Roy the next day as saying that the Government "should impress upon the Russian authorities to permit Indian scholars access to the KGB and the President's Archives as it might help clear the mystery of Netaji's disappearance". Roychowdhury "said he had already sent letters to Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and the External Affairs Minister to use their good offices in this matter".

Dr Vasudevan told the *Indian Express* on 19 September 1995 that "while scholars of most Western countries are making the most of the [Russian] archives, we are suffering due to the quirky attitude of the MEA". For any government in a mature democratic polity such a public damnation over a national icon would have sprung the head of the government to issue clarification. But it was not for nothing that Narasimha Rao was likened to the Sphinx.

A feeble counteroffensive was launched in December 1996. Researcher Joychandra Singh told media there was nothing more to the Bose mystery other than the Taipei crash. He claimed that Russia too upheld this theory. This he attributed to a response he had received from the Russian defence ministry archives in Moscow. Quite remarkable that a private citizen like Singh should have been able to elicit a direct response from the Russians, who hardly ever entertained such requests. But Singh had strong credentials. He had the tacit support of the Government. He had earlier been able to procure a counterfeit death certificate for Bose issued by Dr Yoshimi in 1988.

The MEA records show that a Russian defence ministry *note verbale* dated 28 October 1996 was received by the Indian embassy from the Russian foreign ministry enclosing a letter from head of the archives in response to Singh's letter. "There are no records with the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation about the catastrophe in August 1945 and death of...Bose." Joychandra Singh put his own spin on this to give journalists the impression that Russia upheld the Indian government-approved theory. He harped on his "12-year-old research" [45] on the issue,

which had been inspired by a communication from the Indira Gandhi government urging him to propagate the Taipei death story.

Singh ran out of steam soon after, while Dr Purabi Roy continued to take the Government to task alone. “If they are confident that Netaji was actually killed in a plane crash in 1945, why have they always tried to scuttle any fresh investigation? If they are clean, let them provide us access to the two archives and see what’s there?” [46] In 1996, she chanced to reach out to the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Viktor Chernomyrdin mooted the idea of an Indo-Russian commission to investigate the missing Indian nationals within the territory of the erstwhile USSR.

But was anyone interested in India? RL Narayan, the Joint Secretary in charge of Europe East Division of the External Affairs Ministry—JS (EE)—made an assessment of the situation in 1996. In the note of 12 January 1996, Narayan, who had had two stints in Moscow, admitted that “from time to time various articles have appeared in the Soviet/Russia press insinuating, though without any actual proof that Netaji in fact stayed/was incarcerated in the Soviet Union after 1945”.

The note then set out to tackle the Asiatic Society’s poser that “unless the Ministry of External Affairs of our Government prevails upon the Russian authorities to allow our scholars access to KGB archives it is absolutely impossible for the scholars to pursue the matter further either of this country or of scholars of Russia”.

Explaining the backdrop, Narayan mentioned that

there are broadly three kinds of archives which may be of relevance. Papers relating to the Stalinist period (KGB archives) are kept separately and have so far not been accessed by foreign and even Russian scholars, with the exception perhaps of very limited and selected scholars like the late historian Volkogonov, who has published biographies of Lenin and Stalin on this basis. Papers relating to the post-Stalin period fall into two categories—governmental and Central Committee/Politburo (these are again kept separately). The Russian foreign ministry’s note verbale suggests that their disclaimer about Netaji may be based essentially on perusal of these latter archives.

With this setting in mind, he opined:

It would be unrealistic for us to expect the Russian authorities to allow our scholars access to KGB archives. What we can do is to request the Russian authorities to conduct a search into these archives, and let us know if there is any evidence of Netaji’s stay in the Soviet Union. It is recommended that we may request our Ambassador in Moscow to make a suitable démarche to the Russian authorities on the above lines.

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12/1/96

(R.L. Narayan)
Joint Secretary(EE)
January 12, 1996

Foreign Secretary

A. Mukherjee

Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee saw this note and scrawled at the end that FS [Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar] should discuss the issue with the JS (EE) "urgently".

EAM F.S and J.S(EE) my Pl discuss "Urgent"
14/1/96

*FS (EE) met. 6pm
24h*

PI

FS (EE)

The details of that meeting between Haidar and Narayan are not known. Haidar goes off on TV these days talking at great length about all sort of happening in remote corners of the world, never saying a word about Bose.

But the outcome of the meeting was evident in the actions that followed. No *démarche* was ever issued, as was recommended by Narayan. On the contrary, he started taking a hardline against the Asiatic Society scholars. Narayan was confronted with the problem yet again after Subhas's nephew Pradip, son of Suresh Bose, wrote to Prime Minister drawing his attention to the information said to be available in Russia.

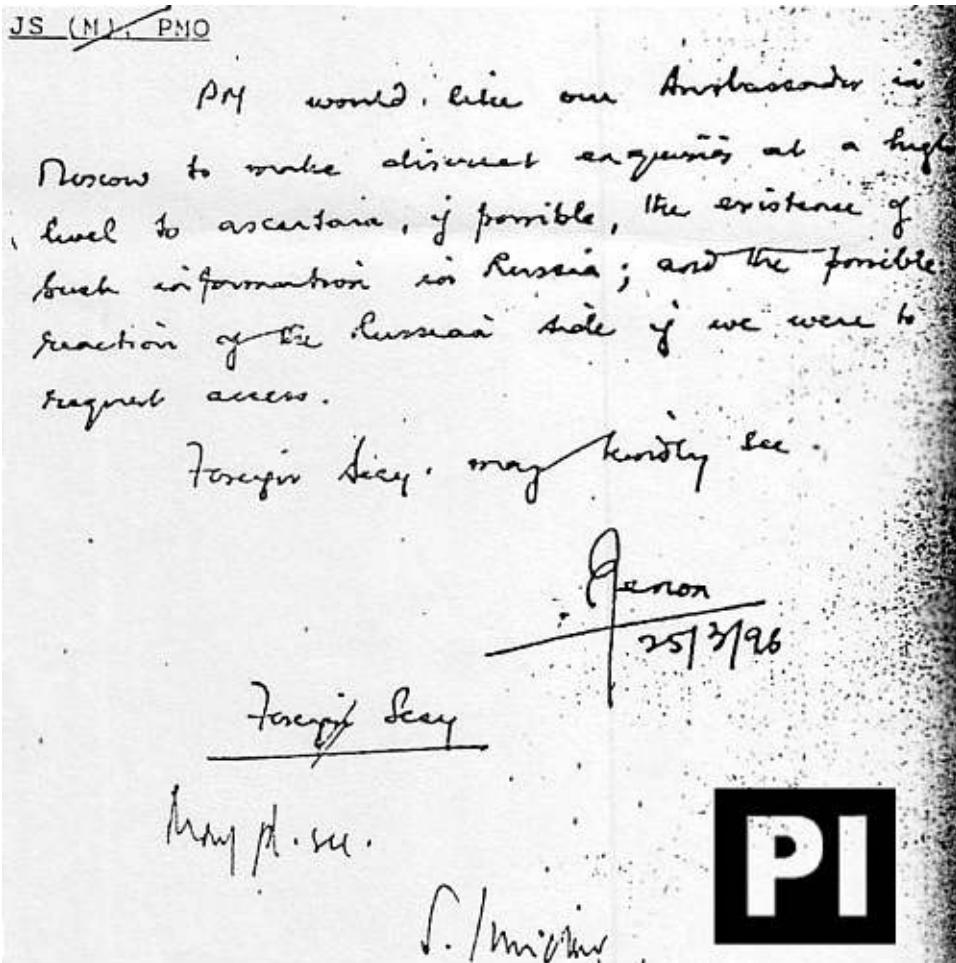
The Joint Secretary now articulated in his note dated 7 March 1996 that the Asiatic Society scholars had "unearthed no hard evidence of Netaji's stay in the Soviet Union" and yet requested the

Government to make a formal request to the Russians. Pradip Bose, he noted, "has gone a step further and has requested [the] Government of India to seek access to these files for the scholars". Narayan opposed it tooth and nail, saying that "no country in the world would permit access by foreign governments, let alone scholars from foreign countries, to its intelligence files".

We have no evidence that such files exist; on the contrary, the Russian government has categorically told us that they have no evidence in their archives that Netaji was in the USSR after 1945. ...In the circumstances, it is felt that it would not be appropriate for Government of India to request to the Russian government to open the KGB/Presidential archives to the Asiatic Society scholars. This would amount to our disbelieving the Russian government's categorical and official statement on the subject.

This note was seen by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, who issued the following instruction through his secretary:

PM would like our Ambassador in Moscow to make discreet enquiries at a high level to ascertain, if possible, the existence of such information in Russia; and the possible reaction of the Russian side if we were to request access. Foreign Secretary may kindly see.



It is quite clear that the PM was well aware of the importance of a "high level" contact. But whatever the Ambassador did in Moscow did not change anything. In his November 1996 note, Narayan charged the Asiatic Society scholars with wanting to access Russian archives "essentially in order to go on a fishing expedition in search of material on Netaji" which they "have convinced themselves exists in these archives". Therefore,

our seeking to obtain access to these classified archives on behalf of the Asiatic Society, after the Russian government has repeatedly and formally told us that they have no evidence of Netaji having been in the Soviet Union after 1945 can therefore be easily misunderstood by the Russian side. From the present perspective of Indo-Russian relations, such a request would serve no positive purpose, but could well have a negative impact.

Narayan—a would-be ambassador—also tried to reason why India could not seek access to security and intelligence-related archives in Russia like the Presidential Archive, the archives of the Foreign Security Service and the Archives of the Army General Staff:

5. Obviously, no Government in the world can be expected to throw open its secret archives for general research, on the basis suggested by the Asiatic Society. Equally, it would not be appropriate for the Government of India to seek access to these archives, which have not been declassified so far. We would, if nothing else, be embarrassed were a similar request, on the basis of reciprocity, to be made to us by the Russian Government at a later stage.

Was the task as uphill as it appeared from *Raisina Hill*? “Access” is not to be understood in its general meaning. If the R&AW were to give some MI6 expert probing terrorist outfits threatening both nations an access to its records, it wouldn’t simply invite the expert to visit its ultra secret record room and let him roam free and pick out anything he wants. The “access” would be a controlled release of information sought by the expert, but vetted and cleared by the Indian officials. This was precisely what then Intelligence Bureau chief Atma Jayaram meant when GD Khosla asked him if the IB had “presented whatever material you had to the Shah Nawaz Committee”: “We do not present any material as an organisation but we have given them access to our material.”[47]

Around the time the Indian government refused assistance to the Asiatic Society scholars in accessing security and intelligence-related archives in Russia, the members of Russian-Swedish Working Group on Wallenberg were being given an access to such archives. It is axiomatic that where there is a will, there is a way. The very idea of the formation of this group had been suggested at a meeting between Swedish Ambassador and Soviet foreign ministry and the KGB officials in 1991. Most significantly, “Kryuchkov, then head of the KGB, received Örjan Berner, the Swedish Ambassador, and undertook to release all KGB employees with some knowledge of the matter from their pledge of secrecy.” [48]

Will the Russians ever do the same for Subhas? Can we expect our IB and R&AW chiefs to make similar announcement?

Accessing intelligence archives in Russia was not that sort of an issue that our government made it out to be. Given the friendly vibes between the Russians and us, they would be much more open to us than they were to the Swedes—who were openly hostile towards them. Furthermore, it was preposterous to speculate what we would do if the Russians asked us for access to our archives. Because, one, we had no skeletons to hide and, two, it was fairly common for two friendly nations to exchange current, operational intelligence, leave aside records from a bygone era.

A classic illustration was recently provided by Prof Christopher Andrew, world’s most respected intelligence scholar and writer of the authorised history of the MI5. He told the DNA of Mumbai in an interview that during the Nehru years the Intelligence Bureau had actually invited the MI5 “to come over and have a look at the records that the IB has collected on the Moscow subsidies to the Communist Party of India”. [49] The point to ponder is that can a government which itself is sitting on loads of classified records on a man have the face to ask a foreign government to release records about him? We Indians should first make a clean breast of whatever we know about Netaji and then approach the foreigners. Charity should always begin at home.

Speaking of foreigners, there are great many things—more about compassion than investigation—that we need to learn from the Swedes. In 2000 the Russian-Swedish group presented its findings on Raoul Wallenberg. The Swedish report concluded that "Wallenberg's death could only be accepted if it were confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt" and that it had "not happened, partly for the want of a credible death certificate, and partly because the testimony about Raoul Wallenberg being alive after 1947 cannot be dismissed". [50] That is, the Swedes refused to treat the Smoltsov memorandum as evidence of Wallenberg's death even though it mentioned his name. And here we are in India, willing to accept the Japanese foreign ministry's assertion that the records pertaining to soldier Ichiro Okura were for Bose somehow.

Quite pertinent for us to see how the Swedish government reacted to the findings. No one rued about the time and money invested in reinvestigating the case. Writing the preface of the Swedish report, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hans Dahlgren hoped that the report "will contribute towards increasing our knowledge about him and lead to suggestions for new lines of inquiry". [51] The day the report was made public, the country's Prime Minister, Göran Persson, issued a statement promising that "our efforts to obtain an answer on what really happened to Raoul Wallenberg will be continued. ...The Government will therefore be allocating further resources in order to follow up the working group's reports." [52]

Compare these words to those of Home Minister Shivraj Patil in the Rajya Sabha on 24 August 2006 as he rejected Justice Mukherjee's report and you will know that just because a section of our society has learnt to dress and speak like the Westerners, it doesn't necessarily mean that we have imbibed all the good things coming from that part of the planet.

Six years' time was given. More time could have been given to him. He was allowed to travel to any country. He did travel to many countries. All assistance, which could have been given, was given to him. After that he comes to a conclusion. What is the conclusion? On an issue, which is of great importance, whether he has died in any manner at any other place and if so, when and how, "in the absence of clinching evidence, a positive answer can't be given". You expect us to accept this finding! And you find fault with us! If it is not for political reasons, for what it is?

This year, the Swedish government is commemorating Raoul Wallenberg's centenary by honouring his memory, not diluting in any way its resolve to know the truth about his fate. The official website for "Raoul Wallenberg 2012" repeats that "the Swedish government is still demanding an explanation" [53] for Wallenberg's disappearance. That resolve has got a new boost from Moscow with a former Special Archive head revealing in January that he saw a file concerning Wallenberg, "challenging the FSB's insistence that it has no documents about the man". [54]

Against this backdrop, let's see where does the Bose case stand today in respect of official Indian and Russian views. The Russians are continuing to replay the old theme. Another *note verbale* was issued by them in 2003 when the NDA government had to again take up the issue at the prodding of the Mukherjee Commission. The Government of India's favourite judge, GD Khosla, had never thought of anything like that. He did not raise a finger when the Soviet embassy in Delhi issued a statement relevant to the terms assigned to the commission he was heading.

According to the 2003 note, a "search was made for documents related to the fate of SC Bose in the following federal archives: Russian State Military Archives (RGVA), Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), and Russian State Historical Archives of the Far East (RGIADV). The information requested for was not found on the GARF, RGVA and RGIADV archives." The note squarely stated that

no information has been found about the fate of SC Bose in the central archives of the Russian FSB, the Central Archives of Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, in the manuscript section of the Russian State Library or in the State Archives of Photographic Documents (RGAKFD).

To break it down in comprehensible language—the Russians said they did not know where and how Bose had died.

In the final assessment, the information contained in the Russian *note verbales* is no gold standard

of proof as the Government of India would like to believe. We cannot overlook the Raoul Wallenberg and Katyn forest massacre cases, where the Soviets had lied for years before coming out with the truth under duress.

An obvious counterargument can be that the USSR was a different entity and democracies like Russia can not cover up things so brazenly and certainly not for a long time.

Not really. If disclosure of something is not going to serve the interest of a nation—democratic or otherwise—its rulers will never disclose or accept it, unless there's some sort of pressure working. Japan revealed in March 2010 that for 40 years it had kept a lid on the very “existence of a secret Cold War deal allowing the transit of nuclear-armed US vessels through its ports”. [55] The hi-voltage disclosure—Japan is the only nation to have suffered a nuclear Holocaust—came after decades of downright denials by the officials.

Not that we Indians have never feigned ignorance over things which actually happened. Lies are often given out for reasons that have nothing to do with national interest. In 1987, a Swedish journalist broke the news about kickbacks paid by AB Bofors to top Indian officials. In his reaction in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi not only denied the claim—subsequently established—he actually termed it a “foreign conspiracy” to destabilise India.

Sitting heavily on our collective memory is the recent case of Radia tapes. When the media first suggested that many important people had been bugged, the Government denied it outright. Had it not been for the subsequent leak of a secret government record online and the pressure mounted by bloggers, journalists and politicians, the UPA government would have hushed up the matter.

If these are not good enough examples, worth recalling in some detail is an illuminating episode involving the governments of India and the United States: In 1963, US President John F Kennedy revealed to Sudhir Ghose, an eminent Gandhian and ambassador-at-large for Indian interests since pre-independence days, that the Chinese attack of the previous year had made Prime Minister Nehru beseech the US for military support. Two years later, on 15 March 1965, Ghose recalled the incident during a speech in the Rajya Sabha that “the father of non-alignment asked for American air protection” and the US President “did respond and order one of the American aircraft carriers to proceed to the Bay of Bengal”. [56]

Though it was aimed at reminding the nation that America was after all India’s friend and Nehru gave precedence to national interest over the principles he talked about, the statement created a mega furore. Loyal Congress MPs mauled Ghose for making such an “outrageous allegation” to sully the memory of the late Prime Minister. Backed by the Left MPs, they sought clarification from the Prime Minister.

Lal Bahadur Shastri summoned Ghose to his office, where in the presence of Home Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda and Foreign Secretary CS Jha, Ghose was told that there was nothing on record to suggest that Nehru had ever made such a request to Kennedy. Since Ghose had heard it straight from Kennedy, he stood his ground and asked Prime Minister Shastri to ascertain the facts from the US Ambassador in New Delhi before making a statement in Parliament. He said if he was proven wrong, he would apologise publicly.

A day before the PM was to make a statement in Parliament, Ghose learnt from his American sources that Jha had been told by the embassy that the US Government did have the letters from Nehru and the same could be produced if the Government of India desired it. Thereafter, Ghose marched into the PM’s office to see Shastri who was unwilling to meet him because he had by then discovered that the copies of Nehru’s letters were indeed available with the Government somewhere.

The PM went on to state in Parliament that Nehru did not ask for an American aircraft carrier. Shastri was playing with words and Ghose was not willing to play ball. Having lost face, he shot off a personal letter to Shastri, telling him that his clarification made no difference to the substance of his

statement that India had sought military support from the US. Ghose repeated that Nehru's letter to Kennedy, personally delivered by Ambassador BK Nehru, had sought "16 squadrons of fighting aircraft", which was much more than a carrier. In his reply, Shastri—whose name is a byword for honesty in present-day India—asked Ghose to let the matter rest. Ghose would have perhaps let that be, but he was publicly humiliated when the US State Department backed Prime Minister Shastri's statement that Nehru did not ask for an American aircraft carrier, leaving out other vital details.

Ghosh then used his formidable connections and goodwill with the US lawmakers and managed to corner Secretary of State Dean Rusk during a public hearing in the Senate in 1966. Rusk was evasive at first and then said it was not proper for him to discuss correspondences between the two heads of the governments. Ghosh averred in his 1967 book that Rusk's cross-examination "clearly established that India did ask for air protection and the US did respond to the request". [57]

It was not until recently—long after Ghose's death—that his version finally prevailed. In 1998, the US government declassified the two letters that Nehru had written to Kennedy, and in November 2010, the *Indian Express* ran a story by veteran journalist Inder Malhotra laying bare their contents. Nehru had asked for a "minimum of 12 squadrons of supersonic all-weather fighters" and a "modern radar cover" and also the support of US air force personnel "to man these fighters and radar installations while our personnel are being trained." [58] The letters had indeed been secretly delivered by Ambassador Nehru, who never discussed their contents with anyone but told Inder Malhotra that he had "locked them up in a safe that only the ambassador could open". [59]

In my sole memorable meeting with Malhotra years ago and a subsequent telephonic talk, he was kind enough to tell me of his astonishment that the Narasimha Rao government should not have tried to access Bose-related records after the fall of the USSR. When Malhotra asked his long-time contacts, who never "withheld anything from him", to throw some light on the Bose mystery, they "just clammed up". I took these words very seriously, having been generally aware of Malhotra's enormous experience and stature. One of his deceased friends was Rameshwar Nath Kao, BN Mullik's No 2 and the founder of R&AW.

Even if one is to take the recent Russian responses on Subhas Bose's fate as canonical, some grey areas will still require some explanation. The list of archives said to have been searched for Bose-related records does not include many important archives. For example, FSB is not the only successor to the KGB. It is like the IB of India. SVR is the Russian foreign intelligence service and in its record rooms there must be some information on or relating to Bose. In an email to me, Dr Gabor T Rittersporn of Center National De la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, wrote: "Documentation on cases resembling the Bose affairs are kept in inaccessible archives of the security agencies [in Russia]."

You never know when you start dusting things off and a rack falls off. The Russians have a knack for discovering records accidentally. A BBC documentary produced in the 1990s shows then director of Moscow state archives, Sergei Mironenko, making an interesting observation about the secret "Operation myth" files about the investigation into the death of Adolf Hitler. "We only discovered these files about two years ago. Before that, they were so sensitive that their very existence wasn't even recorded here." [60]

That isn't very surprising. Files are nothing, governments can even deny the existence of projects, departments and even massive organisations everyone knows about. Our Government did not accept that an entity such as R&AW existed quite some time after it was formed. In Britain, the home of democracy, the formal acceptance that MI6 actually existed came more than eight decades after it was formed.

In an attempt to gain clarity about the Russian and Indian governments' respective stances, I tried to access the entire Indo-Russian correspondence over Bose's fate. Exercising the Right to Information, I requested the Ministry of External Affairs in 2006 to provide me "copies of the

complete correspondence the MEA has had with the Governments of the USSR and the Russian Federation over the disappearance of Netaji” and supply information “whether the MEA sought information from the Russians by issuing mere *note verbales*, or some serious efforts were ever made from a higher level”.

The MEA’s roundabout response only confirmed that it had not. It said that the “the request to Government of USSR and the Russian Federation were made through diplomatic channels at appropriate levels” and refused to provide copies “as it involves the relations with foreign state”.



No. RTI/551/76/2006

विदेश मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIR
NEW DELHI

Dated: 25th August, 2006

Shri Anuj Dhar,

New Delhi-1100

Subject:- Information sought about the disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chander Bose under Right to Information Act, 2005.

Sir,

With reference to your application dated 2nd August, 2006 on the above mentioned subject, it is stated that:

- a) The request to Government of USSR and the Russian Federation were made through diplomatic channels at appropriate levels.
 - b) The requisite copies of correspondence cannot be disclosed as it involves the relations with foreign State and is exempt as per the provisions of Clause 8(1)(a)&(f).
2. If you are not satisfied with the above reply, you can appeal to Shri Rinzing Wangdi, Secretary (ER), and Appellate Authority, Ministry of External Affairs, South Block, New Delhi – 110 011 within 30 days from the receipt of this letter.

Yours sincerely,
(E. Barwa)

Joint Secretary (Information) &
Central Public Information Officer
Telephone No: 2687

Dissatisfied, I appealed to the Appellate Authority in the MEA that “appropriate” was a qualitative term and its meaning could vary according to situation and persons looking into the matter. I further argued:

It is not intelligible to me, and nor will it be to the people of India, as to how the disclosure of correspondence dealing with the disappearance of a national hero, whom the Government holds to have died in 1945, can be a threat to the “security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State” [India] in 2006?

The appeal was dismissed as well. I was told that the information I had sought did not “constitute an ‘information’ as defined in the RTI Act” for I was seeking an “anecdotal reply”. The ministry was firm that “the requisite copies of correspondence cannot be disclosed as it involves relations with foreign state”.

The matter was then referred by me to the Central Information Commission for a decision. One of my points was that the information sought by me was “not anecdotal but factual”. “Simply stating that inquiries were made at ‘appropriate level’ is a value judgment and not information,” I wrote in my

appeal. Information Commissioner Dr OP Kejariwal, a reputed historian and former director of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, agreed with me and asked the MEA to release the correspondence. The ministry stuck to its gun nonetheless and cited clauses in the bulky Indo-Russian protocol—which was actually shown to Dr Kejariwal—to deny me copies of the correspondence.

Dr Kejariwal had to agree with the MEA but he still made a request in view of the overall importance of the subject matter that some sort of effort should be made. The ministry was now caught in a bind. On 2 November 2007, Dr Kejariwal was informed:

Our embassy in Moscow again approached the Government of Russian Federation to get their consent to the disclosure of documents under reference; but the Government of Russian Federation reiterated that documents were submitted exclusively for official use by the Government of India.... However they state that the Indian citizen mentioned in the note of the embassy [myself] can approach the authorities of the Federal and State Archives of the Russian Federation, through the Embassy of India, for permission to get to know the materials deposited in Federal and State Archives of the Russian Federation. [Emphasis supplied by the MEA]

Seizing the opportunity, on 26 November 2007 I requested Dr Kejariwal verbally and submitted in writing that it would be good if our Embassy in Moscow were to use “its good offices to specifically request the eight federal Russian archives”—including Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AP RF), that is Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, and Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (GRU), Military Intelligence Directorate Archives—to:

1. *Check their holdings for any post-1940 classified and declassified records pertaining to Subhas Chandra Bose and Orlando Mazzotta, the Italian alias under which Netaji entered the USSR in 1941.*
2. *Provide documents or annotated lists of material located.*
3. *Suggest what the Government of India should do in case the records cannot be thoroughly searched for or provided under existing rules or any other restraints.*

I emphasised that such "a request from the Embassy of India would certainly carry much weight, considering the excellent relations India has with Russian Federation". I also clarified that "I would not want this exercise be carried out exclusively for myself" and the records thus procured could be sent to the National Archives. The letter was forwarded to the MEA by Dr Kejariwal, who put his comment on its top margin.

And then the Ministry of External Affairs lapsed into silence.

9. The ‘Dead Man’ returns

Insurance agent Dilip Kumar Mukherjee’s years of persistent trying paid off unexpectedly. Sweat droplets appeared on his forehead as his distant uncle Dr TC Banerjee, a homeopath in the nearby Faizabad citys, told him that “Bhagwanji” had granted him his wish. Dilip was finally all clear to visit him along with Dr Banerjee’s family. “Don’t tell anyone anything!” elderly Banerjee forewarned his forty-something kin.

Bhagwanji (pronounced “Bhag-one-g”) was the honorific for a nameless holy man whose very existence was hard to prove, even by his handful of followers. Almost all of them identified him from his stentorian voice from the other side of a curtain that blocked his sight completely. For the locals he was as good as an imagined figure. Someone only heard of; never seen. Despite his staying in that area for nearly three decades, no one had ever run into him in day time. The holy man remained confined to his room in rented accommodations he moved in and out of with unusual frequency. He preferred ungodly hours to emerge, and would still have his face covered. The few who entered his room met an eerie stillness and a somewhat big structured, fair, old man crouching over, with a monkey cap or a cloth pulled over his face.

When asked why he was unseeable, Bhagwanji’s evasive followers would say he was deep into a special *sadhna* or spiritual quest that forbade his appearance before anyone. In a country where numerous holy men and women engaged in all sort of *Hathyoga* and queer *tantric* practices, most people were satisfied by this explanation. At any rate, Bhagwanji was not a nuisance to anyone, so most did not bother beyond a point. Those who continued to be inquisitive invariably heard incredible whispers that Bhagwanji was “Subhas Bose in hiding”. Most laughed it all away and some tried to reach him. But there was never enough time; before long the holy man would be gone to some other accommodation in some other area.

Bhagwanji maintained an air of secrecy around him and whoever couldn’t breathe in it wouldn’t get an access to him. His disciples had to keep their belief to themselves for fear of inviting the wrath of a man they considered god-like. No one wanted to fritter away the hard-earned privilege of being in contact with “Netaji”.

Dilip Mukherjee’s was an exceptional case. In his first meeting, he went straight into Bhagwanji’s room. The Banerjee family had endeared itself to the holy man so much that he had granted them the prerogative of being with him without any barrier.

In his mind Dilip had prepared himself well. “I thought I would ask him this and that question,” he told me in fairly good English for an elderly man living in Gorakhpur. But as his eyes met Bhagwanji’s penetrating glance from behind silver-rimmed glasses, Dilip recoiled, as if he had been hit by a thunderclap of an unimaginable reality. Knowing beforehand “who” he was going to meet didn’t quite lighten the blow of beholding “aged Netaji” in 1983. Born 23 January 1897, Subhas Chandra Bose would have been 86 if he were living then.

“He was very old, but definitely Netaji!”

Dilip burst out in tears and fell on Bhagwanji’s feet. “Netaji, Netaji!” “No, Don’t talk to me like that,” the holy man told him softly.

“He caressed me and I felt better. I was sitting there right in front of him for about an hour. I think of that meeting every day till today. It was an unbelievable sight, but no illusion,” misty-eyed Mukherjee kept talking. “He asked my name and I said ‘Dilip’. ‘Oh, can you sing?’ was his instant

response.” “Do you know Netaji’s best friend Dilip Kumar Roy was a famous singer?” Mukherjee asked me. He reminisced further: “I spoke to him in Bangla. He followed every word of it, but replied in Hindi.”

“At one point we were discussing political orientations. I praised the Communists and got scolded by him. He said: ‘What do you know about them? I have seen them from close. I have been to Russia. I saw how a few luxuriated while the rest suffered. I went to their grand palaces. This body [of mine] even endured torture in Siberia’.”

To me, this was an interesting oddity. Of all the holy men proclaimed to be “Netajis” over the years, Bhagwanji was the only one who had spoken of Russia. I had queried a close follower of Shaulmari sadhu extensively. Assuming he was Subhas Bose for some magical reasons, Saradanand would have known what had happened to “him” on 18 August 1945. Wouldn’t he? So I asked the follower to enlighten me. But his response was made up largely of the ideas I traced back to Samar Guha. For the post-1945 scenario, the version of the follower was that a “defeated Netaji” decided to renounce the world and passing through Tibet, he came to India.

Obviously, I couldn’t stand this theory. Bose was anything but a defeatist and there is no way the Russian angle could be taken out of the mystery. So when I became open to discussing the Bhagwanji issue—which I initially dismissed in disgust—I enquired if the holy man had ever alluded to any air crash or anything about Russia.

I was then told that Bhagwanji had made some remarks in passing. “There was no air crash that day; it was concocted.” The plane which had reportedly crashed never took off from the Taipei aerodrome, he had further said. He was confident that a look through the aerodrome logbook would bear him out. He even indicated that “he had reached his destination” by the time the death news was announced. Interestingly enough, he spoke of having been in a gulag in south central Siberia, somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Baikal and the Ural Mountains.

Three decades after it surfaced, the Bhagwanji angle appears to be fitting so well in the jigsaw of Bose mystery that more and more people are beginning to think that the final act of India’s longest-running controversy might not have been enacted somewhere amid the lush environs of Southeast Asia or the snowy expanse of Siberia, but in the dusty Faizabad town.

What has converted the mind-boggling impossibility of Subhas Bose having been in India incognito all the while he was assumed dead into a near-possibility is a seemingly phantasmagorical and yet evidence-backed narrative. From the mid-1950s onwards, Bhagwanji lived in complete seclusion at various places in UP—Lucknow, Naimisharanya, Basti, Ayodhya and Faizabad. In the 1980s he was being referred to as “Gumnami Baba”—the holy man who had lost his identity—and the term stuck. Bhagwanji’s most preferred terms for himself were “Mahakaal”—son of Goddess Mother Kali—and “Dead Man”, because he was a “living dead”.

The first disciple of Dead Man was a poor Sanskrit teacher Mahadeo Prasad Mishra. Around 1955, both lodged themselves in a rented house in Lucknow’s Singar Nagar locality. After a while, Mahadeo’s widowed daughter Sarsawati Devi Shukla, along with her infant son Rajkumar, joined them as Bhagwanji’s attendant. Soon Dead Man had found a disciple in Itwah aristocrat Surendra Singh Chaudhury.

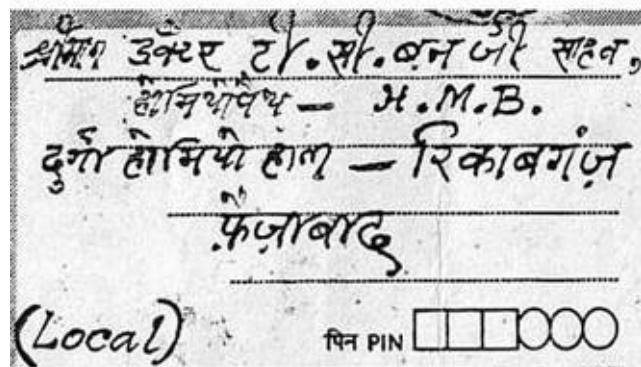
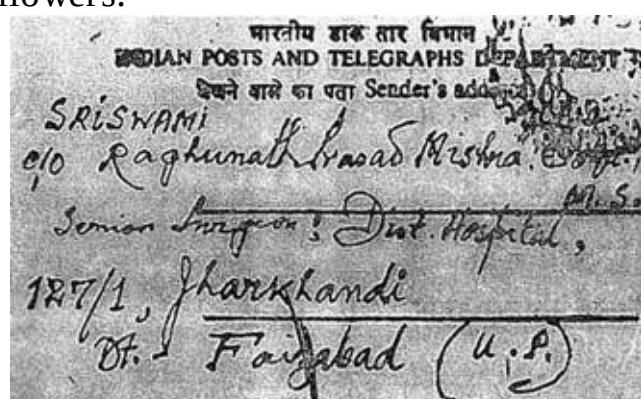
For some time, Dead Man lived with relative ease and comfort. There were hardly any occasions for him to step out into the city. The last was when he needed a new pair of eyeglasses. Accompanied by an unknown driver, he checked into a famous optician’s shop. Trying out a few spectacles, he removed his headgear. In an instant, his shaved bald pate, round eyeglasses and a familiar-looking visage had stunned another customer. “Netaji!” he said. The next moment two young men prostrated

in front of Dead Man. His “cover” blown, he rushed out and the car sped away. “This is why I now keep this moustache and beard,” Bhagwanji summed up the moral of the story a few years later to former INA secret service man Pabitra Mohan Roy.

Unable to cope with living in a populated part of the city and yet remaining unseen, Bhagwanji left Singar Nagar. He took up refuge in a dilapidated Shiv temple on the banks of river Gomati. When it became unbearable to live there too, he shifted to neighbouring Naimisharanya, a salubrious area dotted with temples. In 1958 Bhagwanji was in hiding away in a desolate temple here. Like other Hindu godmen in the area, he would spend most of his days and nights reading and meditating. But the rest of it was quite oddish. He would keep to himself all the time. If anyone visited him, he would communicate by scribbling on a slate, wiping it clean and scribbling again. Strange whispers about the holy man drew a curious relative of the temple priest to him. A few years ago, when he was in his 90s, Srikant Sharma’s most cherished memories of life were of seeing Subhas Bose when he was touring the area in the late 1930s, and then “again” in the temple.

The swirling “Netaji” rumours never ceased and Dead Man kept on hopping from one place to another in futile bids to sidestep them. After Naimisharanya it was Darshan Nagar in Faizabad in 1964 and the next year Ayodhya. By 1967 he was at Basti, where another local, Durga Prasad Pandey, won his trust and lived to our times to echo Srikant’s views of having seen both Bose and Bhagwanji.

Using Pandey’s contact and travelling in a car with him, Bhagwanji came to Ayodhya, where he shifted residences no less than four times. In mid-1970s he was lodged within the Brahmakund Gurudwara complex. Lastly, in 1983 he found a place in Faizabad, the twin city of Ayodhya so that he could be close to his new prominent disciples, surgeon Dr RP Mishra and homeopath Dr Priyabrat Banerjee, son of Dr T Banerjee. He was lodged in a rented shanty on the backside of a bungalow named “Rambhawan” by its owner Gurubasant Singh. No matter what the place and time was, the curtain never came down. But with advancing age Bhagwanji became more talkative and somewhat liberal in writing to his close followers.



In Rambhawan, the disciples would sit next to a curtained, grilled window to hear Bhagwanji speak from inside in flawless English, Urdu-laden Hindi and Bangla, with the unmistakable accent of a man who had spent his formative years in Kolkata. “I never heard a voice like that in my life. The tone and tenor was more like that of an army commander’s than a sadhu baba’s,” Gurubasant told me.

Surreptitious attempts by a young disciple, Ravindra Shukla, to capture it on tape failed. "I took a tape recorder with me, but could not muster courage to press the button."

The Banerjee family, Srikant Sharma, Durga Prasad Pandey and others who saw him or had caught a fleeting glimpse of him were in unison in insisting to me that he was a Subhas Bose lookalike, but older. Bhagwanji refused to be photographed but the followers saw gaps in his teeth and scalpel mark on one side of his stomach. Both of which would have been true for Subhas Bose.

Bhagwanji had imposed a gag order on all his followers, local and special ones coming from Bengal, forbidding them to speculate about his identity to anyone. "Don't tell anyone about me. It won't do good to the nation," he would warn his spellbound disciples. They more or less obeyed him till the last. Which is why almost everything about Bhagwanji that we know today, actually became known after he was said to have passed away on 16 September 1985. In Kolkata, Pabitra was told of the death and he said "the country would burn" if he opened his mouth.

Late on September 19 evening a body draped in the Tricolour [India's national flag] was swiftly moved out of Rambhawan and taken to the banks of river Saryu nearby for cremation, for which no permission had been obtained from the local authorities. "We are only 13 here to see him off on his last journey. There should have been 13 lakhs," bewailed Panda Ram Kishore who had housed Bhagwanji for a while at his residence in Ayodhya. The pyre was lit with a twig and within seconds the flames erupted. Before long Faizabad and surrounding areas were engulfed by pent-up rumours that Bhagwanji was actually "Netaji".

I was told by two former top police officers, one former Uttar Pradesh DIG and the other an ex-CBI Director, that the rumours of "Bose being alive and in Uttar Pradesh" were there even before September 1985 and known to many officers. Apparently, the cops had some occasions to crack the Bhagwanji mystery well before 1985. It is baffling that no one succeeded. In Faizabad, Bhagwanji was lodged in the heart of the town, at a walking distance from the local top cop's residence and office. Just behind Rambhawan was, and is, the fencing of the HQ of the Gorkha Regiment of the Indian Army. Bhagwanji was said to be using a transmitter, receiving and sending some messages in English every day at six in the evening. How in the world did that not create a blip on the radar?

There is actually no excuse because the police had been notified about the strange happenings more than once. There was even this silly story that Bhagwanji was a "CIA agent". Back then, the standard way to discredit anyone in India was to brand them as such. In 1979, a journalist-cum-informer wrote to Faizabad Superintendent of Police (SP) in his *gopniya* (secret) letter that there was "something suspicious about Gurudev Swami" [Bhagwanji] then living in Ayodhya. "Some people say Babaji is a CIA agent. He has a transmitter and he sends messages." This was good enough a charge to be reported to the local Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau office. Anyway, the journalist also jotted down that "people say Babaji is Subhas Chandra Bose and wants to remain in hiding".

The SP launched an inquiry but was unable to get an audience with Bhagwanji. He insisted, and got transferred. A former beat constable at Basti, Mohammed Mobin, told me that men of certain air of importance about them would emerge from their cars and under cover of darkness walk towards the dilapidated house where Bhagwanji lived. There were hardly any street lights in that area when I visited it a decade back.

Advancing age and a leg injury in 1980, which ended his occasional, secret long tours to the world outside, forced Bhagwanji to intermingle with people around him. Once Gurubasant Singh saw an army colonel going inside with "a puffed chest" and then emerging shaken. "He told me, 'that man sitting inside is a general'."

In the last few years, I have interacted with many individuals who either had the occasion to speak to Bhagwanji or heard about him before 1985. One wealthy chartered accountant in Delhi called up memories: "My father and I both talked to him in the early 1960s and came to believe that he was

Netaji. But I don't have any proof to back my belief so I can't talk publicly. I was a teenager then."

One little boy who got hooked to the Bhagwanji phenomenon in the 1980s is now one of India's most outstanding filmmakers. Anurag Kashyap, creator of classics like *Dev D* and *Black Friday*, took me on a nostalgic trip to a time when his maternal grandfather stayed opposite Rambhawan. "I don't know if it was my child-like imagination or it actually happened. Probably I chanced to talk to him as well," he said with a sparkle of excitement in his eyes and a smile that never left his face for more than an hour that we talked. "I still think of Gumnami Baba at times."

The newspaper clippings that young Kashyap pasted on his scrapbook in 1986 were testimonials to a gathering storm. After September 1985, the local journalists got into action mode as a torrent of speculations and emotions surged in Faizabad and around. Many scrambled to chase the scattered leads unmindful of the dismissive attitude of the state officials, who had reached a conclusion beforehand. The state Chief Secretary rebuffed the suggestions that Bhagwanji could have been Bose. At best he was some associate of Bose's, so he said. The personal views of Faizabad DIG Ajai Raj Sharma, a would-be Delhi Police Commissioner and BSF chief, were at variance at the start. He told journalists that "there was something about Gumnami Baba" and that it required a closer look. He suggested a handwriting test.

As the state machinery adopted a wishy-washy attitude, journalists began connecting the dots. None went as far as Ashok Tandon, who wrote in Hindi and was first to link Bhagwanji to Bose, and the *Northern India Patrika* team comprising Nirmal Nibelon, VN Arora & Sayed Kauser Hussain. On the whole, the journalistic enquiries upheld the Bose link to Bhagwanji. Too bad that Nibelon, a national-level journalist especially brought in for the enquiry, died in a Delhi accident soon after. If he had lived on, this contemporary of Shekhar Gupta, editor-in-chief of the *Indian Express*, would probably have left an even better account than what the NIP team did.

The NIP reports on "the man of mystery" pushed the people of Faizabad into a vortex of emotions. The instant reaction of the state government was to float a conspiracy theory that the Janata Party and the BJP were behind the public outcry. On 3 December 1985 the Home Department in Lucknow directed the DM of Faizabad to send "a detailed report in the matter in triplicate at once for transmission to Government of India".

From- Zone UP Lucknow To- D.M., Faizabad.

.....

24

Janta Party B J P Leaders of Faizabad are reported to have been trying to arouse public feelings regarding identity of one Gurhami Baba who died on 16 th September 85(.) Please furnish a detailed report in the matter in triplicate at once for transmission to Government of India.(.)

.....

MOST URGENT

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, FAIZABAD

....

S.O. J.A./Gurhami Baba

Dated 4-12-85

Copy forwarded to S.S.P., Faizabad for immediate
in quadruplicate (4 copies) please.

[Signature]
For District Magistrate
Faizabad.



The truth was that the public discontentment was spontaneous, with every section of the society, including local Congress leaders, pitching in. The locals completely ignored the vague findings of a counter "investigation" in another newspaper that Bhagwanji was "either a spy, or a blind Bose follower or some misguided Anand Margi".

Alarmed by reports that the authorities were contemplating auctioning the belongings Bhagwanji had left behind, activists Dr MA Haleem and Vishwa Bandhav Tewari approached the District Magistrate on 30 January 1986. Their letter, marked cc to the Foreign Secretary at Delhi and a disinterested UP Chief Minister ND Tiwari, called for an inquiry.

An important English daily of Uttar Pradesh, Northern India Patrika, has after months of enquiry and investigations come to the conclusion that the saint was none else than Subhas Chandra Bose. The most important evidence which the paper has cited is based on the records, documents and materials found in his residence of which an inventory was prepared cursorily by a police officer of a lower rank.... We, therefore, submit to you that the documents and other materials found in the said house should remain sealed and preserved for the purpose of inquiry, and the guards posted there should continue to remain there in the national interest. We would like to be informed of the steps you propose to take in the matter.

The District Magistrate did not revert to the two. Things changed when Lalita Bose, daughter of Suresh Bose, rushed in from New Delhi following the media reports. Her arrival put paid to the conspiracy theory that the BJP and others were causing the commotion as Lalita was a member of the Congress party at that time.

In early 1986, she met Bir Bahadur Singh, the new Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and found him to be hostile to the idea of an inquiry. Lalita's request to have a proper catalogue of the belongings and correspondence left behind by Bhagwanji made by a senior police officer or advocate-commissioner was turned down. This was despite a section of the administration taking interest in the issue. What you see now is the letter written by then Administrator General JM Pant, who wanted the DM of Faizabad to ensure that Bhagwanji's belongings were "not tampered or disturbed".

- ४६
वर्तमान — २२५३
विधान — २४५०
भी यथा विषयहर में प्रव-
त्त अपना विषय का भाग
महार चक्रविहार नाम



C-144

69 कार्यालय,
महापरिवर्वन समिति,
उत्तर प्रदेश।
उत्तर प्रदेश भवन
इलहाबाद ५-०२-१९८६

३४/

गम्भीर/विषय
विषय

To,
The District Magistrate,
FAIZABAD.



Sir,

It has been brought to my notice through a series of news paper reports that a mysterious Swami is alleged to have died on 16th Sep. 1985 at Faizabad. It is further reported that he has left vast assets including 28 boxes containing valuables and documents. These boxes have been taken possession of by you and are under your custody.

Lalita Bose made her own enquiries. It was both a humbling as well as traumatic experience for her. Breaking down occasionally, she admitted to many in Faizabad that Bhagwanji appeared to be her missing uncle. Asked to react to Dr Sisir Bose's reported comment that "those who were claiming that the 'mysterious' Baba was in fact Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were in fact 'selling the name of the great national leader'", Lalita charged her first cousin of toeing the government line for pecuniary gains. In the Gumnami baba file kept at the DM's office in Faizabad there is a clipping of an 11 November 1985 report in *Northern India Patrika* to the effect that Sisir "visited Faizabad to check the veracity of the reports". That is not correct because there is nothing whatsoever on the file to back up the newspaper report.

If at all Sisir paid any flying visit to the town during that period, he never met anyone of consequence in the episode. It were his cousins Lalita and Jitendra Nath Roy who dwelt into the matter. Elderly Roy, son of Bose's sister who used to live in Gorakhpur, did not speak to media but Lalita could not hold herself back. She told the *Pioneer* on 1 April 1986 that the personal effects of Bhagwanji "were in one way or the other related to the kith and kin of Netaji".

The most remarkable point is that when I went through heaps of the effects I found an unusual Bengali silk in which a well-wrapped photograph of my father late Mr Suresh Chandra Bose was found. ...I kept asking my father as to who is that rustic-looking man who comes to you often from Basti. My father parried my frantic enquiries. My father used to chat for hours together with this man in his private room. [1]

While some Bose family members may want to dispute today what late Lalita Bose actually felt, the fact is that on 10 February 1986 she, Dr MA Haleem and Vishwa Bandhav Tewari moved the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court against the state of UP, Chief Minister, state Home Secretary and District Magistrate of Faizabad.

Through their lawyer Robin Mitra, the petitioners described the enquiry by Nibediton-Arora-Hussain team as "a great national service". They lamented that despite interest evinced by the public, the District Magistrate was merely "sitting tight over the matter". They stated how perfunctorily the police had made an inventory of the items left by Bhagwanji. To preempt the state government's plan to auction Bhagwanji's belongings, they argued that "the petitioner No 1 [Lalita Bose] being the niece of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has a right to the property, if the nameless saint is found to be Netaji".

They even suggested that Bhagwanji's books, correspondence etc. could be sent to the National Archives. The court's intervention was sought as there was "no other alternative remedy available" due to "the callous inaction of the opposite parties," especially the Chief Minister, who had been "absolutely unreasonable".

Making up for the executive's inaction, Justices SS Ahmad and GB Singh announced an interim relief on the same day. The opposite parties were called upon to file a counter-affidavit "within six weeks". (It would take 13 years before the government responded). The main request was agreed to. The DM of Faizabad was ordered to oversee the preparation of an elaborate inventory, giving details of and about the items, correspondence, books etc. found from Bhagwanji's room at Ram Bhawan and then keep all these in his safe custody.

The High Court order should have made news across the nation but it didn't. Maybe because the event was overshadowed by a major development people say was triggered by a deliberate political move of the Government in Delhi. In January 1986, an appeal was filed at the district court in Faizabad to unlock the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid complex. The petitioner was not a party to the dispute. But that did not deter the judge in showing an "utter disregard for procedure" and in "undue haste" he allowed the prayer promptly.

There was a heated discussion in the UP Legislative Assembly on 25 February 1985. Krishanpal Singh and Nityanand Swami, who would be the Chief Minister of Uttaranchal in future, asked about Bhagwanji and Jagdambika Pal of Congress—still in public life—too spoke about the need for an extensive probe, even though he saw no Bose link. Standing in for the government, Finance Minister Baldev Singh Arya stated that an inquiry had revealed that Bhagwanji was not Subhas Bose. The members wanted to see the inquiry report, but the minister refused to make it public.

The process of cataloguing Bhagwanji's belongings lasted from 23 March 1986 to 23 April 1987 during which 2,673 mostly invaluable items left by the holy man were described in an inventory. This inventory and the wealth of information which has piled up since 1985 is a great help in profiling the unseen Bhagwanji. Though immersed in spiritual practices and studies—he had loads of unabridged treatises on Hinduism in Sanskrit, Hindi and Bangla—Bhagwanji was also a man of culture and refinement in the Western sense of the term. He mostly survived on a shoestring budget, but never let go the tastes of a man who had seen affluence and been to places. A passing remark by a follower about her brother in Stuttgart made Bhagwanji recall his own strolls in the scenic German city. Another day he thought back to his "student days" in London.

Bhagwanji occasionally puffed away at his pipe or rolled a cigar in his mouth and once mentioned that he picked up the habit from Mussolini. He had bread and butter for breakfast and savoured the best of Western literature—William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and PG Wodehouse being his favourites. Some of the other books in his collections were *Gulliver's travel* by Jonathan Swift, *The Odyssey* and *Iliad* by Homer, *The Bermuda triangle* by Charles Berlitz, *Flying saucers farewell* by George Adamski, *Life beyond death* by Swami Abedanand, *Celebrated crimes* translated by IG Burnham, *The Hunch Back of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo, *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller, *Alice in wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *The sacred Rome*, *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, *Flying saucers have landed* by Leslie and Adamski.

His taste in music was mostly Bengali and Indian classical. His collection included records of Pannalal Bhattacharya, KL Sahgal, Juthika Ray, Ustad Faiyaz Khan, Sumitra Sen, Dr Govinda Gopal Mukherjee, Atul Prasad Sen, Bismillah Khan, Vilayat Khan, Pt Ravishankar, Pannalal Ghosh, Dilip Kumar Roy, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Firoza Begum of Bangladesh and more. Among the popular musicians, he admired Bollywood great Naushad Ali not only for the music he created, but also his politeness and willingness to help friends from his rainy days. "The jewel amongst your radio announcers is Melville de Mellow," Bhagwanji told a follower. "I have myself seen that many dramas from India have been translated in many Russian theatres," he claimed on another occasion.

The watches Bhagwanji probably wore on his long tours outside—but never displayed to any local so long as he lived—were Rolex and Omega gold. When these watches were discovered at Rambhawan, quite a commotion followed because Bose always wore round watches ever since his

parents presented him a round Omega gold watch in his younger years.

A typical discourse by Bhagwanji during a communion with his followers would be a heady mix of religion, history, current politics and sometimes an outlook for the future. He would summon his thoughts scattered far and wide to give examples of world events as if he had witnessed them first hand. Once he spoke of having been on a submarine for a long time, but more frequently discussed the possibility of life on other planets. He would refrain from referring to himself and whatever little remarks he made would be in passing, addressing himself in second person or as “your Dead Man”. He did not refer to Bose unless compelled to and used the phrase “your Netaji”. “This body” was another of his pet phrases while alluding to his past. “This body” was closely associated with Kazi Nazrul Hasan,” he said of the Bengali singer, a friend of Bose.

The unlikely holy man made predictions which his followers claimed came true cent per cent. Hitting the bull’s eye was his 1971 English comment about Soviet Russia: “It is God’s truth, and take it from the horse’s mouth. Communism shall die at the place of its birth.” He missed it when he calculated around the same time that “within the next 15-20 years” the wisdom flowing from ancient Hindu scriptures would find great acceptability among high society in Russia and France. Bhagwanji was also said to have prophesied before 1970 that in time Germanys and Koreas would be united.

When thinking back, Bhagwanji reflected on memories made around big people and events. Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Azad were no historical figures for him; he spoke as if he knew them intimately, dealt with them personally. In a retrospective mood one day, he spoke of having “no rancour” even though “it has been kept a secret that your Dead Man went [out of India] with Bapu’s full blessings and concurrence of the inner committee”. He said that Bapu [Gandhi] “wept like a child...praying against Partition but he was overridden roughshod”. He thoroughly detested Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, but said Indira was “very brave” and felt bad when she was assassinated in 1984. “No one should ever hurt a woman,” he told a follower. He could hear when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was delivering a speech at a Faizabad venue in 1985, not so far from Rambhawan.

A follower asked Bhagwanji what he thought of Rajiv and he said: “Better than his grandfather.” Bhagwanji thought “bright future” awaited Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narsimha Rao. He remembered meeting “Chancellor Hitler” at his mountain resort and becoming privy to his interest in playing the violin. This was strange, for it was only in the 1990s that the Russians first displayed the war trophies they had picked up from the Reichschancellery in Berlin in 1945. Among them was a violin from Hitler’s private collection. It even carried his carved image on its head.

Being under “24 hours vigil by the SS” was irksome, but Dead Man nonetheless lavished praises on German and Japanese soldiers for their patriotism. He sympathised with the Jews for their ordeal through the centuries and lauded them for their “unswerving faith in their destiny”. He spoke as if he had visited deep interiors of Tibet and China. “I know the Himalayan region like my palm.”

This extraordinary holy man’s personal belongings were mostly books. His big collection included voluminous Britannica and other encyclopaedias and the complete collected works of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. Books dealing with recent history, such as *Between the lines* and *India: Critical years* by Kuldip Nayar, *Himalayan blunder* by Brigadier John Dalvi, *India’s China war* by Neville Maxwell, carried his outpourings as comments on the margins. “A man always wrong,” Bhagwanji thought of Morarji Desai. He praised Dalvi, who had been taken a PoW during the 1962 war: “God bless you for your nobility and honesty. He saved you from death and brought you back to your people.”

In the same book, he scrawled several offensive words for Prime Minister Nehru. On page 316 of the book, against the PM’s quote “We were stabbed in the back,” he scribbled: “A lie—black as hell. He was a clown and a knave at that.” In the context of the 1962 war, he dubbed the Chinese as “100%

correct students of Maharshi Kawtilya", and the Indian soldiers as "simple honest sons of India" who were "offered as a 'free sample' at the altar of total stupidity, ego and greed!" Bhagwanji did not approve Dalvi's lauding a certain army commander. "Aren't your high praises sentimental?!" he asked, adding that "I know" the general "only as a 'yesman-lapdog' to the high command and the political bosses".

That night I had a long chat with GOC. I could talk to him freely as I had served under Gen. Niranjan Prasad in 1949, when he was commanding the 5th Royal Gorkha Rifles Regimental Centre and I was his second-in-command. We had become family friends and had maintained this friendship over the years. He was a fine gentleman and I was proud to claim him as a friend. I had implicit faith in his personal and professional integrity. My only doubt was whether as a disciplined soldier, he would raise enough moral courage to oppose plans which were impracticable and which could only commit us to an impossible situation.

I requested him to emphasise at the meeting of 12th September that the maximum force which could be deployed in the Namka Chu was one battalion; and the only role that this battalion could fulfil was to give heart to the Dhola Post Garrison and prevent further petty incursions into our territory. There was no question of con-

cern't your high Praises 164 Sentimental? I know
Gen. Prasad only as a "yesman-lapdog" to the High Command
and the Political bosses. He never formed strong character to
take care, when the occasion arose & he was forced

"Oh God, what blunders from HQ & ND", "Oh, blast you all", "Well, that's that"—hardly the expressions of a holy man dwelling in a back of the beyond part of India.

Durga Prasad Pandey of Basti beseeched "the great Bhagwanji" for an access through his letter in English as he knew it." An old and very religious ex-revenue officer late Sri Jawala Misra Vakil, Basti, told me as to your identity while breathing his last keeping full confidence in me to maintain the secrecy of this vital secret." Bhagwanji declined the access at that time. He dictated his response to another follower:

I am a bona fide dashnami sanyasi and you will know that a man under the holy orders incurs death according to the civil laws. And a sanyasi is dead to his former life; it is in the keeping of divine Mother Durga and Father Lord Shiva.... In passing, you shall find cogent answers to all your hypotheses, queries, thoughts...both as expressed in your letter, and which remain unexpressed in your heart. Peruse with your heart calmly, quietly, lovingly. Every word, phrase, sentence and their constructions are pointers for you, they are pregnant with possibilities. Seek and thou shall find.

As Hindu godmen go, Bhagwanji was clearly out of the ordinary. In the sense that any Indian holy man who could speak and write in English like him usually found salvation in Europe or America or at least had droves of hippies flocking to him in his sprawling ashram.

Bhagwanji could have easily gotten out of his life of anonymity, misery and self-imposed solitary confinement—he described it as "vexatious dog-life"—but he wouldn't. He did not even allow the number of his close disciples to go beyond a dozen at any given time. Each would keep an eye on the other for any violation of the culture of secrecy. For what? The best places to undertake spiritual quests in India have always been the Himalayan caves—Bhagwanji himself claimed to have lived in some—and not isolated houses in small towns. This man simply hid himself away, as if he was a fugitive of some sort.

Bhagwanji's collection indicated the wide spectrum of his interest covering every conceivable topic—from terrorism in Punjab to the constitutional developments in Bangladesh. Followers recalled that he spoke like a bureaucrat while talking of the Motor Vehicles Act and like a counter-intelligence expert when alluding to the rings of spies in the nation. He claimed that in UP alone there were nearly 40 meeting points for international spies and the Indian agencies had penetrated only three of them.

Quite a few books Bhagwanji possessed were interesting just by their subject matter. *International Military Tribunal for the Far East: Dissident judgment of Justice Radha Binod Pal*—which he underlined at several places—Dr RC Majumdar's epic *The history of the freedom movement in India*,

Leonard Mosley's *The last days of the British Raj*, Peter Sengar's *Moscow's hand in India*, Rajni Mukherjee's *Moscow's shadow over West Bengal*, Sita Ram Goyal's *Nehru's fatal friendship* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The gulag archipelago*.

Bhagwanji's daily dose of news came from a number of English, Hindi and Bangla newspapers. The *Pioneer* was said to be his favourite, but from the *TIME* magazine to the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, he browsed a host of magazines. He took note of events by underlining the newspapers. For example the death of British botanist and birth control advocate Marie Stopes in 1958 and the assassination of Bangladesh President Zia ur-Rahman in 1981.

In Lalita Bose's presence the team preparing the inventory also discovered several pictures of Bose family members, especially of Subhas Bose's parents. Those who had sent these thought they were Bhagwanji's parents as well. One of the holy man's most treasured possessions was an old-fashioned umbrella sent to him from Kolkata with a note that it was of "father Janaki Nath Bose".

Lalita Bose also came across typed copy of her father's lengthy testimony before the Khosla Commission on 17 August 1972. It turned out that Suresh Bose had insisted that his brother was still alive at that time. This assertion of his had been duly recorded in the testimony. Lalita Bose noted that the typed copy bore corrections in her father's handwriting. She was dumbfounded when the summons sent by the Khosla Commission to her father in West Bengal was located in Rambhawan. She was not around when a copy of her freedom fighter cousin Dwijendra Nath Bose's testimony before the same commission was located among the heaps of papers. Suresh Bose was not the only family member who had "fantasized" about a living Subhas Bose more than two decades after his reported death.

During his examination, Dwijendra Nath, son of Subhas's eldest brother Satish, was pointedly asked if he had tried to find out the identity of Parda wala baba, or the holy man behind the curtain, a name by which Bhagwanji was sometimes referred to in Naimisharanya and Basti. He denied that he was his uncle. But then many confirmed followers of Bhagwanji like Pabitra Mohan Roy and Samar Guha also deposed before this commission and said absolutely nothing of their holy man connection. They followed as an article of faith his directive to make endeavours to get the air crash theory dismissed, and not go beyond.

Dwijendra strayed into the areas deemed forbidden for Bhagwanji's followers. He was asked by a counsel if he had indeed made a statement on 6 March 1966 in Thiruvananthapuram that "Netaji was still alive and was working in a place very near the borders of India". "Yes I did say," Dwijendra affirmed. An *Amrita Bazar Patrika* report on his statement was quoted and brought on record: "I can tell you that last September, Netaji had an attack of pneumonia and was examined and treated by some very eminent doctors whom I know, but I won't name. Mr Bose told reporters."

"Yes, I did say that," Dwijen told the commission—without any hitch.

A letter available with a Bhagwanji follower proves that in 1966 the counsel of Dr SK Das, former personal physician to President Rajendra Prasad, had been sought for then ailing Bhagwanji. Was Dwijen making an allusion to this?

Asked why Subhas Bose was still in hiding, Dwijendra retorted that "it was not correct to say that". "He is still working for India. He will come out...at the appropriate time...."

"Therefore, may I understand that your case is that though all these sadhus are not Netaji, but Netaji is still alive?" the counsel put to him.

"Yes."

"And it is within your knowledge."

"I do not get this information day to day, I mean, where he is. Not only me but there are others also, I would not name them, of course, who get information after he had left a place say months or one year after that Netaji was at such and such place." [2]

Who could have been passing Dwijendra the information about “dead” Bose’s movements? Was it the same group which kept Bhagwanji posted about each and every development with direct to remote link to Subhas Chandra Bose?! Their letters found in Rambhawan read more like intelligence reports, and indeed some of them were INA secret service veterans and former revolutionaries.

Sample this: On 24 January 1964 former revolutionary Sunil Das informed Bhagwanji about his “chance meeting” with Surendra Mohan Ghose, the lawmaker who had gone to Shaulmari ashram, in Bengal Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen’s office. Forward Bloc chief Hemanta Basu was also with Das [pictured].



Describing Ghose as “an agent of Sri Jawaharlal Nehru”, Das wrote:

Then he [Ghose] went on to say the Allied Powers (this is Govt's opinion) have by common consent struck off the name of Netaji from the list of war criminals because they have officially concluded that Netaji was dead. Now, if Netaji reappeared he would immediately be declared an 'impostor' by the Allied Powers!

I am also intrigued by an October 1970 newspaper report quoting Hemanta Basu proclaiming in a public meeting at Kolkata that “Netaji was still alive”. I wonder what would be the take of the current All India Forward Bloc leaders on this. Since they publicly support the Russian angle, they must throw light on what exactly Hemanta Basu meant. I am sure he was not implying that Bose was alive in Siberia in 1970.

The followers from Kolkata and elsewhere regularly despatched Bhagwanji digests of newsitems concerning Subhas Bose—especially those dealing with the mystery. He carefully read everything, underlining the parts he regarded important. Rambhawan yielded clippings of all the articles Barun Sen Gupta wrote on GD Khosla’s sham inquiry. A copy of the *Times of India* story of 26 October 1982 titled “Soviet scholars revise opinion on Netaji” was also located. Some of the newspaper reports were not in original but typed copies. There was this supposed “extract” from an April 1970 story in the Times based on an interview with Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan in Pakistan by KN Kulkarni:

To Mr Kulkarni's utter surprise and ignorance over the fate of Netaji, Badsha Khan visualised that Subhas might have come earlier in 1947 but the fate and destiny helped him to reach somewhere other than this sub-continent. The day would come when Subhas might appear in the midst of his own countrymen, astounding the whole world like mid-day sun.

Many of those who wrote to Bhagwanji viewed him as someone endowed with an immensely exalted persona. “You have attained the position of Brahma Rishi for the good of the nation,” extolled Surendra Singh Chaudhury in a letter. One Gurucharan Singh Bedi of Dera Baba Nanak, Gurdaspur, who had sent a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib to Bhagwanji, wrote, “Crores of Indians have put their eyes upon you”. A letter from Kolkata likened Bhagwanji to Bhishma, the invincible grand old warrior. Bhagwanji drew the same analogy for himself, saying he was “the legal inheritor of this earth” but was “stepping aside from the path of ruling”.

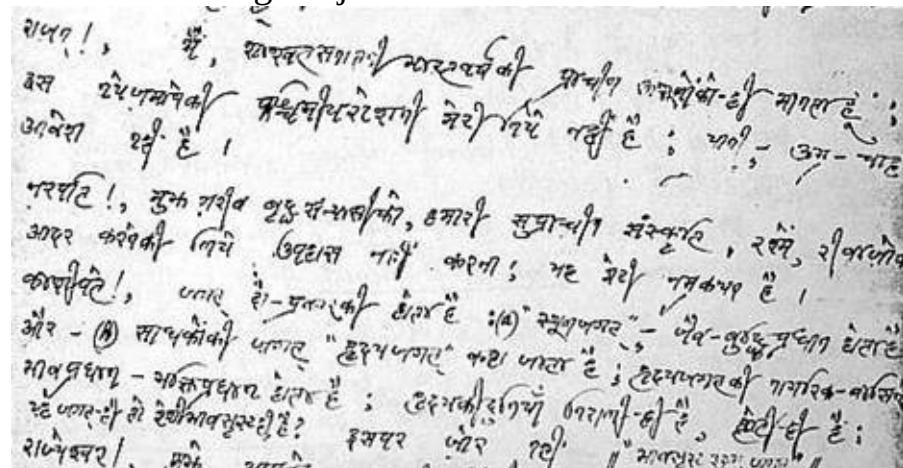
There were instances of the followers and those who somehow got to write to Bhagwanji linking him to Bose and imploring him to go public. One Abdul Hafiz wrote to “respected secret sadhu” in Hindi that he prayed to the Almighty for fulfilment of Bhagwanji’s desires. “Please take your original form at the earliest!” It is not very common for Hindu holy men to have Muslim followers.

Bhagwanji actually had a Muslim attendant at Basti.

One follower from Kolkata wrote in Bangla that “the present national scene warrants a big change. We are waiting for the right time”. Another letter dated 21 January 1981 read: “In this long wait sometimes I get anxious and at times I get desperate. Sri Sri Sitaram Omkarnath Thakur has hinted that he is in contact with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.”

“1008 Sri Sri Sitaramdas Omkarnath” was a highly revered Bengali holy man who had known Bose and many other greats. His followers today are scattered around the world. If you ask me, Omkarnath should be regarded by the Intelligence Bureau as its “patron saint” because he was the guru of BN Mullik. Both guru Omkarnath and disciple Mullik passed away in 1984. Until 2011, Thakur’s commune was headed by his favourite disciple, who had been offered the choice to either serve the country by joining the IB or serve the humanity by becoming a saint. India’s loss was mankind’s gain.

Yet another letter, this time in broken English, by Gurucharan Singh Bedi read: “People say you are Mother India’s best son Netajee himself.” Bhagwanji himself used the metaphor for himself. “I am a son of the motherland,” he wrote in Hindi in an undelivered letter to Dr Vibhuti Narayan Singh, former Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University and former king of Kashi. Sentence constructions and vocabulary clearly showed that Bhagwanji learnt Hindi late in life.



The holy man’s utterances were collated and reproduced in a book titled *Oi mahamanaba asey*. [4] Titled after a famous Rabindranath Tagore song meaning “the great man comes”, the book was first published in the early 1970s and enlarged in subsequent editions. Written in quaint, hard to understand Bangla, it carried several passages in English, mostly Bhagwanji’s quotes. Compiled and commented upon by Bhagwanji’s followers—all of them used the same penname “Charanik” or “Charan”—*Oi mahamanaba asey* portrayed him as a superhuman being, and, reading between the lines, Subhas Chandra Bose.

Till now you all knew me as the son of Rai Bahadur, son of so and so etc. Then you knew that he entered politics against his will because of Deshbandhu’s magic wand. A few got to know that he did sadhana secretly. Some also got to know that some tantrik experts met him at certain places in other countries under different situations and advised him. Then he went abroad, became the supreme commander and then died or disappeared. Suddenly you knew he is alive, that he did not die. [Translated from Bangla]

In another place in the book, the following attributed to Bhagwanji appears in English:

My most and only beloved mother was a direct disciple of Paramhansa Dev. By every suck of her breast, through every kiss of her, by the channels of her caresses, touches, tender looks and words, the tattwa-shakties of the Divine Mother flowed in and filled me. My father gave unto me thoroughness and strength in service to others and fighting activeness. ...I inherited mysticism from Mother, Paramhansa and Vivekananda. Throughout I have been constant. Even during most hectic times, the deepest hours of night afforded a bit of time for that.

From my childhood I began hearing and perusing scriptures. As I grew up, my mystic hunger also grew. I went through all scriptures and philosophies again and again. In college and university years I used to seek out, hunt the so-called great seers and wise men of our days and questioned, questioned, questioned them on mysticism. None satisfied me. I even left everything once in search of true mystic satguru and searched far and wide in the country and high and low in the Himalayas. None could satisfy me. It was bitter winter. I remembered my own mother, dear darling adored mother, and came back at her lap and

feet.

What Bhagwanji claimed for himself was actually true for Subhas Bose. For instance, one of Bose's earliest biographers, Durlab Singh, wrote this in 1941:

In the winter days of 1914 he...ran away into the heart of a jungle amidst the valleys of Himalayas in search of some spiritual teacher.... Scenes of his home return were most dramatic. Everybody was sitting in the drawingroom when he suddenly made his entry into it. He first of all proceeded to his mother and touched the dust of her feet.

Other than using the word "Subhas" Bhagwanji claimed everything to identify him as such. "Master moshai's influence on my life was the greatest," he declared. "It was Beni babu who turned my life around. ...And if there was a bosom friend, it was Hemanta."

The thoughts that are occurring to you now occurred to me as well. Surely it was never a secret that Beni Madhav Das was Subhas Bose's school teacher and Hemanta Sarkar his childhood friend. Just because someone rhapsodised all that did not mean he was Bose. Anyone could have lifted these details from already published books.

Actually, *Oi mahamanaba asey* is full of many imponderables. For example, it quotes Bhagwanji claiming that at one point of time, the British Indian Army almost gave in to the INA's assault. "I had great hopes that Bengal would rise like a single person as soon as I crossed Burma." [Translated from Bangla] Bhagwanji has also been quoted by the book as having said that Dead Man "gave himself to India" before "effacing himself away".

A sizeable chunk of the allusions Mahakaal made pertained to his peculiar position as someone whose name had been "crossed out of human register".

I am just a will o' the wisp...It is born, does it work, runs around, stays still for a while, vanishes from one place and then shows up at another place. It manifests itself but cannot be caught. I am just not here. I have no existence. [Translated from Bangla, except the highlighted English word]

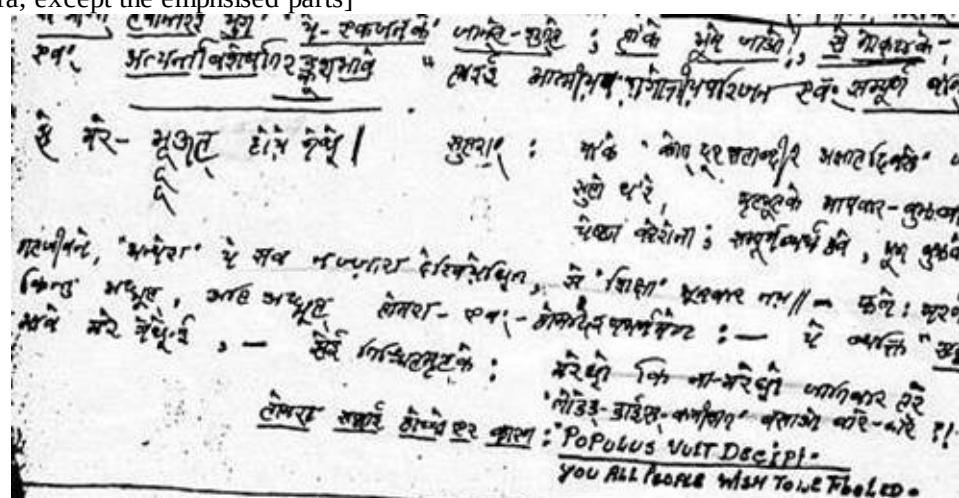
And yet Mahakaal felt that being "dead" actually "saved" him. For

no more will he have to carry with him what he has done or what he hasn't done in his old/earlier life. He won't have to answer. Old relations, old acquaintances will not pester him anymore. Or else he would have had to face questions every moment—'you said this 20 years ago and now you are saying this, you did that 20 years ago and now you are doing this.' This faqir has nothing to be afraid of in that regard. Mother Kali has driven him through the correct path. His road is clear. What he did propound 20 years ago has become redundant due to special circumstances. Will you do the same things in winter as in summer? Will you do the same things at 20 years age as you did when you were 10 years old? [Translated from Bangla]

Bhagwanji repeatedly claimed that he had "undergone complete metamorphosis" and was an altogether different person from what he used to be. And that the attempts to comprehend his present through his past would be futile. "With all your erudition and discernment, you simply cannot comprehend the state of metamorphosis of the Ghost of Mahakaal. How very complete and final!"

In one letter recovered from Rambhawan, Bhagwanji was found to have written:

Very strange are you and your government that they constitute 'loaded dice commissions' over and again just to know whether he is dead or not! You all are the reason behind this. Populus Vult Decipi - You All People Wish To Be Fooled. [Translated from Bangla, except the emphasised parts]



Charanik commented that Mahakaal had had "a complete break with the past". His "new life" was a mix of old and new—a baffling amalgamation of spiritualism, mysticism, militarism and the

paranormal. To his endless wonder, Bhagwanji once said:

As human beings, we are, at all times, radiating energy, which is soaked and stored by items around us. Even our thoughts radiate an electrical field which leaves an imprint on objects in the form of energy. According to eminent [Russian] scientist Genady Sergeyev, every human being leaves an electrical imprint—energetical imprint—as well as an informational imprint, on objects that he touches or is close to. Every object around us has magnetic characteristics of its molecules. It is then that it becomes a natural magnetic recorder. Even over a brief period, man can record the information of his entire life on a nearby object. By 'brief' I mean—in a split of a second.

Mahakaal described the concept of *vishwaprem* (love for the world) as “bunkum”. He said he was a *yodha-sanyasi* (warrior saint) as opposite to his *sanyasi-yodha* (saint warrior) idol Swami Vivekanand. Theorising that the military strength and power of ideology moulded any nation’s history, he rued that India’s greatest misfortune in the last two thousand years was not being able to produce a “military seer”. This nation does not know what is military thinking, he complained.

Dead Man revealed himself in a feeling of omnipotence as a behind-the-scene mover and shaker. I don’t know what to make of the mind-stretching claims of the hidden “military seer”. Wishful hallucinations...or the confessions of a spymaster? The three doctors who were quite close to Bhagwanji in his last days—surgeon Dr RP Mishra, homeopath Dr Priyabrat Banerjee and anesthetist Dr BN Rai—insisted to me that not only was he mentally sound, Bhagwanji was something of a “superhuman”.

This superhuman vaingloriously spoke of his presence in several post-WWII war zones where he couldn’t have been. He got briefings on the issues no holy man could possibly fathom. One of his theories was that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was to preempt an Anglo-American intervention. The British opened a channel with the Khan of Kalat. The “scheme” was that under the garb of talks with the Afghan elites to improve the landlocked country’s lot, a delegation of British ministers and lawmakers would reach Kabul. Two days into the talks, armed intervention from the Pakistani side would start. But the Soviets came to know of this, and even as the plane carrying the British was airborne, the Red Army invaded Afghanistan.

I don’t know if the declassified records give any hint of any such thing. A follower, who I have come to regard as truthful, told me that a week before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Bhagwanji told him to expect some “major change” in these countries. In *Oi mahamanaba asey*, Bhagwanji goes on to provide a sarcastic insight into the lawless FATA region of Pakistan at the height of CIA-backed Afghanistan *jihad*.

Yes, the book overstretches imagination—in almost every paragraph. A reference is made in it to Mahakaal’s secret visit to another country, where he meets the world’s “greatest historian” and implores him, in the presence of his wife and their daughter, to record certain facts in his forthcoming book. A follower’s understanding is that the allusion is to the legendary Will Durant, his wife Ariel and their daughter Ethel.

I find that hard to swallow. How’s that possible? The “meeting” couldn’t have taken place in the US, because Bhagwanji never said he visited that country. But he often talked of being in Paris, a place he very much liked. The follower thought that Durant actually made some modifications to what he was writing at that time at Bhagwanji’s request.

The Durant couple passed away in 1981 and their daughter is no more too; so no chance of getting the account verified. All one knows that when Bhagwanji’s belongings were being inventorised at Rambhawan, many works of Will and Ariel Durant, including the volumes 1 to 10 of their magnum opus *The story of civilization*, were found among Bhagwanji’s collection. A comment left by Bhagwanji on the margin of a page decried the general trend among Western historians at that time to take a lopsided view of the Orient.

“Loads of hogwash!” is how I might have characterised the details gone into so far, had the evidence not emerged of not one or two but several old Bose associates of undoubted integrity and

commitment carrying the belief that Bhagwanji was no one but Subhas Chandra Bose.

Foremost among them was Leela Roy, a member of the Constituent Assembly. Her portrait in Parliament House—unveiled in 2008 in the presence of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh—evidences Roy's exalted position among the pantheon of freedom fighters. In our fascination for Bose and his INA we tend to overlook that prior to that most remarkable but very brief phase of his life, Subhas Bose had for long been a front-ranking politician. During this period, he had many close associates and followers who remained on his side for decades. One of the reasons we have come to regard Lakshmi Sehgal of INA as Bose's closest woman aide is that after 1945 she and others from the INA caught public imagination and became living legends.

Leela Roy (nee Nag), for one, knew Subhas Bose intimately from the time both were in their early twenties. She was one of the earliest women revolutionaries. A historian can tell better, but I am not aware if there ever was anyone else of her status turning to revolutionary ways and actually getting involved in the physical liquidation of the supporters of the Raj. Her father was a wealthy Rai Bahadur and she herself excelled early in life by becoming the first woman to earn a Master's in English from the Dhaka University. There she met her future husband Anil—a hunk who was lost to die of cancer in the 1950s—and followed him into the revolutionary fraternity. Both formed the group called Sri Sangha. In 1941, Subhas tipped them of what lay ahead.



Leela Roy in 1946 **JP**

What is not known historically is that from 1963 till her death in 1970 Leela Roy secretly believed Bhagwanji to be Bose. She had been led to him by Dr Pabitra Mohan Roy—no relation of hers. How Pabitra, Leela Roy and others met Bhagwanji is a long tale. It is not clear whether or not Bhagwanji contacted anyone in Bengal for a few years after he suddenly surfaced in Lucknow. It was purely by chance that a “contact” was “re-established” in 1962.

In April that year, Prof Atul Sen, an ex-MLA and an acquaintance of Bose met Bhagwanji in Naimisharanya by chance. Sen conversed with him from the other side of the curtain and on his return to Kolkata sounded off to some of his old friends from the revolutionary fraternity of Anushilan Samity and Dr RC Majumdar that he had ran into “Subhas Bose”. Around 1965 Majumdar wrote in Leela Roy's magazine *Jayasree* about his surprise over Prof Sen's account that the man on the other side of the curtain discussed with him past episodes which could not have been known to anyone else except Bose and him.

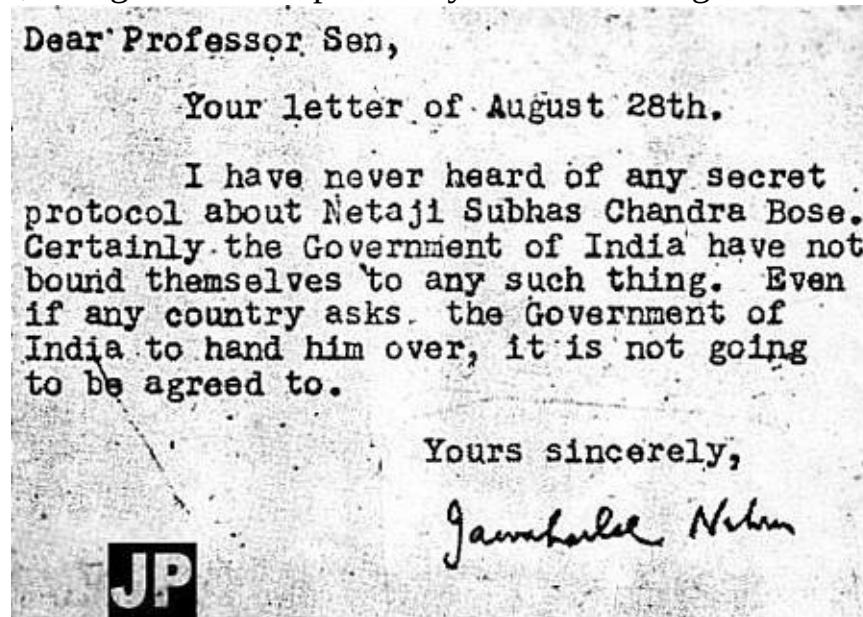
Ignoring Bhagwanji's caution, Sen on 28 August 1962 wrote the following to Prime Minister Nehru:

Dear Jawaharlal Ji, I take the liberty of addressing these few lines to you in the matter of the widely prevalent belief that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is not dead. Mine is not mere belief but actual knowledge that Netaji is alive and is engaged in spiritual practice somewhere in India. Not the sadhu of Shoulmari, Cooch-Behar, in West Bengal about whom some Calcutta politicians are making a fuss at this moment.

I deliberately make the location a little vague because from the talks I had with him for months together not very long ago I could understand that he is yet regarded as Enemy No 1 of the Allied Powers and that there is a secret protocol that binds the Government of India to deliver him to allied 'justice' if found alive. If you can persuade yourself to assure me that this information is not correct or even if it is correct your Government shall resist any action by any of the said powers against the great patriot I may try to persuade him to return to open life.

The Prime Minister's response was somewhat odd. First of all, he should not have reacted kindly to the suggestion that Bose was alive in view of his own long-standing belief that he had died in 1945. Secondly, the bit about a secret protocol was so patently absurd on the face of it that it warranted a contemptuous dismissal. Since Panditji had a marvellous intellectual capacity to personally dictate cogent responses to the numerous letters he received from all over the country each day, it cannot be assumed that he did not apply his mind to what Sen had written.

However, a reading of his August 31 reply gives one the impression that he was open to the idea of Bose's remaining alive, though he did emphatically refute the allegation about the protocol.



On September 5, Sen informed the PM that in view of his answer he was "pursuing the matter as suggested in my letter of August 28". He couldn't because Bhagwanji had cut him off the moment he came to know of his intimating the PM about him. Sen never got the opportunity to again get in touch with Bhagwanji. But the news spread by him reached former Anushilan member Pabitra Mohan Roy. Roy met Sen, heard his story and decided to check it out for himself.

A few days later he managed to reach the old Shiv temple in Naimisharanya where Bhagwanji was staying. The holy man tested Roy's patience and allowed him inside only after several attempts. Pabitra died in the 1990s, taking his secrets with him. But the contents of dozens of letters found in Rambhawan in 1986, [image of a sample letter follows] admissions of Bhagwanji's other followers and certain statements of his tightlipped sons leave me in no doubt that he took Bhagwanji to be Subhas Bose. No one knew as much about Bhagwanji as he did and it's a pity that he left no record or diary with useful details at his home.

Date _____

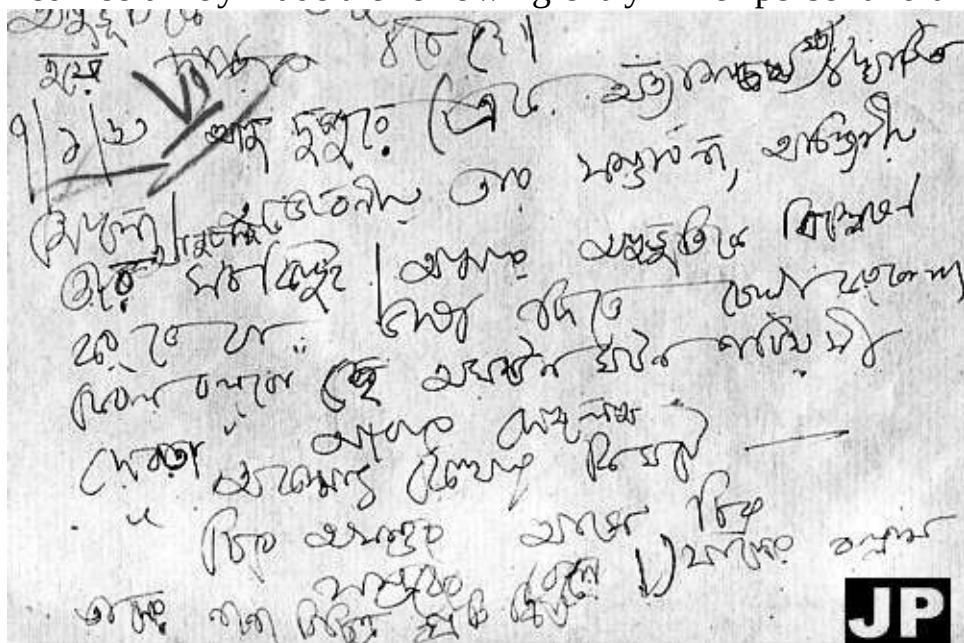
(৭)

বেঁচে আছেন কি-কোথায় বাজে। এখনও আজ আবৃত্ত
হৃষি প্রস্তর দেখে—০৮ এ. প্রজাত শোঁ—২০১২ সেপ্টেম্বর
অন্তে। অন্তে স্বামী প্রবীণ হয়ে আছে। ৭০ মুদ্রার প্রক্
ৰূপ প্রস্তর। ৩ অক্টোবর—১০০০ মুদ্রা।

১৫ মুদ্রা—শুভে প্রস্তর ২০/৮ টেলিগ্রাফ কোর্টের
প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—অন্তে প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা
শুভে প্রস্তর প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১২/৩ টেলিগ্রাফ।
প্রস্তর প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০/১০০০
প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০/১০০০
প্রস্তর প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০/১০০০
প্রস্তর প্রস্তর প্রস্তর—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০—১০০০ মুদ্রা ১০/১০০০

Perhaps it was just as well, for he was Bhagwanji's eyes and ears. "Wherever I've got any type of information, I've religiously forwarded it without any delay, bias or fear. This has been your 'standing order'," he wrote in a 1979 Bangla letter.

In their first meeting, Bhagwanji asked Pabitra to bring the next time a few items, including a powerful transistor, chronometer, telescope, Fowler's dictionary and cigars. While arranging for them, Pabitra turned for help to *didi* [common Indian term of endearment for elder sister or suchlike person]. Leela Roy could deal with "Subhas" as an equal. On 7 January 1963 Pabitra told her that he had met "Bose" at Naimisharanya. A stunned Leela Roy made the following entry in her personal diary that evening:



A bewildering truth was revealed today afternoon. Unthinkable are its possibilities; everything associated with it is unimaginable. I will not try to express in language or analyse my feelings. I will only say that O God of miracles, I see again that suddenly some things happen somewhere—the eternal impossible appears in the form of the eternal possible. Those, whom I shared this with, reacted in various strange ways. [Translated from Bangla]

Thereafter she called a meeting of Sree Sangha confidants and close relatives. Sunil Das, Shaila Sen, Ajit Nag, Helena Dutta, Santosh Bhattacharya, Sagrika Ghosh, Bijoy Nag, Basana Guha and her husband Prof Samar Guha attended. On March 23, accompanied by Shaila Sen and Prof Guha, Leela Roy arrived at Naimisharanya.

According to many followers and local media reports, she was not the first high-profile woman visitor received by Bhagwanji. Anandamayee Ma was one of the most respected Hindu saints of her times; someone who knew Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and attracted a large number of Westerners. A video of hers on the YouTube shows Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paying a visit to her in the 1980s. The

mighty Indira is seen in the video to be treating Anandamayee Ma with utmost deference. This Anandamayee Ma was said to have made some efforts before Bhagwanji allowed her to establish contact with him.

Leela Roy endured a tearful, three-day long ordeal before Bhagwanji agreed to meet her. Srikantha Sharma, who played the role of mediator, told me that Bhagwanji paid no attention to either Shaila Sen or Samar Guha. "He told me that Guha was just a child when he left India." Bhagwanji gave Roy some instruction written by him in Bangla. But he was not yet ready to let anyone take a specimen of his handwriting. "My hands trembling—had to write every (Bangla) letter remembering after two decades of lapse. Please transfer it to your own writing and, return the paper."

Convinced that Bhagwanji was Subhas Bose, Leela Roy on her return to Kolkata told her adopted son and nephew Bijoy Nag about the incredible meeting. "He has done so much for the country. He is suffering even now." Some time later, Pabitra again went back to Bhagwanji along with former revolutionary Amal Roy. They stayed there for a month.

The first person Leela Roy sent to Bhagwanji from Kolkata was an alternative medicine practitioner and a former freedom fighter. Kamalakant Ghosh took care of Bhagwanji's immediate medical needs. Santosh Bhattacharya, another emissary Roy sent would get to spend a lot of time with Bhagwanji. Bhattacharya was sure that Bhagwanji was Bose, whom he had served as young party worker in the late 1930s. He and Dulal Nandy—who lives near Kolkata—doubled as packers and movers whenever Bhagwanji shifted his residence. It was Dulal who presented the Rolex watch to Bhagwanji; Leela Roy gave the Omega gold.

At Bhagwanji's instance, Leela Roy informed a few of Bose's former political associates about "him". But none believed her, because they thought if he was indeed back, he would have contacted them before anyone else. Leela Roy also sounded out some people who knew Bose intimately: Brother Suresh Bose, childhood friend Dilip Kumar Roy, political compatriots Trailokya Nath Chakravarty and Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chaudhury, industrialist Ashutosh Ganguly and ascetic Swami Asimanand Saraswati. Only one or two among them were able to pay Bhagwanji a visit subsequently. Some of these people were seen in the pictures later sent to Bhagwanji. One for instance showed elderly Suresh Bose paying homage to Leela Roy.



The message to Dilip Kumar Roy, who studied with Bose in London but became a holy man afterwards, was conveyed through a hand-delivered letter in 1963. Wrecked physically by a recent stroke, Leela Roy wrote with a shaking hand...

Leela Roy

Phone 46-4116

312, GANGULI BAGAN, NAKTALA,

CALCUTTA-7

Date 25/7/63

মনের কথা এবং বাস্তু এবং পরিষেবা
স্মৃতি | Cathedral Strike ২৩৭৯
পর্ম ও প্রতিফল ২০০.৩০ টাঙ্কা জীবন।
১৯৬১ মুস এবং স্টেড ক্লিনিক - অঙ্গ
স্থাপন করে আছে। পুরুষ (৩) ও
মহিলা (১) এবং স্টেড স্টেড
(১) এবং স্টেড স্টেড
এবং স্টেড।
বাস্তু এবং পরিষেবা ও
প্রতিফল ২০০.৩০ টাঙ্কা
স্মৃতি প্রতিফল ২০০.৩০ টাঙ্কা
কোটি দুই শত একশন
১৯৬১ বাস্তু এবং পরিষেবা
১৯৬১ বাস্তু এবং পরিষেবা "He is
alive + in India" কানুন মুক্ত
করে দেওয়া এবং প্রতিফল
স্মৃতি প্রতিফল | এবং "It was Dilip who
Dilip who always wanted to make
JP

I wanted to tell you about your friend. I am not entitled to speak much, but I can only inform you that "**He's alive—in India.**" He has mentioned about your friendship with him many times. For example, "**It was Dilip who always wanted to make me mystic.**" For this reason, this letter is important.... If you trust me, then it is 100 per cent correct. No one else should know about it—this is the **stern injunction** on me. [Translated from Bangla, except the words emphasised] [5]

Reaching Trailokya Nath Chakravarty "Maharaj" was not easy for he was in east Pakistan, the present-day Bangladesh. "Maharaj" had troubled the British during the freedom struggle so much so that he had to be kept behind the bars for 30 years in all, more than ten years of which were in the notorious prison hell in Port Blair.

Undeterred by the boundary divide, Leela Roy asked her confidant Sailendra Roy, died a few years ago only, to sneak into east Pakistan and deliver the message. Formidable Chakravarty turned to jelly on receiving it. In 1963, he wrote his first letter to Bhagwanji.

After Partition, I decided I would not leave my country. Hence, I am staying in east Pakistan only. The person with whom I was lodged in Mandalay Jail, played tennis and participated in Durga Puja—I have not forgotten him. I'm still with him. In Delhi, in the year 1940, at Shankar Lal's residence I was accompanying him. I was by his side while we toured United Province —on a chilling winter night in the Agra ground, hundreds of people were waiting for him till nine at night. I'm eagerly waiting for the same person. The oppressed and tortured people of East Pakistan are waiting for him. [Translated from Bangla] [6]

Trailokya Nath Chakravarty
MAHARAJ

P. O. & VILL. KAPASATIA
DIST. HYMENSINGH

Dated 11. 4. 1963

59/1, Central Road.
Jadavpur.
Calcutta - 32.

অসম পত্রিকা,

বাসুদেব মন্দির পাশে, অসম পত্রিকা
কলকাতা - ৩২।

প্রিয় ভাই - আমর এখন আজোকা কোথা
আছি - আমি আপনার পত্র পেলাম, আমি আপনার
কাছে আসব আমি আপনার পত্র পেলাম।

১৬ মে ১৯৪০ খ্রি, মাঝে আপনার পত্র
আছে - আমি - কলকাতা, কলকাতা - ৩২, ১৫, প্রক্ষেত্ৰ
পত্র পাশে - আপনার পত্র পেলাম -
আপনার পত্র - আপনার পত্র - আপনার
পত্র - আপনার পত্র - আপনার পত্র -
আপনার পত্র - আপনার পত্র -
আপনার পত্র - আপনার পত্র -

শুভ পূর্ণ পূর্ণ পূর্ণ।

"Maharaj writes as if he's writing to my uncle," a nephew of Bose told me after going through the letter carefully. Shankar Lal was Forward Bloc's general secretary. It was at his Delhi residence in New Delhi in 1940 that Trailokya had last met Bose. He was also with Bose when he was bundled to the dreaded Mandalay Jail in the 1920s.

Maharaj's struggle went on even after 1947. He actively participated in the efforts to secure freedom for Bangladesh till he took ill, was brought to India and died in 1970.

Another senior revolutionary who came to know Bhagwanji's secret through Pabitra Mohan Roy was Ashutosh Kali. An Anushilan Samity veteran like Roy, Kali too had been prevented by long years in prison (1916 to 1938 and 1940 to 1946) from playing a bigger role in the freedom struggle. In May 1963 he offered his services to Bhagwanji.

The moment we received your instructions we started maintaining secrecy. ...I am determined not to allow any laxity on our part..any danger to your existence is not just so for you but also for us all. It can result in a great disaster as well as an immense damage to the nation. [Translated from the Hindi rendering of the original in Bangla]

Before he died in an accident in 1965, Kali visited Bhagwanji in May 1963. His another undated letter read:

Ever since we got news of you, all of us, the entire Anushilan group, have been yearning to gain from your guidance and work under your instructions. ...I have crossed the age of seventy (but) the idealism that I imbibed from the valiant revolutionaries, the courage with which I fought everything is still burning bright within me. ...If you exhort, even at this point of life I will not hesitate to join the movement. I wanted to inform you that Basanti Devi is desperate to receive news of you. She has requested us to let her know about your whereabouts. [Translated from the Hindi rendering of the original in Bangla]

I cannot vouch for it but the reference to Basanti Devi in Kali's letter was probably to the wife of Bose's mentor Chittaranjan Das, a motherly figure to Subhas. However, I am convinced that Subhas's *sejda* Suresh Bose took Bhagwanji to be his brother. After being sounded out by Leela Roy and Pabitra, Suresh Bose told his confidant Sunil Krishna Gupta in late 1963 to go to Basti in UP and

contact “Subhas”. Bhagwanji was the reason why Suresh Bose had stated before the Khosla Commission that his brother was alive.

Died in 2010, Sunil Krishna Gupta was one of the selected Bengali disciples of Bhagwanji’s. The rest were Sunil Das, Santosh Bhattacharya, Pabitra Mohan Roy (all deceased), Dulal Nandi and Bijoy Nag, the current editor of *Jayasree*. All of Sunil Gupta’s siblings were freedom fighters with elder brother Dinesh Gupta forming the Badal-Binoy-Dinesh trio. In a heroic tale not too well-known outside Bengal, the three teenagers in 1930 made a daring entrance into the Writers’ Building and shot dead a top cop for he had mishandled Subhas Bose. Today statues of the three martyrs are a popular landmark outside the seat of power in West Bengal.

Sunil Krishna Gupta assisted Amar Prasad Chakrovarty, the Forward Bloc counsel before the Khosla Commission. Many of Chakrovarty’s posers for the witnesses evidently came from Sunil and they certainly did not fit in present-day Forward Bloc’s confused worldview, which doesn’t see Subhas Bose emerging alive out of the USSR. This is despite Keshab Bhattacherjee, the lawyer who represented the party before the Mukherjee Commission, coming out openly in favour of the Bhagwanji angle in his 2011 Bangla book.

In the 1990s, Sunil Gupta was the moving force behind Rudra Jyoti Bhattacharjee’s PIL leading to formation of the Mukherjee Commission in 1999. As his health failed, his nephew Surajit Dasgupta and Surajit’s friends Prof Nandalal Chakravarty and Dr Madhusudan Pal became a fixture at the commission. Because Sunil Gupta died in penury and an unsung man—he told me that he shunned publicity—people have trouble recalling his name. But the following certification from a most unimpeachable authority proves that Sunil Gupta was indeed quite close to Suresh Bose and the Bose family.

On 17 August 1956, Intelligence Bureau Deputy Director S Balakrishna Shetty wrote this to the Home Ministry:

We reliably understand that some of the Top Secret papers of the Government of India made available to the Chairman of the Netaji Inquiry Committee are now in the possession of one Sunil Krishna Gupta.... He appears to have obtained them through his friend Mr Bose who was a member of the Netaji Inquiry Committee and intends to show them to Muthuramalingam Thevar.

Upon receipt of the IB note, a Top Secret DO letter dated 23/24 August 1956 was written by Joint Secretary N Sahgal to SN Ray, then Chief Secretary of Bengal. The two ICS officers, two former toadies of the British Raj, then dissected the credentials of a freedom fighter. Sahgal suggested that Bengal government “might like to have the matter looked into and...have the premises of Sunil Krishna Gupta searched for the recovery of the file”. Ray’s Top Secret DO dated 10 June 1957 gave the result of the inquiry by the West Bengal Intelligence Branch, which utilised the services of two INA veterans:

Sunil Krishna Gupta...is well educated, possess considerable cultural attainments and is intimately known to the Bose family. All the members of Sunil’s family, including his two grown-up sisters were associated with the political movement in the Far East sponsored by the late Subhas Chandra Bose. ...A highly responsible member of the former Rani Jhansi regiment and a commander of one of the INA guerrilla regiments, both of whom were in the confidence of Shri Suresh Bose, told our agents that not even a scrap of the secret papers of the Government of India had so far come to the possession of the inner group of Shri Suresh Bose.

A 1999 *TIME* magazine article described Sunil Gupta as someone who “demands no recognition and even refuses to be named”. [7] I can vouch for it, having remained in touch with him for years.

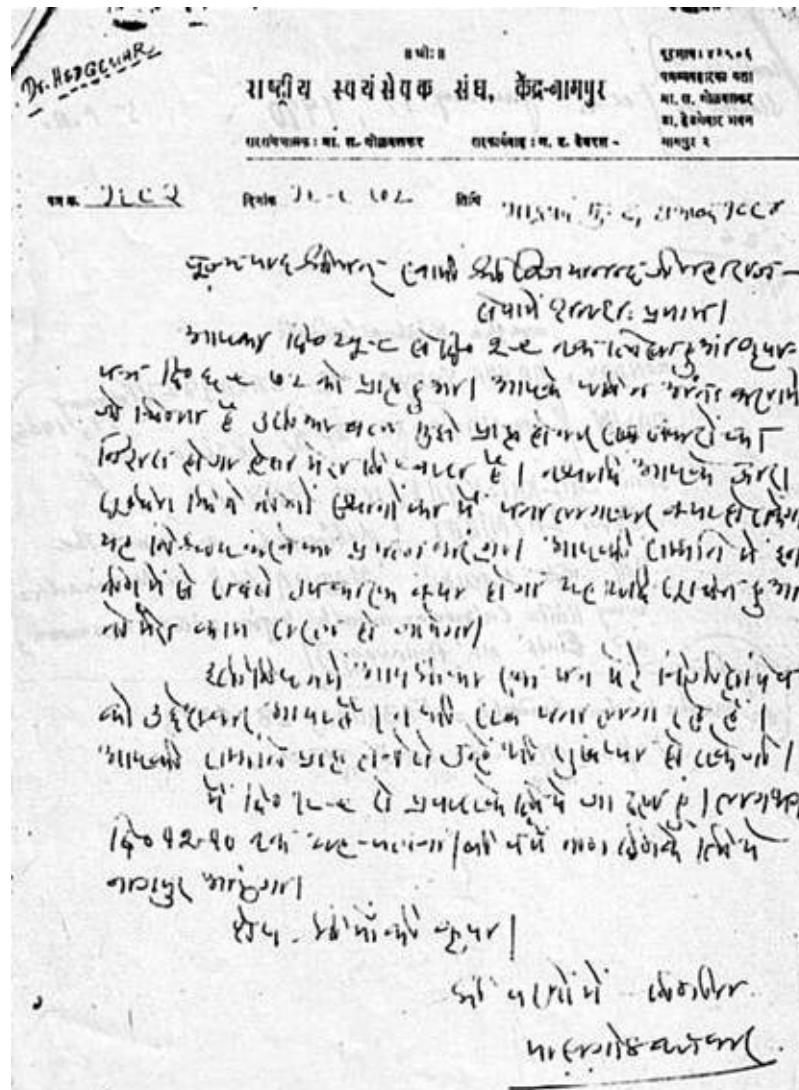
There were many who kept in touch with Bhagwanji believing he was Subhas Bose. Letters of certain Bhoop Bahadur of Coochbehar and one VR Mohan were found in Rambhawan. The names sound like those of the former king of the region where Shaulmari ashram was located and a well-known distillery industrialist. The holy man would destroy much of his correspondence by burning and then scattering the ash. Some that have survived the destruction tell their own story. The following note for instance was presumably written by former West Bengal Chief Minister Prafulla Ghosh.

॥ दिश्यते करुना त्रिपुरारी
 विक्रमोदयं ते विष्णव
 एव तृण त्रिपुरारी— त्रिपुरा
 भगवन्ति अपि विष्णव
 त्रिपुरा त्रिपुरा ।

त्रिपुरा त्रिपुरा

The writer “Malikanada Ghosh”—which was Prafulla’s alias—laments that his life would have taken a different turn if the events of “the Haripura session leading to the Wellington Square happenings” not taken place. Haripura Congress session witnessed the rise of Subhas Bose as the Congress president, and at the Wellington Square session, he was forced to step down. Bhagwanji discouraged his followers to speak or write about his identity but most could not stop themselves from dropping hints that they were aware of it.

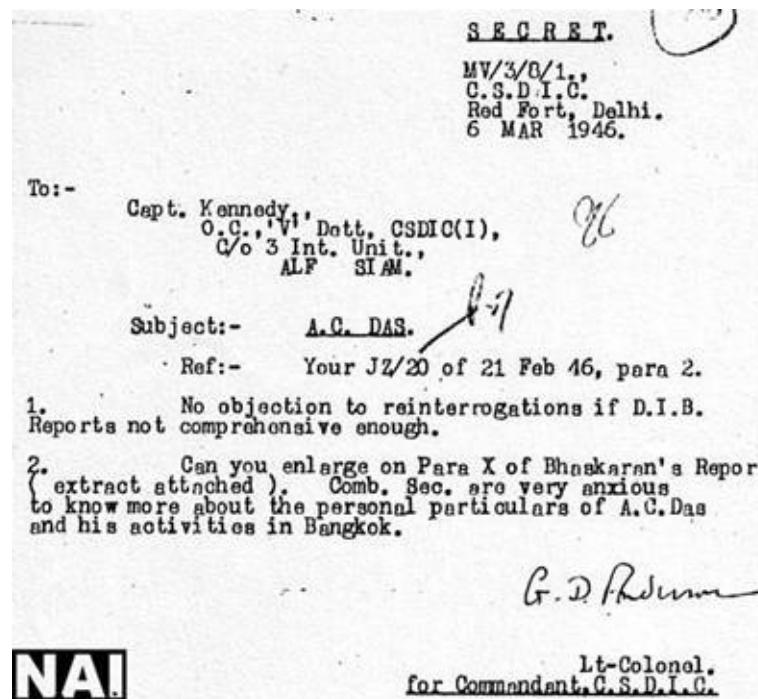
Now, this should give goose bumps to the RSS/BJP/VHP rank and file. The *Guruji* of entire current top brass of the Sangh *parivar*—former Prime Minister Vajpayee, former deputy PM Advani, former HRD minister Dr Joshi, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, his predecessor KS Sudarshan—held Bhagwanji in highest esteem. It is evident from a letter written by Madhav Golwalkar to him. This too was found at Rambhawan.



Golwalkar starts the letter with salutation: “I bow before you a hundred times.” The content of the

letter gives the impression as if Golwalkar, who ran India's biggest social organisation, was taking orders from a nondescript hermit who hardly left his room. No, there is no doubt that this letter was meant for and was received by Bhagwanji. The letter carries faint notes in his handwriting mentioning the name of RSS founder Dr Keshav Hegdevar and some astrological calculation about Golwalkar, who was quite unwell at that time.

Many followers who did not see Bhagwanji's face for quite some time nevertheless believed that he was Bose because of his unmistakable voice and the ability to recall the details only Bose would have known. I have reasons to think that they were not bluffing. For instance, there is the case of AC Das of the INA secret service. Records declassified in 1997 and now available at the National Archives in New Delhi contain an intelligence report saying that on his last night in Bangkok, Bose had a long talk with Das about the underground work after the Japanese surrender. Another report speaks of the CSDIC's anxiousness to nab him, as Das had gone missing after Bose's reported death. [8]



NAI

Lt-Colonel.
for Commandant, C.S.D.I.C.

Yet another record which was used as an exhibit by the Mukherjee Commission in some other context shows Bose writing to Hikari Kikan, the Japanese military body which liaised with the Provisional Government of Free India, to hand over one AC Das fifty revolvers, some wireless sets and some British currency for post-war work.

Copy for Sri A.C.Das

302

Annexure - D/14

~~SECRET~~

Bangkok,
16th August, AM 6.

Headquarters,
Hikari Kikan,
BANGKOK

Subject: Arrangement for Underground Organisation

Dear Sirs,

I understand from Sri. Debnath Das that Hikari Kikan has kindly promised ten-fistols and Two Wireless sets for underground organisation. But this is not enough. In view of the fact that there will be no more fighting of the Japanese Army, it may be possible to get from the Japanese Army arms and wireless sets in addition to what the Hikari Kikan may be able to spare. It would help our underground if we could get fifty revolvers and wireless sets, as well as British currency. This letter. The arms, wireless sets and British Currency may be handed over to Sri. A.C. Das, who has been put in charge of this work by Sri. Debnath Das.

Thanking you.

Yours very truly,

Subhas Chandra Das

Copied to: S.A.C.U. Agent, who may nominate Mr. Ghosh / P.C. Bhattacharya / Mr. Bhattacharya

*If Sri S. Bhagwanji and Sri S. Roy are
going to take up underground work, please
send to India for British currency.*

None of these documents were in public domain so long as Das lived. In 1955, the Shah Nawaz Committee examined Das at Bangkok and its report cited his evidence in support of the air crash theory:

When he [Das] heard the news of the crash, he like others did not believe it. But although Mr Sunil Roy had the wavelength, frequency, call signs etc. to contact Netaji, he tried in vain to contact him. They gave up the attempt after 10 days, and believed that the plane had indeed crashed with Netaji. [9]

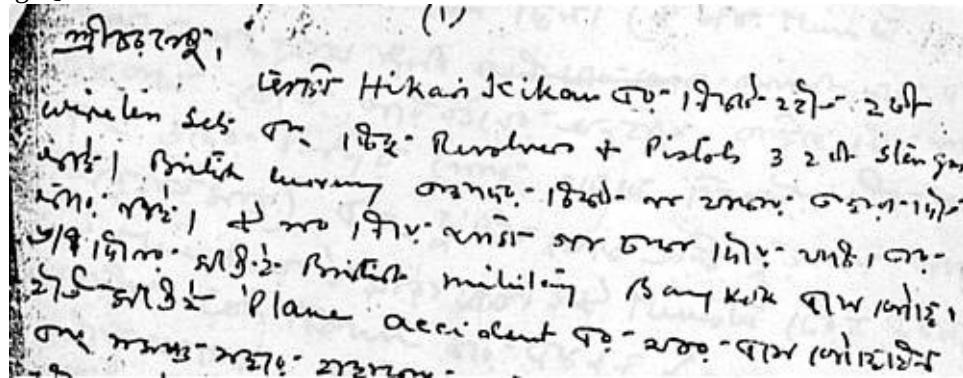
Das eventually returned to India. He also gave evidence before the Khosla Commission, where he stated that he actually never believed in the news of Bose's death. Das did not tell the commission that courtesy Leela Roy he was at that time in touch with Bhagwanji, thinking he was Bose. Rambhawan yielded several of his letters. The first one was written in 1964 and had been appended by Leela Roy along with her letter. Roy titled it "the credentials of Anil Das alias Renu" but it was something of an *aide-memoire* for Bhagwanji. In the letter, Das referred to his role in the freedom struggle that had begun in 1930s and lasted beyond 1945.

On the night before he left Bangkok, Netaji took individual interviews of a number of people. I was one of them. When Netaji called me it was half past 2am. He told me about the post-war work and cautioned me against getting arrested. He gave me a letter addressed to Hikari Kikan. ...Netaji said that wherever he may go, he would remain in contact with us via wireless....

When I heard the news of the crash of Netaji's plane, I knew such a news would come and it would not be true. I waited for over a decade and in 1956 I visited India and told everything to auntie [Leela Roy]. In 1961 I left Bangkok for good and last year auntie sent me to Naimisharanya and thereafter whatever small or big news I wanted to know I came to know from her. Now I am waiting for your orders. [Translated from the Hindi rendering of original in Bangla]

After perusing this letter, Bhagwanji specifically asked Das about what had really happened after 16 August 1945 and what statements were given by the captured INA personnel. Das elaborated in another letter that he

received two wireless sets and a few revolvers, pistols and stenguns from Hikari Kikan. They could not give me British currency. Then I went underground. Within six-seven days the British military reached Bangkok. ...First Debnath Das surrendered before British military authority, and he was let off after his statement was taken. [Translated from the Hindi rendering of original in Bangla]



Das, who did not marry, is now dead but his letters and the testimonies of people whom he regarded as his family make it abundantly clear to me as to what his belief was with regard to Bhagwanji. When he granted audience to Das, Bhagwanji corrected a few details about "their meeting" in Bangkok.

It is not that everyone with links to Bose gained access to Bhagwanji. The holy man was highly selective. At one point, political activist Manu Bhai Bhimani—who had been associated with Gandhi, Bose and other leaders before 1947—came in contact with one Bhagwanji follower. As Bhimani was sounded off about "Netaji's" presence in India, he expressed some views which were jotted down in a short note in a small piece of paper and sent to Bhagwanji. The note, discovered from Rambhawan, said:

He [Bhimani] came in contact through a common friend. He talks too much. He says that:

1) If Netaji is in India why does he not appear or broadcast? All the people will accept his leadership at once.

....

3) He helped Shri Sarat Chandra Bose all the time till he was alive.

4) He helped Netaji when he escaped from Calcutta to Kabul. Sisir and Manu Bhai went with him. He has a special white bag which he used when he accompanied Netaji.

I verified the points 3 and 4 from Sisir Bose—Point 3 is correct, and point 4 is not correct. (and you can say also) Bhimani also sent me a letter which has been sent for your kind perusal.

Bhagwanji did not approve of Bhimani's claims. "He has lied", he wrote. He described as "false" Bhimani's claim that he had helped Sarat Bose until his death in 1950. He crossed out both points 3 and 4 and wrote: "You don't know facts. Mejda helped him. Everyone knows this except you fool."

Mejda [elder brother] was what Subhas used to call Sarat. Of course any "impostor" could have written something like that. You might think that—in spite of the foregoing account—it is actually quite foolish to think that Netaji remained hidden in his own country like that.

My dilemma as a researcher is that I cannot brush something under the carpet just because it looks implausible. Even though I know that it makes a lot of "political sense" to "end" the Bose mystery with the Russian trail, I am helpless because there is a considerable body of evidence telling me that there is something about the Faizabad angle. And when I speak of evidence, it includes of the variety which is admissible in courts all over the world

There is only but one direct evidence that Bose was alive after 1945. "You don't know facts. Mejda helped him" wouldn't have blown my mind if a topmost handwriting expert of India hadn't opined that these words were written by Subhas Chandra Bose.

- 3). He helped Skin Sarat Ch'Boe
you don't know all the time till he was alive.
facts. Meijin helped him. Everyone knows this except you
too.
- 4) He helped Netaji when he
escaped from Calcutta to Kabul

10. Why ‘Dead Man’ tale can’t be wished away

If the Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry hadn’t revisited it, the legend of Bhagwanji would have morphed into an urban myth centred around Faizabad. But it so happened that when the commission was formed, some believers rushed to the commission with their claims. Of these, Dr Alokesha Bagchi stood out for he had cared to supply the commission an authenticated copy of the inventory prepared following the High Court’s 1986 order on Lalita Bose’s petition.

By having the holy man’s belongings secured Lalita Bose had met with partial success only. After the inventory had been prepared, all the items located from Bhagwanji’s room in Rambhawan were sent to the district treasury and stored in sealed iron containers. The court case lingered on for years and in the meanwhile Lalita and others lost steam. The last she was heard making a public pitch for resolving the issue was in October 1989. Addressing media in New Delhi, she “demanded to know why the Government was not serious to find out whether ‘Gumnami Baba’ of Faizabad was Netaji as a section of the Press had suggested”. *Hindustan Times* reported:

Ms Bose said he was of the same age, size and colour of Netaji. He did not meet people except from behind a curtain. His accent was Bengali. His notes on books in English and Bangla looked like the writing of Netaji. After the death of the Baba, Ms Bose made a claim for his property as his niece as she did not want such important material to be destroyed because it was “unclaimed”. [1]

Despite his own precarious financial condition, co-petitioner Vishwa Bandhav Tewari picked up the threads. Mohammad Haleem had passed away. Tewari, since deceased, wrote to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Speaker, UP Governor, Chief Minister and the Forward Bloc in Kolkata, but all in vain. In 1997 he was told that the file of Lalita Bose’s 1986 petition was untraceable in the court records. At that juncture, Dr Bagchi, a surgeon from Gorakhpur, came to his rescue. Bagchi felt attached to Bose because his grandfather had hosted him once. Sincere but credulous, the surgeon was also under some fanciful notion about a holy man, then camping at a secluded place near Sitapur.

Tewari’s efforts led to yet another judicial injunction in May 1998. Judge Brijesh Kumar of the UP High Court ordered for the recreation of the file. Bagchi found that in the court record someone had fraudulently entered “case resolved” against Lalita Bose’s petition.

The state government eventually filed its counter-affidavit in January 1999, when the central government was under pressure to initiate a new judicial inquiry. The state government, however, dismissed Lalita Bose’s case. She was no longer alive to respond to the government contention that for the “want of knowledge” it could not be believed that she was Bose’s niece. The NIP reports were trashed. “No reliance can be placed on any news published in the newspaper without verifying the authenticity of the same.”

I find that statement amusing. While checking the Gumanami baba files at the DM’s office, I noticed that several newspaper reports making empty claims delinking Bhagwanji from Bose had found pride of place in the official documentation. Evidently, the state government in the 1980s followed the central government’s policy of dismissing all media reports which went against the official version about Bose’s fate and, at the same time, preserving those which favoured it. The Prime Minister himself saw to it that such media reports were brought on record. See this noting for example:

From time to time we have been asked questions about Shri Subhas Chandra Bose. I think you might keep the attached cutting for reference in this connection.

J. Nehru

(J. Nehru)
21-12-1952

A. V. G.
24.12.52

~~C.S.~~
~~F.S.~~

The press clipping referred to was this:



So, I fail to understand how could the UP government not attach importance to media reports linking Bhagwanji to Bose. The affidavit gave one reason. The local police had concluded that Bhagwanji was not Bose.

Soon after the Mukherjee Commission was set up, Bagchi filed an affidavit and appended a copy of the bulky inventory he had obtained from the High Court. I am sure that a reading of it must have made the commission officials realise that there was more than what met the eye in the *la affaire* Gummani Baba. At least that's what happened to me despite my having a completely closed mind on the issue at that time. I could not believe that Bose could have remained in hiding like that and so the very idea was as preposterous as it could get.

I was then working with *Hindustan Times* online. Shali Ittaman, my colleague, came up with the idea of conducting a probe into the matter and in consultation with CEO Sanjay Trehan and editor Shailesh Shekhar assigned me some research and writing task. The whole idea would not have materialised if HT editor Vir Sanghvi was not supportive of it. Under the lead of Bose biographer and senior journalist Sitanshu Das, the one of its kind HT probe concluded in 2001 that "on present evidence it would seem improbable that Bose died on August 18, 1945".

No reputed daily had ever dared to take such a decisive stand on this issue. The HT probe was pathbreaking and a runaway hit on the web. The bulk of hits came not from India, but from the US, home to a large number of expatriots and people of Indian origin.

After we were done, I met Bagchi during a hearing of the Mukherjee Commission in New Delhi. He gave me a copy of the inventory and that was the start of the phase 2 of the HT probe. Halfway

through my research, I cross-checked with Sitanshu Das and Suresh Bose's son Pradip the antecedents of some of the people whose names had figured in the Faizabad issue. Without being judgmental about Bhagwanji, Pradip Bose made one thing quite clear: Leela Roy was a class apart. "It was impossible for her to have mistaken someone else for Netaji."

All the research for the phase 2 of the HT probe was done by me. My reports, overseen and rewritten by my seniors, were lapped up by the readers. Going forward from where long forgotten Ashok Tandon and the NIP team of Nirmal Nibedon, Vishwambhar Nath Arora and Sayed Kauser Hussain had left, I traced Bhagwanji's Bengali followers in Kolkata and managed to get his handwriting tested by one of the best experts in India.

B Lal Kapoor, a former Additional Director of the National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Sciences, Ministry of Home Affairs, studied Bose's handwritten notes I had obtained from the National Archives and compared them with poor but a large number of the 1985 vintage photocopies of Bhagwanji's notes. Lal gave his opinion in his March 2002 report to *Hindustan Times* that "there are characteristic similarities in general and individual writing habits, strongly suggesting common authorship of relevant questioned writings and admitted writings (of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose)". The concluding editorial for the HT Bose mystery probe said:

We do not fear the inference that the hermit may be Netaji Subhas Bose, but we do gasp at the conclusion that will be drawn from the writings and letters that have survived this man. Taken on their face value, they have the potential to change Indian history the way we know it.

The commission followed its own procedure. First retired session judge NK Panja visited Faizabad on the instructions of Justice MK Mukherjee and took evidence from Bhagwanji's local followers. It was only after that Justice Mukherjee himself visited Faizabad, the District Magistrate's office to be precise, in November 2001. [The picture you see now shows him on right. Dr Alokes Bagchi is on the left and I am behind the two. Bijan Ghosh, the lawyer who had filed the Bharat Ratna PIL, was behind the camera.]



In the presence of several mediapersons, including myself, the sealed belongings of Bhagwanji were inspected by him. Some 700 items, mostly letters and books were selected to be taken to the commission's office in Kolkata. Most important among them, from the forensic point of view, were specimen of Bhagwanji's writings and a matchbox containing a few teeth assumed to be his. The commission decided to get these handwriting samples and the teeth examined by the government experts. After *Hindustan Times* carried my story on B Lal's opinion on page 1, the commission hired his services as well. All handwriting and DNA reports were received by the commission in sealed covers and opened by Justice Mukherjee in a public hearing in 2004.

The result was that whereas Lal had given a positive report, the government reports were negative. One DNA report was negative and the other inconclusive. The commission's verdict on the Bhagwanji angle, as stated in its final report made public in May 2006, was that

there is no reason for not acting or relying upon the evidence of the last two categories of witnesses particularly of the category who had seen Netaji before 1945 and also met Bhagwanji/Gumnami Baba face to face on a number of occasions, more so when their evidence regarding the frequent visits of some freedom fighters, eminent politicians and former members of

INA on January 23 and during the Durga Puja festival is supported by the fact that letters written by some of them including Prof Samar Guha, Dr Pabitra Mohan Roy and Ms Leela Roy were found in "Rambhawan". [2]

But still

there are other formidable facts and circumstances on record which stand in the way of this commission in arriving at a conclusive finding that Bhagwanji/Gumnnami Baba was none other than Netaji. [3]

The report summarised the negative findings of the government forensic experts and determined that “in absence of any clinching evidence to prove that Bhagwanji/Gumnnami Baba was Netaji the question whether he (Netaji) died in Faizabad on September 16, 1985, as testified by some of the witnesses, need not be answered”. [4] Most journalists afterwards read in the commission report a complete dismissal of the Bhagwanji angle. “Absence of any clinching evidence” meant that there was evidence but it was not incontestably final—which is my position even today.

Another chapter was added to the Bhagwanji saga in 2010 when Justice Mukherjee's off-the-record comments were surreptitiously recorded by independent filmmaker Amlan Ghosh for his documentary "Black box of history". Wholeheartedly backing B Lal's meticulous report, Mukherjee reacted derisively about other government reports. His comments confirmed the suspicions of forensic fraud about which the sources had tipped me off earlier. More importantly, the former Supreme Court judge said that he was "100 per cent" sure that Bhagwanji was Netaji and regretted that he could not prove that in his report due to non-cooperative attitude of the Government, and even the Bose family.

Even with such an intriguing backdrop, no proper discourse has taken place in India till date over the Bhagwanji episode. Most of our historians and intellectuals—whose job it is to explain complex issues to the public—have zero interest in the Subhas Bose matter. When they display some, they refuse to come out of the rut of the Taipei “air crash” theory. The recent big hype over a slim book written by a grandnephew of Bose's has further reinforced the impression among a large number of unsuspecting people that the air crash theory is the only explanation of Bose's fate. On the other side, a sizeable number of people continue to believe that Bose was liquidated in Russia under some hideous international conspiracy. And so they think that Bhagwanji must have been an impostor. On the whole, the Bhagwanji legend is pooh-poohed because of its incredibility quotient. The negative findings of the DNA and handwriting experts are cited to summarily dismiss any link between Bose and Bhagwanji.

There are also those who accept in private that there is some definite link but do not publicly air their views for fear of negatively impacting Bose's image. “The Netaji we knew was a fearless fighter—a death-defier. Nothing would have stopped him from coming out in the open if he was in India for so long!”

My take is that all these assumptions must not be allowed to overshadow facts. A grandnephew of Bose quoting from the Shah Nawaz Committee report and asserting that this is “historical evidence” is simply making a motivated statement. [See Appendix III. Views of Subhas Bose's family on his fate] To say that “I went to Russia and some scholar told me that Netaji died there only” is also not a piece of evidence but unsubstantiated hearsay. The opinion of a handwriting expert before a commission of inquiry, like it or not, constitutes direct evidence. If Lalita Bose had lived on beyond 1998 and had told the Mukherjee Commission on oath that same thing she told the media about the Faizabad handwritings having been of her uncle's, it would have tilted the scales.

Who was Bhagwanji is still a moot question. Agreed that the available evidence does not incontestably prove that this man was Bose; but does it establish otherwise? Certainly not. The disbelievers should find an explanation as to why for so many years, so many outstanding patriots of integrity with no ulterior motive held Bhagwanji to be Bose. How could he “fool” so many people for so many years and for what purpose? If he was an imposter, who were behind him and what could

have been their motive? How come more than one impartial and intense media enquiries upheld the Bhagwanji angle? How come both Khosla and Mukherjee commissions were formed largely due to the efforts made by his followers? Why would a former upright Supreme Court judge charged with finding the truth about Bose come to hold the belief that Bhagwanji was indeed Bose?

If I have been successful in evoking some counter-questions in your mind, I think I've your attention. Now, allow me to guess some of these posers and furnish relevant details so that you can take an informed stand.

I open with the rider that my current understanding about the Faizabad holy man is not what I would like it to be. I have been able to access only a fraction of the information. Most of the stuff that Bhagwanji left behind is rotting away in the Faizabad district treasury. So there are going to be gaps in the details to follow. To fill them will require further research and efforts which would not be possible without public support. I think a fraction of the abounding interest the general public has in cricket matches would be enough to crack the entire Bose mystery.

In the last one year I have often been asked: "How can Justice Mukherjee now say that Bhagwanji was Bose when his report doesn't say that?" See, sometimes you know something is true, but still can't prove it. If you remember, a few years ago a judge let off the culprit in the murder of a young woman in Delhi, saying, "Though I know he is the man who committed the crime, I acquit him...." [6] The father of the accused, a middle-level IPS officer, had used his influence and, therefore, the judge did not find right evidence laid out in front of him. Later the verdict was overturned and the killer got convicted by the higher court. It proves that when public pressure comes, no one can get away with wrongdoings.

Anyone, of course, would be at a liberty to say for whatever reasons that he or she does not share Manoj Mukherjee's belief. All I would say to that is that please bear in mind that Mukherjee is a former Supreme Court judge who investigated Netaji's fate. If he can be 100 per cent sure of something, we can try and be 25 per cent sure that there must be some good reason for him to hold that sort of belief.

But how do we reconcile with hurdles in the way of lending credence to the Bhagwanji angle? The matter was probed by the police at the very outset and they said this man was not Bose. Didn't they?

In pre-Mukherjee Commission days if you asked the central government who Bhagwanji really was, your question would have been passed to the UP government for an answer. The state government would have checked up the police inquiry report available in Faizabad DM's office and reverted with the statement that this man was not Bose. The word for it in today's language is "spindoctoring". The police report about Bhagwanji's identity doesn't precisely conclude that he was not Bose. This is despite it being a whitewash. The report contains just three pages with another one carrying the single-sentence conclusion drawn by then SSP of Faizabad. While brevity is the soul of wit, this is hardly amusing. This is not my understanding of how an inquiry should be.

An example of inquiry—leaving aside its political overtones—is the recent Sohrabuddin encounter case. We all know what the CBI did to ascertain circumstances leading to the gangster's extra-judicial killing. The investigative agency caught hold of existing and retired senior cops, extracted information from them and filed a chargesheet running into thousands of pages before the Supreme Court. The CBI also told the court for whatever reasons that it would like the case to be moved "out of Gujarat as a fair trial wasn't possible in a hostile atmosphere". [7] In the Ishrat Jahan fake encounter case, the Gujarat High Court on 1 December 2011 directed that the investigation be handed over to the CBI "because it could not trust either the special investigation team or the state police to do a credible job". [8]

While I am not terribly keen to know how a criminal and a terror suspect were bumped off, so far as "politically sensitive" cases go, this is the right model of inquiry. It is up to us which one we would

like to uphold as a fair one. A three-page, "talk to one guy here and one guy there" sort of report would be good enough for a rookie journalist to churn out a story, but would hardly do justice to a serious matter under investigation.

But then, we do know how police functions in this country over cases of political significances. I am just reading a report in the *Times of India* which says that the Delhi Police after a thorough inquiry has not been able to find any evidence linking any politician to one of the biggest political scandals of our times when bagsful of money were supplied to lawmakers to vote in favour of the Congress-led government. But no one is surprised that the cops can't get at the truth many times. There are things beyond them. So far my memory serves me, no one ever said the UP Police was the Scotland Yard of the East.

The 1985 police inquiry was wholly inadequate. Some junior cops went around and queried a few Bhagwanji followers with a view to extracting from them "any solid evidence to suggest that this person was, in fact, Netaji". Some did not know much, others were afraid and some others took resort to evasion. Knowing how our baton-wielding cops generally behave, they must have spoken in threatening tones. The report says that "a police party was sent to Calcutta to talk to Dr Pabitra Mohan Roy and other associates of 'Netaji' but none of them were able to give any information about this matter and, in fact, they appeared to be reticent about providing any information to the police".

Local media published the transcript of Pabitra's examination in 1986. Going through it, even a Grade X student could tell that he was being untruthful and concealing something. So how could the wily cops not see through it? Some of them had told the media when the controversy was raging that handwritings and fingerprints could offer a way out.

So why was that not done? Local journalists told me that a handwriting expert brought by the police had actually compared a few samples and he turned pale. You know what happens when people turn pale; they develop cold feet and they can't put their fingers on anything.

According to the police report, when they scoured through Bhagwanji's room in September 1985, a large number of belongings and literature associated with the "Indian National Army" in general and Sri Subhas Chandra Bose in particular came to light. There were a large number of family photographs, reports of inquiry commission related to the death of 'Netaji' etc. It also transpired that a special ceremony used to be held in the room of 'Bhagwanji' on very 23rd January which incidentally is the birthday of Sri Subhas Chandra Bose and on this date no person of Faizabad was apparently allowed to visit him. But some persons from Calcutta used to come and stay with him for that day.

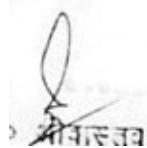
Not very much intrigued by all this, the SSP concluded that "on inquiry it could not be ascertained as to who was the deceased man and who is his successor or heir, hence the properties have been kept safe and according to the orders of Court, it will be disposed off.

Comments on Grounds

On Inquiry it could not be ascertained as to who was the deceased man and who is his successor or heir, hence the properties have been kept safe and according to the orders of Court, it will be disposed off.

65/3

sr. Supt. of Police,
Faizabad.



RTI

The report also stated that the "state government has been informed of the inquiry conducted by the police in this matter and further instructions of the government are awaited". The waiting game continues till date. I fail to see how in the intervening period it was given out that the police inquiry

had proven that Bhagwanji was not Bose when all it had was to prove nothing.

That's one side of the story, you might say. "OK, the matter was cursorily inquired into in those days. But today we do have handwriting and DNA reports disapproving the claim that Bhagwanji was Bose!"

Let's begin with the handwriting reports. Back in 1985 people could spot similarities between Bhagwanji's and Netaji's handwritings. Lalita Bose identified Bhagwanji's handwritings as those of her uncle. I am told that Nirmal Nibedon too had sought the opinion of an expert and though the expert was nodding in affirmative on the match, he was unwilling to give his opinion in writing or come on record. Lest we forget, the Congress party held sway across the country at that time.

"Oh, keep this out now!" You might like to rejoin.

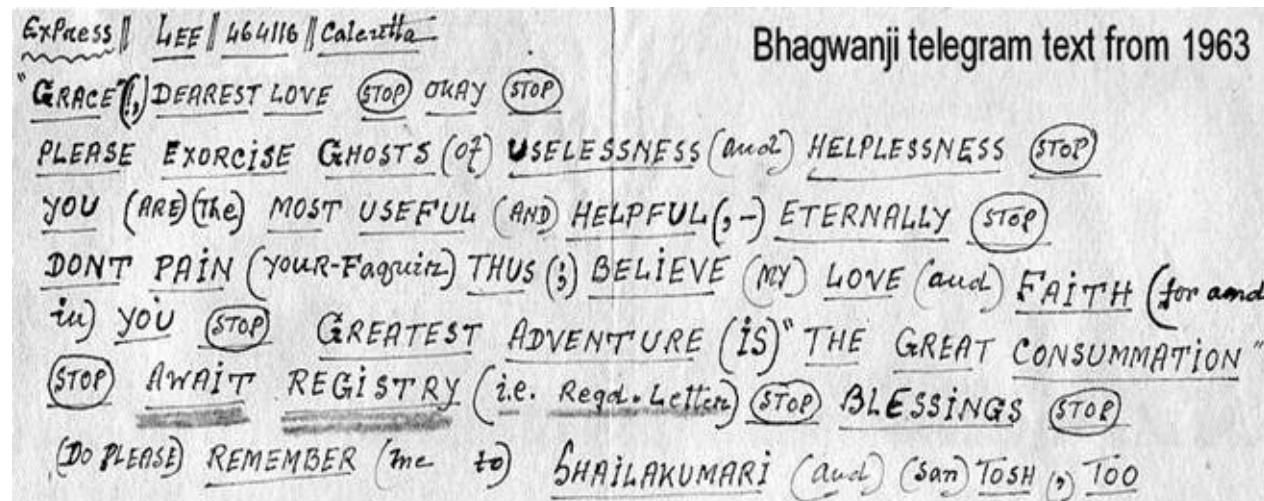
I can't. The political setting is a key factor in the Bose mystery. Foreigners can't understand this, but we must not overlook this if we want to take an objective, 360-degree view.

"I know; no need to remind me of all that" could be your response.

Not you, but there are a lot many youngsters around. Their impressionable minds have been bombarded with the propagandist fillers on state-controlled TV and adulatory print adverts issued by the ministries. Those years of 1985-86—those "good old days" when "pesky" Opposition and media were hardly the "troublemakers" as they are now—were not conducive for a fair inquiry into any issue which could have impacted the Congress-led government negatively. Congressmen's orders were treated as holy writs. Generations to come will scarcely believe how thousands of innocent men, women and children were chased through the streets, butchered in their homes, burnt alive by mobs in New Delhi in November 1984. The Government never carried out a fair inquiry. Covering up the Faizabad issue was a child's play if you ask me.

"But I have heard someone saying that those handwriting samples at Rambhawan could have been planted?"

Considering the huge spectrum of Bhagwanji's handwritings written across decades, it is impossible that anyone could have planted all of them, not just in Rambhawan, but also in several other places. Specimens of Bhagwanji's writings are there in private hands in Kolkata and other places.



It is scientifically impossible for a man to write in someone else's handwriting across thirty years or so. Any seasoned expert could easily make that out.

"So, were the samples ever shown to any good expert?"

In 2001, I approached B Lal Kapoor on behalf of *Hindustan Times*. A former Chief Government Examiner of Questioned Documents, B Lal is famed as one of the all-time greats of his field. He honed his skills in several forensic labs in the US, the UK, Germany and Switzerland during his service years. Post-retirement he was included on the panel of experts in several government

departments and banks, such as the State Bank of India and Citi. Even after retirement, he was getting flooded with cases by the authorities and invited to give lectures to officials and even judges on the aspects of handwriting testing. During the 87th Indian Science Congress in 2000, he was awarded the life-time achievement award in forensic sciences.

B Lal gave a positive report to *Hindustan Times*—an unbiased, mainstream newspaper with no special love for Bose. Later, he was engaged by the Mukherjee Commission. Working on different samples, he produced two far more detailed and convincing reports. Applying the fundamentals of the forensic testing of questioned documents outlined by AS Osborn and Wildon R Harrison, he found that the English samples picked up from Rambhawan (questioned documents) were “written by the same person” who wrote the admitted handwritings of Subhas Bose. “It has been found that in spite of time gap there are fundamental similarities.”

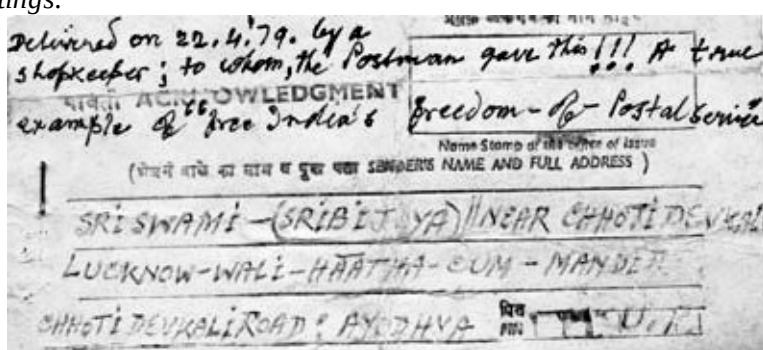
Through intense comparison of admitted writing of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose...it has been shown that he is a skilful writer having at his command more than one variety of letters. Such pattern...is also found in the relevant questioned English writings and such similarities are quite characteristic in nature and have great identifying value.

Regarding the Bangla handwritings, he wrote in a separate report that

the questioned Bengali writing are having time gap of few years when compared with the date of execution of admitted Bengali writing. ...Even having time gap, the relevant questioned Bengali writing and relevant Bengali writing are showing characteristic similarities with natural variations and the collective occurrence of such similarities may not be found in the writings of two different persons as a matter of chance. The collective occurrence of significant similarities can only be explained by the fact that both the writings belong to one and the same person.

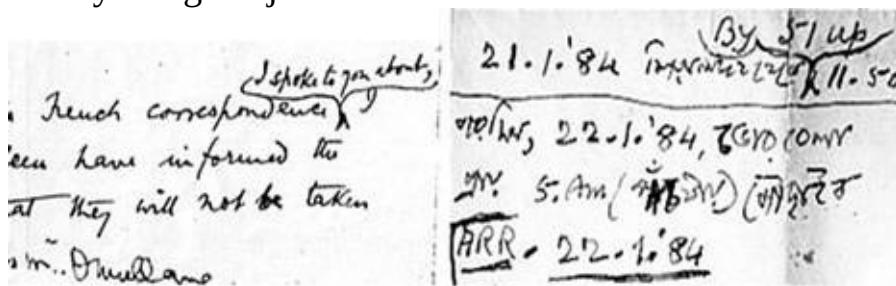
He further pointed out:

As found in the case of English writings, even in the case of Bengali writings, the writer has got a habit to write quite small-size letters utilizing every available space. This is a sort of idiosyncrasy of the writer and is found both in the case of questioned and admitted handwritings.



[Bhagwanji's comment on a postal acknowledgement slip: Delivered on 22.4.79 by a shopkeeper; to whom, the Postman gave this!!! A true example of “free India’s freedom-of-Postal Service”.]

Kapoor also discovered that the writer of both admitted and questioned writings was in the “habit of giving a peculiar sign when making insertion of certain words”. [9] This peculiar caret was described by him as having a “very high identifying value”. The following combo of Bose’s and Bhagwanji’s handwritings will drive home the point. On left is a specimen of Bose’s writing in 1937 and on right a 1984 scribble by Bhagwanji.



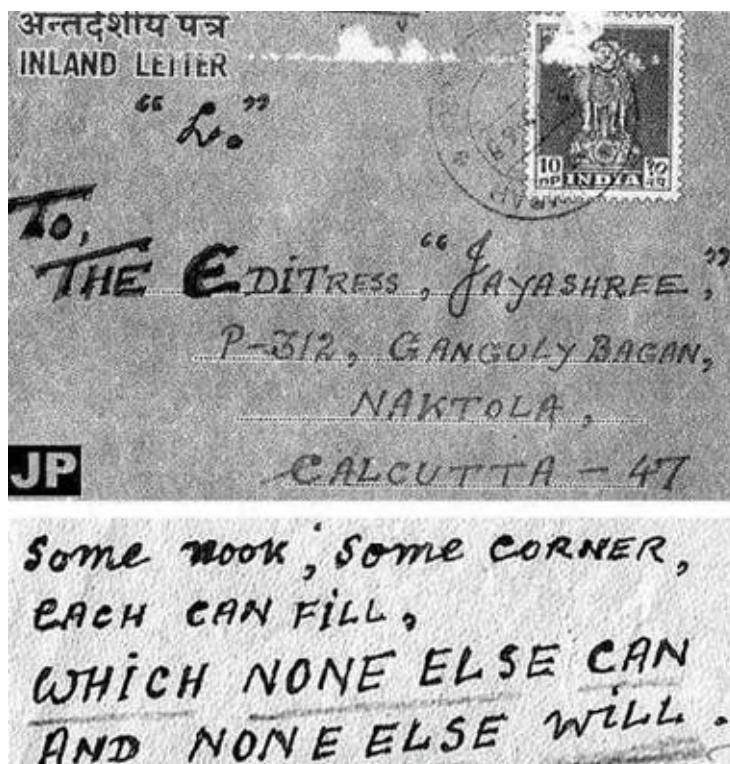
“What about reports of two other experts the commission approached?”

The other two reports were given by “government” experts. They did not have the stature and experience of B Lal Kapoor and their subsequent conduct also did not inspire too much confidence in their findings.

One report was given by Dr SK Mandal, senior scientific officer at the Forensic Science

Laboratory, Kolkata. Take a look at his report and you know that it is fraudulent. While giving a report, a handwriting expert is supposed to state reasons for drawing the conclusions. But Mandal's report has zilch. It simply says the writings are of two different persons. The other one was signed by Amar Singh, Government Examiner of Questioned Documents, and ML Sharma, Deputy Government Examiner of Questioned Documents. "We have carefully and thoroughly examined the original documents of this case in all aspect of handwriting identification and detection of forgery, with the scientific aids in the Government of India laboratory at Shimla," they stated while explaining the reason for opinion. They admitted that Bhagwanji's writings "do not show any sign of imitation or forgery in them".

This was the only common ground between them and B Lal. In his report to the *Hindustan Times*, he had observed that Bhagwanji tried to conceal his identity by overwriting the strokes and writing in the capitals.



B Lal nevertheless emphasized that

it is not possible for a writer to change his writing habit completely. Even in an effort to hide his identity, the writer is not able to leave his individual characteristics and other peculiarities found in his handwriting. There is such a faithful reproduction of some peculiarities that even a gap of time to the extents of decades can not hide them.

The expert's conclusion on this point was that he found "no evidence...that the questioned writing has been made by a writer other than Shri Subhas Chandra Bose by imitating/copying the writing of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose". But if you believe the Government of India Laboratory report, the resemblance was merely cosmetic.

Both the handwritings in their pictorial appearance appear to bear a marked resemblance to each other at the first instance, which is due to similar style and class of writing. However, the analysis of the structures of the letters, the study of the "master pattern" of the letters, in words as well as range of variations on close observation shows that the two writings are quite distinctive and different in their origin and are written by two different authors. [10]

The report gave some details and at the end showcased a "juxtaposition chart" highlighting the differences between the two handwritings. The chart had eight examples, five for English and three for Bangla, comparing both sets of writings and demonstrating the differences in 10 alphabets in all.

That is not very impressive. B Lal's report was supported by 460 large size photographs accounting for each and every alphabetical letter appearing in the handwriting samples given to him. He also dwelt at length on the issue of "natural variation" in handwriting.

Every genuine writing has got natural variation since the human hand is not an exact reproducing machine and it is very important to consider this natural variation for a correct conclusion regarding authorship of a writing. If natural variations

are taken as differences then there would be error in the identification. [11]

His finding was that Bhagwanji's handwriting showed "natural variations which are additional symptoms of genuineness and there exists significant similarities".

That the central government experts were not confident of their report became clear to the commission staffers when they chose to ignore the commission's summons to appear before it in New Delhi on the same day when their former boss B Lal Kapoor was going to be examined. Amar Singh never turned up before the commission. ML Sharma went all the way to Kolkata from his office in Shimla to make the Government's case. As Mandal was being examined, Sharma sneaked into the room and noted all the questions that he was also going to face. It was later argued by deponent Prof Nandalal Chakravarty before the commission that "armed with the prior knowledge of the questions he was going to face", Sharma started answering questions even before they were put to him.

The government experts made contradictory statements during their examination. Mandal was asked by Justice Mukherjee: "Do you agree that to study the writing habits of the author of a document the shape of punctuation marks, their position and frequency, the choice of a peculiar punctuation sign, the mark of a caret, underscoring and bracketing need to be considered?" He said, "Yes". Then he was asked: "Did you consider all those factors before arriving at your conclusion and have those factors been reflected in your report?" He now responded: "I considered all the above factors but none of those factors have been reflected in my report." What would you say to that?

ML Sharma too was asked by Prof Chakravarty: "Do you agree that a matured writer can have a habit of using a peculiar or unique sign or insertion in a line, which is rare?" He replied: "Yes, it may have." Later he was asked: "Do you agree that such a sign has a very high identifying value in examining a writing?"

Knowing the implication of answering in affirmative, Sharma now said: "I do not agree." At the end of the examination he could not conceal the truth. "Do you agree that such a sign falls within the category of individual characteristics?" Answer: "Yes". "Do you agree that individual characteristics of a handwriting are the most important factors to determine the authorship of a document?" Answer: "Yes".

All the government experts were given a dressing down by Justice Mukherjee for their strange behaviour. Had it not been for other factors, he would have thrown out their reports as unreliable.

"Other factors as in negative DNA report? Now we are talking! A DNA test cannot be wrong. Right?"

The process of DNA testing is scientific and beyond reproach. But humans can err, or create frauds. There have been reports of the fudging of forensic tests even in the developed nations, what to speak of rampantly corrupt third world countries. The Indian forensic labs are not like those in the US or Europe that one will take their word as final on politically sensitive issues. The credibility of DNA testing process in India has often been called into question over matters that are nowhere as politically volatile as the Bose case.

For instance, in 2003 three police officers and two doctors were found guilty of "fudging the DNA samples of five innocent civilians" killed over the Chattisinghpura massacre of 2000 in J&K. [12] A September 2010 report in Hyderabad journal reported how a scientist at the Forensic Science Laboratory in the city was caught red-handed while accepting bribe from a suspect in a rape case. The scientist said: "The police usually tamper with DNA reports to help mighty culprits to go scot-free." [13] Two unimpeachable authorities have also recently testified that we have little to tom-tom about our state-controlled forensic labs. A secret April 2006 US government record leaked by WikiLeaks said: "Forensics is weak in India—only two DNA labs service the entire country." [14] Our Government is very much aware of that. On 1 February 2010 Home Minister P Chidambaram admitted that the "state of forensic science as well as the state of the Central and State Forensic

Science Laboratories ‘leave much to be desired’”. [15]

“Which lab carried out the DNA tests in the Bhagwanji case?”

Two different DNA tests were performed on some teeth found in the house Bhagwanji last stayed and, therefore, presumed to be his. The report of the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics (CDFD) in Hyderabad was signed by a fairly junior technical officer. The name of the senior scientist-incharge was not mentioned anywhere in it. This report dated 23 June 2003 said that two out of seven teeth made available to them were “subjected to DNA isolation, and DNA fingerprinting profiles were prepared”. The same were then matched with the DNA obtained from blood samples given by Bose’s relatives.

This report was inconclusive as the teeth “did not yield DNA suitable for complete analysis”. [16] For inexplicable reasons, the remaining five teeth were not used for meeting desired concentration of DNA. My suspicions were further raised when a source in the commission told me that an impression was given to them initially that the DNA had in fact matched. Thereafter, I showed a copy of the CDFD report to a DNA expert, who concluded that “the test was politically conjugated to truncate its normal inference” for reasons beyond his comprehension.

First, the DNA isolated from the two teeth would have done the job convincingly as there are other ways to attain higher and purified yield of DNA extraction. However, even if it is taken that the yield of DNA was not sufficient for the micro-satellite based fingerprinting, the question remains what prohibited them from using all the teeth samples?

The problem could have been properly addressed if they had used mitochondrial DNA-based assay. Although the protocol looks very much the authenticated one, from the blurred gel picture in the photocopy of the report shown to me, and from the results, one simply cannot draw a negative conclusion mainly because the test wasn’t carried out in replicates. On a more ethical ground, such tests are generally not performed by an individual alone without any supervision from the other scientific staffs.

The remaining five teeth were then given to the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL), Kolkata, whose comprehensive report signed by its director on 11 June 2004—when Congress had returned to power—concluded that “the individual-source of the teeth does not belong to either maternal or paternal DNA lineage of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose”. [17] The credibility of this report was marred by the leak of its apparently “premeditated” finding to Bangla newspaper *Anandabazar Patrika* which has been for the last few years supportive of the Taipei death story.

The commission set aside the Hyderabad lab report because it was inconclusive but asked the CFSL director to appear before it. The CFSL director did so only after summons were served on him thrice. His bias was also evidenced by the fact that he had ignored the commission’s repeated calls to figure out if it was possible to lift latent fingerprints from Bhagwanji’s belongings. Moreover, the director was quite gung-ho about the feasibility of a DNA test on the Renkoji remains, something that the other eminent experts—from Sir Alec Jeffreys to Lalji Singh—ruled out completely.

Amazingly enough, as early as 2000, the CFSL Kolkata was talking of a scientific “breakthrough”—a sort of thing which rarely, if ever, happens in a third world country. According to a *Times of India* report, the “scientists here [at CFSL] claim to have hit upon a more sophisticated version of DNA testing, which, they said, could help them prove conclusively if the remains kept at the Renkoji temple in Japan are actually of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose”. The director was quoted in the report as making a tall claim that “recently we have mastered the technology and with this breakthrough we are now able to do what forensic centres in Washington in US or Birmingham in UK are doing”. [18]

After the director’s cross-examination before the Mukherjee Commission, one deponent pointed out—and I find some force in this argument—that the entire procedure of gene profiling starting from DNA isolation till the analysis of the microsatellite repeats was conducted by one expert, that is the director himself. This went against the norms of DNA testing. “If an analyst has a mala fide intention, the result of DNA analysis can be manipulated, especially in the absence of a second examiner and interpreter,” said deponent Dr Madhusudan Pal during the argument session of the

Mukherjee Commission.

“So you suspect Bhagwanji DNA tests were fudged?”

It would not be entirely unjustified to have that sort of feeling. In view of the overall credibility of the government labs and the mala fide intentions of the Government which runs them, either fudging or contamination of samples can't be ruled out.

“Is that possible?”

Around 1999 the CFSL performed a DNA test on remains presumed of Paul Wells, a British national kidnapped along with others by the terrorists in J&K. According to a report published in the *Independent* of London, in January 2000 the J&K Police “announced that scientists on the Central Forensic Science Laboratories in New Delhi and Calcutta had confirmed through DNA testing of samples of bones and other body parts that this was indeed the body of Mr Wells”. [19] To verify the claims made by the CFSL labs, the British carried out their own tests. The Foreign Office in London later announced that “British police forensic scientists had decided that the remains were neither those of Mr Wells nor of any of the other hostages”. [20]

“Why should we believe those foreigners?”

Out of a misplaced sense of patriotism ordinary people like us may want to stand by “our” report, but throughout the world everyone will go for the British report. Even our own ruling class, top bureaucrats, soldiers, intellectuals, journalists, everyone—whose children’s favourite destination for study, work and permanent domicile is more likely to be London or New York than Mumbai and New Delhi—won’t give a fig to a report from an Indian lab when another one from the West is at hand.

That’s why every time there is some forensic test involved in some contentious matter in India, the parties involved try to seek opinion of the experts from the US and Europe. Recently we saw how everyone ignored the Delhi CFSL report on the audio tapes floated with a view to tarnishing the reputation of former minister and civil society activist Shanti Bhushan and went with the one approved by an independent American expert. Later, Vir Sanghvi followed his suit and managed to take the Radia tape taint off him by getting two American and one British experts to establish that the recording of his conversation had been doctored.

In hindsight, the handing over of these teeth to government agencies was a mistake. The Government of India has from the start displayed no genuine interest in resolving the Netaji issue. All the inquiry panels, including the Mukherjee Commission, were constituted by it under pressure and not out of a free will. It continues to withhold several secret files on Bose’s death and has no intention to share them with their real owners—the people of India. It has even destroyed, forged and hushed up evidence. Its intentions are not to resolve the issue but to cover it up. No reliance, therefore, can be placed on the reports given by the labs directly or indirectly controlled by the Government. All forensic tests concerning any aspect of the Bose mystery must be carried out in independent labs in Europe or America to ensure impartiality.

“But some scholars, Forward Bloc leaders and members of Netaji’s family are insisting that the DNA test and the handwriting reports have conclusively proven that Bhagwanji was not Bose and we should close that chapter!”

Most of these people have convinced themselves that Bose was killed in the USSR even though there is not a shred of evidence to back the allegation. The logic that rejects the Bhagwanji angle just because government forensic reports have falsified it or the UP government rejected it is not only greasy but also fraught with pitfalls. When the believers in the “Netaji was killed in Siberia” theory are reminded that the governments of India and Russia don’t even admit that he was there in the first place, they say that these governments are not being truthful. When a government is acting like that, how can you accept as gospel its opinions, and those of the people on its payroll, on the other aspects relating to the Bose mystery? Why have this “pick and choose” policy to suit your own prejudices?

Do you want to know the truth about Bose, or do you want the truth as you think it is?

I don't think that any opinion expressed by the authorities is trustworthy given the political ramifications of the controversy around Bose's fate. That is why the official stands concerning the Russian or Shaulmari angles are as much irrelevant as is the case with the Faizabad episode. I do not accept that Shaulmari sadhu was Bose merely because I have gone through some secret official papers saying so. I do so because there is independent evidence to substantiate that view. The government records are most vital while forming opinions, but the official views expressed in them must be taken with a pinch of salt for they may represent the thinking of a biased political leadership. My interest in seeking secret government records is only to understand whether or not Netaji died in 1945 or if he was alive afterwards. I have no faith in the Government's assessment about what he was and what he stood for. Every child in India knows that the Government of India never had any special love for Bose. By government I mean the political leadership controlling the system.

The Bose family members who are now making adverse remarks about Justice Mukherjee for his pro-Bhagwanji stance should check out their own past comments about his unprejudiced inquiry. A member of the family said at a gathering that he agreed with the DNA test on "Bhagwanji's teeth" conducted in the CFSL Kolkata. I asked him how would he react if the Renkoji remains were brought to India and tested at the same lab. I reminded him that the lab operated directly under the Ministry of Home Affairs which had been indicted in the Mukherjee Commission report for not fully cooperating with it. His response was that he did not trust the government machinery and would prefer that such a test be carried out in an independent lab. He did not appreciate it when I told him that we were of the same mind after all.

"One last question: Why did the BJP not bring the whole thing out?"

It's for the BJP to answer. To be fair to the party, the Vajpayee government did do the country a favour by setting up the commission, though acting on a court order. The case would have been doomed if there was a Congress government at the helm in 1998-99. But why would the BJP not go beyond a point beats me. Continuity in government policies could be a factor, and it is not easy to overturn a stance that has been held across decades. Maybe the BJP leadership determined that the truth was not worth the trouble. Yes a large number of people scattered all over the globe are deeply interested to know the truth, but a resolution of the mystery is not going to have any significant bearing on the electoral fortunes of any party in India.

There is one calculated guess that I can make. The inside story may not be as simple as many people think it is. If the case was really of an open and shut variety like "Bose was killed in Russia and our people connived at this", some non-Congress Prime Minister would have got it out and stigmatised the party for ever.

There is definitely more to the Bose mystery than the Russian angle and it is quite complicated. And there's no way we can hope to resolve it, unless a full-fledged debate is going on in the true Indian way. When the MPs are raising a stink in Parliament, people are carrying out candlelight vigils, celebrities are issuing appeals, intellectuals are making right noises on the TV, newscasters are grilling the ministers live, the Prime Minister and major leaders are asked straight questions during press briefings—that will be the day.

In the forlorn hope that such a time might come, I'd do well to try and leave a brief account of the life and times of Bhagwanji—the man many believed was Bose. This is in addition to what has been discussed previously. In view of unverifiable and massively incredible details that are currently available, this is going to be sketchy and jump from one episode to another. So my apologies in advance; I know very little.

First of all, what was the secret of the "concocted" air crash story as per "Dead Man" Bhagwanji? In *Oi mahamanaba asey* Charanik gives Bhagwanji's purported account of how on August 17 evening

“he” first parted from his associates. The allusion to “Japanese general” is perhaps for General Isoda and “youngest general and adjutant” is clearly Habibur Rahman—who was just 32 in 1945.

Many (of his own side) were not trusted by him, but he kept them under the impression that they were the closest and most trusted. He finished all his work and then came out of his room. ...The Japanese general became restless—no more delay. Mahanayak now came to his generals. Everyone was anxious to know who would accompany him. Each person’s expressions spoke out that he was the sole appropriate candidate to be with him. But he who had to choose had already made his choice. He said...“my foreign friends have allowed only one extra seat. I am taking with me my youngest general and adjutant”. [Translated from Bangla]

It appears from Bhagwanji’s statements that “he” never went to Taipei. He parted company from his fellow travellers, probably in Tourane. Charanik writes:

He had to get down at a predetermined place. It was planned that he would get some rest there. But suddenly there were signals that some people were following. Even a moment’s delay could not be allowed. Mahanayak now bade farewell to his trusted adjutant. He told the adjutant, “Remember my direction...I can’t tell you everything in detail. But I have told everything to two of my very trusted Japanese generals. Get the directions from them and act accordingly. Tell them if you need anything.”

Mahanayak then left for an unknown destination. Long time later, Mahanayak commented, “Yes my adjutant was a complete man. Perhaps that is why he did not have any place in free India. At least I do not know of anyone else who has followed orders with such unshaken dedication.” [Translated from Bangla]

Bhagwanji’s “unknown destination” was *bhalu-desh*—the land of bears—and he reached there with the additional help of “black society”. Soviet Russia was “the land of bears” and “black society” was a coinage for the secretive Black Dragon Society, whose former head’s son-in-law Rash Bihari Bose had handed over the charge of the INA to Subhas.

Charanik asked a rhetorical question at this point: “Does anyone know that he went to the land of bears before his last trip?”

If you asked historians, they would tell you that Bose passed through Russia in 1941, and never thereafter did he chance to be in Russia. But the same historians also said that Bose died in Taiwan. So shall we believe the historians or can we repose some of our trust in the unknown entity called Charanik?

This medium of Bhagwanji’s further claimed that Mahanayak actually “met the leader of that country and made all arrangements” before 18 August 1945.

This would have to be complete nonsense because in the last few months before the war ended, Bose did not move around much. Actually he did not even visit Tokyo. The Shah Nawaz Committee report states, and it is well known, that “in October 1944 Netaji visited Japan for the third and last time”. [21]

But what if I told you that what you see now is an intelligence report speaking of a visit in December 1944?

Headquarters,
SACSEA Commission No 1.
SAIGON, South East Asia Command.
6 Nov'45.

To : HQ. SACSEA
GHQ (I) (for Combined Section M.I.Bte)
HQ. ALFBIAM
HQ. I4 Army
HQ. 20 Div.

Subject : - SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE.

The following information has been elicited from the conversations with the Staff Officers of the Japanese Army HQ. Saigon :-

1. In December 1944, SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE suggested that it would be expedient for the Japanese Govt. to come to terms with CHIANG-KAI-SHEK and further seek friendship with Russia. BOSE's theory was that CHINA would only too gladly accept a suggestion which would extract her from the convulsions of a long and weary war. In regard to RUSSIA, he explained that he was convinced that the Russian alliance with GREAT BRITAIN and AMERICA was brought about by force of circumstances and that with the completion of German defeat, Russia will repudiate her present mask of friendship and will openly revert to her well-known hostile status towards GREAT BRITAIN and U.S.A.
2. The Japs were in favour of such a move as they realised that their defeat was inevitable unless a paramount political event of this nature occurred. But they were doubtful if BOSE was capable of procuring this new tripartite alliance. The Japanese therefore rejected this offer and conventionally re-iterated their belief in their eventual victory as they intended to produce a large scale counter-attack which would turn the tide of war in their favour.

There are indications that the Japanese Govt. evinced a keen interest when BOSE put forth these suggestions and in fact, plausible as these looked to them, it was in this connection that BOSE visited TOKYO on Dec. 44. But his preliminary info

NAI

SACSEA Commission No 1 report of 6 November 1945—declassified and available in the National Archives in New Delhi since 1997—opens with the statement that “in December 1944, Subhas Chandra Bose suggested that it would be expedient for the Japanese government to come to terms with Chiang-Kai-Shek and further seek friendship with Russia”. Where and when he said that is made more clear in the second para of point 2: “There are indications that the Japanese government evinced a keen interest when Bose put forth these suggestions and in fact, plausible as these looked to them, it was in this connection that Bose visited Tokyo on December 44.” [22]

So does it, or does it not prove that there has been some sort of secret history about Netaji that the historians are yet to fathom?

“You are reading too much in one document and it could be, for all we know, a typo! I can already see a grammatical error in the report.”

Perish the thought. Another record in the archives, declassified the same year, even speaks of a rumour about Bose’s secret visit not just to Tokyo but to Russia. Charanik had an edge over the historians.

In November 44 there was a general rumour...that SC Bose was preparing to leave for Moscow in order to place all information about the Indian freedom movement before the leaders of the USSR. ...In December 1944, Lt Sadhu Singh of HQ, 1 Div, INA, was acting as QM of the YE-U rest Camp, informed B 766 that SC Bose had left for Moscow and was soon expected back in Tokyo. [23]

“This is only a rumour!”

There's no smoke without fire. Another dot to connect comes from now missing Top Secret note AM Sahay had sent to the Ministry of External Affairs in 1952. He wrote: "While I was visiting Shanghai in January 1945, Netaji passed that way on his way back from Tokyo."

For reasons he never explained publicly, Suresh Bose made a similar claim before the Khosla Commission. He hadn't mentioned this in his *Dissentient report*, so he must have come to know it afterwards. Who could have informed him? A *Times of India* report dated 6 November 1970 quoted him saying that Bose's plan to go to Russia "was drawn up in early 1944 and it was accepted by the

Japanese government". [24] In pursuant of this plan, what Subhas did next according to Suresh was reported by *Hindustan Times*:

In December 1944, when the Azad Hind Government was functioning and the INA was engaged in the battlefields, Netaji was absent from there for about a fortnight. During this period, Netaji had been to Russia and had probably met Marshal Stalin. [25]

A noting made by Pabitra Mohan Roy showed Bhagwanji as having said exactly the same thing and more. That the "disappearance was planned by him" much before the Japanese surrender. "Even before that he went to 'R' and nobody knew." The note further said that days after the news of the crash was circulated, "he" was seen by petty Japanese officers and some "Anglo-American personnel" at "a small hotel near Saigon". A note scribbled by Bhagwanji referred to "American intelligence officer Alfred Wagg" coming to know about a post-18 August 1945 meeting where "he" was present.

Another cryptic remark of Bhagwanji. He claimed that General Douglas MacArthur had sent an identical message to President Harry Truman and Louis Mountbatten, supreme Allied commander for Southeast Asia. "Subhas Chandra Bose has escaped again."

But no record of any such message is in existence as of today. The MacArthur Archives at Norfolk has only one record indirectly concerning Bose in its declassified lot.

I am sorry I am going to pile you with more and more even as you have difficulty in digesting the remark attributed to MacArthur. Bhagwanji took a leap two decades ahead as he said that

as long as McNamara was in a key government position he kept quiet. But after becoming the chairman of IMF he said, "We have categorically different news regarding the publicized death story of so and so". [Translated from Bangla, except the highlighted words]

Robert McNamara, who died recently at 99, was the US Defence Secretary (1961-68) and then the World Bank chief from 1968 to 1981. I have not yet come across any statement attributed to McNamara, substantiating Bhagwanji's incredible statement in any which way.

In his numerous talks with the close followers, Bhagwanji repeatedly spoke about his experiences in Siberia. Charanik, on his part, narrated this in *Oi mahamanaba asey*:

Concentration camps of central Siberia contain male and female labourers, farmers, craftsmen, authors, scientists and teachers—from five thousand to 25 thousand people. Not one or two, there are almost 49 concentration camps. They manufacture ultramodern goods for daily use. These are transported to the retail outlets from the main city. Those who buy these do not know that they have been manufactured by their parents, brothers and sisters and other kin.

One day a new camp was being constructed; so the soldiers took 10,000 prisoners with them. But there was no hut there. Their duty was to install pillars by digging 12 feet deep holes in the ice. "Keep your back hot by heavy work"—anyone who does not follow this will freeze and die. All this is not hearsay. Mahakaal has experienced all this. [Translated from Bangla]

Then how did this Mahakaal escape from that place and reach India?

He did not escape but left with Russian consent around 1949, the year when the war criminals' trials ended. Bhagwanji claimed that he was not exactly imprisoned in Siberia and said that he was grateful to Joseph Stalin for not treating him like an enemy. Like the Soviets, he did not think India was a free country still.

TN Kaul, former Ambassador to the USSR and Foreign Secretary, was to write in his memoirs that post-1947 the Russians "still looked upon India as a colony of Britain" and "could not understand why we still wanted to remain in the Commonwealth, when we had suffered so much at the hands of British imperialism". [26]

When it came to the crunch, all vows of attaining *purna swaraj* (complete independence) became a thing of the past. "They got Independence in a begging bowl," was Bhagwanji's pet peeve. Winston Churchill, the most anti-Indian among the colonial British, gave a thumbs-up to the transfer of power only after being convinced by Mountbatten. This opponent of Bose and independent India's first Governor-General chose 15 August as the D-day for it reminded him of his great victory against Japan, and the INA if you please, in the war.

In the early 1970s, Mountbatten elucidated to Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre how he

ensured that India remained a part of the Commonwealth after the transfer of power.

They would keep the same uniform [in the armed forces], merely putting the three lions on their shoulder instead of the actual crown...they would keep the white ensign with the red cross of St George, just as in the Navy.... They must owe some common allegiance to the King.... [27]

And allegiance to the King India did pay beyond August 1947, though Lord Mountbatten thought that the Republic of India too had to be extra courteous to the British monarch even in the early 1960s. He suggested to then Indian High Commissioner in London that Queen Elizabeth and not the President of India take the salute at the Republic Day parade as head of Commonwealth. Excited High Commissioner Vijyalakshmi Pandit, who came close to being conferred with the title of "Dame", forwarded the request to New Delhi. Prime Minister Nehru shot it down. [28] In 1948-49 the PM had to overcome great resistance from the lawmakers as he strove to get India into the British Commonwealth of Nations in the interests of India. In 1956, when he was in London, Nehru took Freeman's oath "to be true to the Queen". [29]

If it matters at all, my own take is that, yes, forging close ties with Great Britain post-1947, remaining in the Commonwealth was, and is, in our national interest. The fact is that we have a great affinity with the British. Indeed, India would not have developed into a modern nation state if they had not replaced the native kings. We have immensely benefitted from their values, culture, language etc. I am actually much aggrieved by the history that is being taught at schools, or even depicted in movies and TV shows. It creates grossly wrong impressions about the British—who, on the whole, were nowhere as barbarous as the medieval royals of India were. As a result, many people think that "we drove them out" on 15 August 1947. The popular history continues to vilify the British down to their "last day" in India, shoving under the carpet the fact that, constitutionally, the British rule in India continued till 1950.

An average Indian's perception of the Independence Day—the Union Jack going down and the Tricolour coming up—is so remarkably different from the real event that it will sound fanciful to him if he was told that the Union Jack did not disappear that day. Mountbatten himself brought it on record that he disapproved of a ceremonial lowering of the British flag and Nehru agreed with him, not wanting to offend British susceptibilities. "It was still used, on holidays and great days and even now, they very often fly the Union Jack," [30] he told Collins and Lapierre. He also remembered Nehru's toast that night: It was for King George. They never told us this in schools.

As the head of the Indian state, George signed the letters of credence and appointment of Indian ambassadors and performed other stately functions. The "free" India government remained hostile to Subhas Bose. The chiefs of the Indian Air Force and the Navy were still British and their Indian juniors were more British than them. Indians did not lead the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy until 1949, 1955 and 1958. In 1948, Nehru told Parliament that the INA men would have no place in the Indian Army. "To reinstate them would lead to many complications, both practical and psychological, and the unity of the army might be affected." [31] In 1949, the Army Headquarters issued a circular against displaying the picture of Subhas Bose "at permanent places, in canteens, quarters etc." The same HQ continued to insist for decades that the history of INA should not be published lest it should affect the "moral of the soldiers". [32]

On the whole, it was for our good, but not to the liking of Dead Man. So, he did not return to India in 1949. Instead, he went—believe it or not—to China. His another incredible claim was that when the People's Republic of China was proclaimed on 1 October 1949, he was there witnessing the event as a guest of Mao Tse-tung. As per *Oi mahamanaba asey*, Dead Man visited Beijing's underground city—about which the outside world had no inkling until 1990. In a meeting, Mao told Dead Man, the book says, that the Aksai Chin region indeed belonged to India and mocked that "your leader" did not have a clue while a six-lane highway was being constructed there in the 1950s.

A journalist who believes that Bose died in Russia, and can not stand any talk of the Bhagwanji

angle, once shared with me what he had heard from an R&AW officer. Something about “Bose” being in China in 1949, doing some backchannel mediation between the Russians and the Chinese over some dispute. Several members of the Bose family are aware of “the Chinese angle to the Netaji mystery” but prefer not to talk about it.

There is definitely a Chinese angle to the Bose mystery. I don’t know how much truth it holds, but it is there. Those who believe that Bose died in Russia also know of it but refrain from alluding to it for an obvious reason. If Bose was in China in 1949, he was certainly out of the USSR—alive.

For a background, we must recall that our hostility for the Chinese communist leadership—not the Chinese people—started in late 1950s when the dragon devoured Tibet. Before that almost all of our top leaders had warm vibes for China. This is a simple fact of history. All it requires is a little polishing up.

We all know that an Indian medical mission was sent to China in 1938. But the Chinese historians have chosen to emphasize that it was sent by Jawaharlal Nehru. Whereas, the person solely responsible for sending the mission [was] Bose. ...In Modern Review he wrote an article on Japan’s role in the Far East and denounced her assault on China.... [33]

Records declassified in 1997 show that with the end of the war in his sight, Bose weighed his options. On 21 March 1946, INA’s JK Bhonsle was interrogated at Red Fort on the subject of “last plans of SC Bose”. He revealed that “Bose had also decided that in case the Japanese government did not agree to taking up his case with Russia, he himself would try to get to Shanghai and from there try to contact the Russians through the Chinese Communists.” [34] Azad Hind Government minister Debnath Das told the Khosla Commission that one of the escape plans for Bose was to go “to Yunan, the headquarters of Mao Tse-tung, who would help him carry on his campaign against the British”. [35]

“Was this Bhagwanji a communist?”

Absolutely not! He liked individuals for some of their traits, looked upon those who had helped him, praised people with great civilizations behind them—but vehemently disapproved of communism. He prophesied at the peak of the USSR’s power that “three quarters of the house of cards that Stalin had built has been destroyed, the rest will be destroyed in front of you” [Translated from Bangla]. Bhagwanji was clearly a Rightist who said over and over that the “Godless, greedy creed of Communism will die”.

*The race which cannot bind itself to its history and culture can never win. This is the **axiomatic truth**. This is the state of the communists. They are like a **flash in the pan**, glare for two days and will then evaporate. This creed is carrying its death in its own cell.* [Translated from Bangla, except the highlighted portions]

Historians won’t tell you this, but it is a truth that in 1949 rumours began doing rounds in India and elsewhere that Subhas Bose was in China. Forward Bloc general secretary RS Ruiker claimed in July 1949 that Bose “who is presumed to be in Red China, may come back to India provided the ban on his entry into the country is withdrawn”. [36] Then a bombshell was dropped by Sarat Chandra Bose. On 7 October 1949 his paper the *Nation* ran a full-page story. You’ve got to see it to believe it.

NETAJI IN RED CHINA



SARAT BOSE ASSERTS GOVT. POSSESS INFORMATION

Why Truman Invites Nehru
Greater Betrayal In Offing



(By The Nation's Staff Reporter)

Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose said yesterday (Thursday) that the Government of India were in possession of definite information that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was in the Red China of Mao Tse-tung.

The report was based on an interview Sarat had given to a *United Press of America* scribe a day earlier. He told the correspondent that "the Government of India were in possession of definite information that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was in Red China of Mao Tse-tung".

"If Bose was in China, why was he not coming to India?" Sarat Bose was asked. "I don't think the time is ripe for his coming back home," he replied.

A shocker of such magnitude couldn't have been ignored, but little is registered in the extant records. The Intelligence Bureau did destroy some records of 1949 vintage concerning Bose. One wonders what they were about. Back in 1949, the Ministry of External Affairs dismissed Sarat Bose's claim with a terse denial. But the news travelled to the West. On 28 November 1949 German news agency *Interpress* released a story titled "Babu Bose: Mann hinter den fronten" (Mr Bose: The man behind the front), which said Bose was in China.

Six years later came another shocker. Close Bose associate Muthuramalingam Thevar, whose statue now stands in the Parliament complex in New Delhi as a tribute to his eminence, publicly claimed that he had secretly visited China on Sarat Bose's instruction.

Wednesday, April 4, 1956

STORY OF MEETING NETAJI LAST FEBRUARY

REPORTED STAY NOW IN CHINA

From Our Delhi Office

APRIL 3.—Sri Muthuramalingam Thevar, member of the Madras Legislative Assembly and a Forward Bloc leader, told a Press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday that he would furnish conclusive proof that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was alive if the Inquiry Committee appointed by the Government of India to go into this question was reconstituted.

HE said that he was prepared to tell the Committee as much as it was possible in the circumstances, provided he was convinced that the Committee would be able to resist outside influence.

His suggestion was that Dr. Radhabanind Pal, the eminent Jurist, be appointed Chairman of the Committee.

Sri Thevar who claims to have been a member of the 3-man War Council formed by Netaji before his mysterious disappearance from India said that he might tell the Prime Minister also about Netaji if he was sympathetic.

War criminals in Tokyo should be invited to function as the Chairman. Apart from this, it is necessary on the part of the Govt. to make it known categorically to the public whether Netaji's name is still in the list of war criminals and if not, when it was removed, and how? Subhas Babu

20th March, 1945 said that Mr. Netaji was Engineering-in-Charge of Municipal Works of Nagapattinam at the time of its fall to Japan, and "I do not know the place in which he was travelling and which is alleged to have crashed" was seen to Hong Kong the next day without any damage or repair on March 22nd, 1945.

Gandhi while talking to Messrs. Shah Nawaz and Bhdgopal, the L.N.A. heroes, said "whatever you may tell me to the contrary, I still believe in my heart of hearts that Netaji Subhas Bose is alive."

Subhas Babu was taken to Manchuria by the Japanese because it is due to Subhas Babu that the neutrality pact between Russia and Japan was kept in tact in spite of Japan remaining in the Axis Block and Russia declaring war against Japan before one week of surrender. The surrender of Japan was an arranged affair to avoid Anglo-American entry into Manchuria. The military might of Japan land, navy and air to a very great extent had been transferred to Manchuria long before the surrender. War ended in September, 1945. An Asian Liberation Army was formed by Netaji and the Japanese Chinese under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, Burmese Indo-Chinese, Malays, Indonesians, Philippines, Sikhs had all joined this army with the assistance of the Russian Govt. The army started fighting in January, 1946, in China. This was reported as a Communist revolt. The so called revolt was able to drive Chiang-kai-Shek out of China because the Chinese military men had understood the co-operation of China, Japan, India and all the South-East Asian countries. Then the came to the conclusion that Chiang-kai-Shek was a showman of America. So the

Sri Thevar said that towards the end of 1949 when Sri Sarat Chandra Bose was ailing, he went down to Calcutta to meet

Sri Bose. He saw Sri Bose on December 7 and stayed with him for ten days. They had consultations on the matter as Sri Bose apprehended that he was going to die. After these talks, Sri Thevar said, he left India incognito on December 17. He crossed the Burma border and entered China where he stayed almost the whole of 1950. He met Netaji in January but where he would not divulge. He returned to India in October 1950. He said that the Government of India knew that he had visited China but if it doubted that, he could prove that he had been to China.

Thever made claims that are not supported by historical facts known today.

Subhas babu was taken to Manchuria by the Japanese because it is due to Subhas Babu that the neutrality pact between Russia and Japan was kept intact.... The surrender of Japan was an arranged affair, to avoid Anglo-American entry into Manchuria. The military might of Japan...to a very great extent had been transferred to Manchuria long before the surrender.... An Asiatic Liberation Army was formed by Netaji and the Japanese. Chinese (under the leadership of Mao Tsetung), Burmese, Indo-Chinese, Malays, Indonesians, Filipinos, Siamese had all joined this army with the assistance of the Russian government.

Two booklets—*Netaji mystery revealed* (1954) by SM Goswami and *Liu Po-Cheng or Netaji?* (1956) by Shiv Prasad Nag—supported Bose in China theory. Nag—who was later found to be in close contact with Bhagwanji—actually made a most farcical claim that Bose was actually in guise of Chinese general Cheng. I read both the booklets and, to be frank, found nothing credible in them.

Goswami was a completely unreliable character. He reproduced some poor quality pictures purporting to show “Bose” in China in early 1950s. I see no such thing, though many people who had met Bose thought that one picture showed a person with some resemblance to him. According to the Shah Nawaz Committee report, the foreign ministry of the People’s Republic of China identified the person in the next image as Lee Ke Hung, superintendent of the Peking University Medical College. So anyone wanting to prove the committee wrong will have to establish that the man in the picture, third from left, is not Lee Ke Hung.



Also, there is no reference to any Asiatic Liberation Army anywhere. A follower clarified that it was another name for the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army which fought against the General MacArthur-led international forces in Korea from 1950 to 1953. But then quite a few formerly secret CIA records on the Korean war are now available. A cursory look by me obviously showed no such thing which might fit with the theory that “Bose” was active in Korea along with the Chinese.

Liu Po-Cheng, rather Liu Bocheng, was a very well-known Chinese marshal whose many pictures are there on the internet. So, I am unable to deduce much out of the claims made by Thevar and others, and supported in part by Bhagwanji, regarding the activities of “Bose” in China. I won’t be surprised if some of it turns out to be deliberate myth and misinformation.

The only researcher who I know has made a proper search for information relating to Subhas Bose in China is Priyadarshi Mukherjee, a professor in Chinese & Sinological Studies Centre for Chinese & South-East Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. In his affidavit to the Mukherjee Commission, Prof Mukherjee suggested a search in Historical Archives in Nanjing. The commission took it up with the MEA and was conveyed on 17 September 2004 that “both Chinese Historical Archives in Nanjing as well as Nanjing Library have conveyed to the Indian Consulate in Shanghai that they do not have any such book containing historical references to Netaji”. [37] You can see that the answer was somewhat vague.

I am not prepared to believe that the Chinese attention was never drawn to numerous claims about Subhas's presence in their country. Even the Americans, who had nothing to do with Bose in the Cold War years, couldn't skip mentioning it. For example, the February 1954 issue of *National Republic* carried an article "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Red threat to India". Its author, Elliot Erikson, wrote:

There is a strong possibility that Bose is alive. At the end of the war, when the Japanese front collapsed in Burma, Bose, if he showed himself, ran great risk of being prosecuted as an international war criminal. If Bose is still held prisoner in Communist China, he could be sprung as the leader of a Red "liberation" of India from capitalism. The most strongly anti-Communist Congress leaders admit that if such an event happened, Indian resistance to China would collapse immediately. [38]

I don't know anything about China except what I read in newspapers occasionally. Prof Mukherji is an expert who speaks Chinese like the Chinese. He doesn't know what to make of the Faizabad angle but believes that the Chinese are holding some records about Bose. In January 2011 he met Prof Wang Bangwei, director of Indian Studies Centre at the Peking University and asked him about the possibility of Bose's contact with Mao after 1949.

Professor Wang did not directly answer my query but said that both Bose and Mao had the same objective of achieving liberation of their countries by armed struggle, so it was natural for them to be close. On being asked about documents on Netaji in the Research Cell of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), Wang categorically said that it is impossible for a foreigner like me to get access to it. Even many Chinese can't get access either.

The rumours about Bose and China peaked during the 1962 war and were noted by IB chief BN Mullik. A former Delhi Congress chief told the Khosla Commission that Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri too was aware of the claims made at the time of the Chinese aggression.

In 1962 Bhagwanji was in Naimisharanya. If we believe the followers, he spent quite some time in both Russia and then in China. The diary of a follower has this hasty, free-flowing note of Bhagwanji's recollection:

There are many political offenders in Siberia and many great scientists. Suppose you have gone to Moscow, you wouldn't know that all the nice electronic goods have been manufactured by scientists in Siberia. There are many generals too. This somehow reached the ears of the ambassador. Then he came to the outside world and said "so and so" is imprisoned in Siberia. Then, Ambassador Mr Menon asked permission from the foreign office to visit that place. They said what would you do there? [Translated from Bangla]

Bhagwanji cryptically added: "I did one favour to Menon. He had done a favour to me—during my student days." He did not specify which year "Mr Menon" had sought the permission.

When Subhas Chandra Bose attained fourth position in the ICS examination, the topper was KPS Menon. He was India's Ambassador in China in 1946 and then the first Foreign Secretary of free India. From 1952 to 1961 he was our Ambassador in Moscow. His son too became India's Ambassador to China, and his maternal grandson, the suave Shivshankar Menon, is India's National Security Adviser.

Some deponents before the Mukherjee Commission insisted that a record of KPS Menon's meeting with Stalin should be summoned. The MEA said it had one record and it was shown to Justice Mukherjee in a sealed cover. The judge found nothing in the Top Secret record relating to Bose. But then, the government records can be less than honest.

I have a copy of a declassified October 1972 US State Department record quoting then External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh trumpeting before his American counterpart William Rogers that India knew who were the CIA spies in India and who were leaking the proceedings of the Congress Working Committee. On the other side, the still secret Indian record of the same meeting is devoid of any such mention. Whose version will you put your money on? Our own is unlikely because in those days every Congress leader publicly accused the CIA of engineering problems in India.

Around 1955 Bhagwanji left China and headed towards India. He spent some time in some Himalayan caves and crossing the Mansarovar region on foot, he reached Nepalgaunge area of Nepal. He then crossed over to the Indian territory, overcome with emotion, having "returned to the motherland" after so many years. Travelling at night with his face covered, he came to Lucknow with

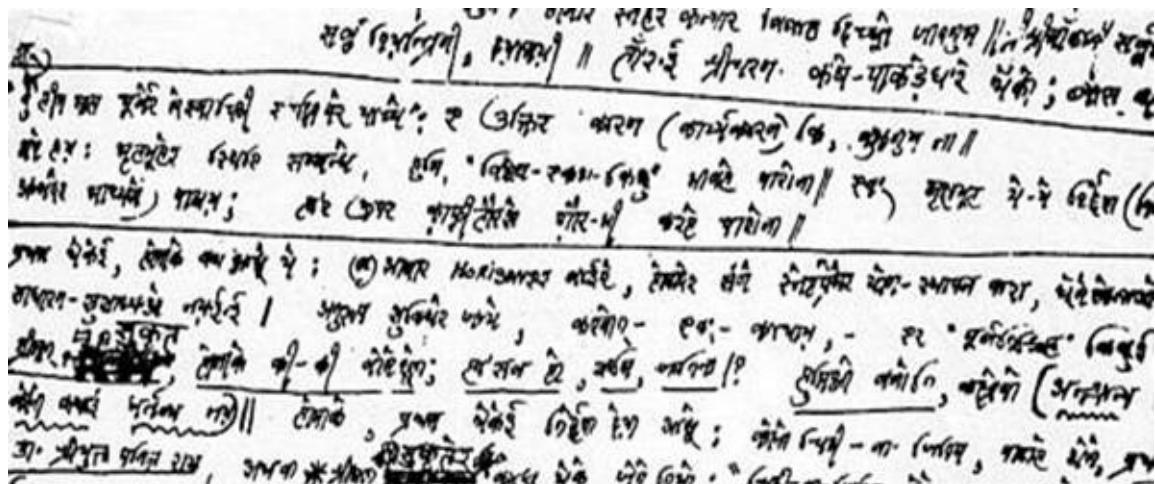
Mahadeo Prasad Mishra, the Sanskrit teacher he had met in Nepal. Mahadeo died without ever seeing his face. In the UP capital, Bhagwanji found a supporter in Chief Minister Dr Sampurnanand. My quick survey of the Sampurnanand papers kept at the National Archives did not yield any clue, though.

Another secret follower of Bhagwanji was renowned Sanskrit scholar, philosopher and *tantra* expert Gopinath Kaviraj. One day, so reads the diary of a follower, Sampurnanand asked Bhagwanji: "Do you know Tripathi?" Bhagwanji replied that he had heard his name. Sampurnanand then said: "Tripathi's guru Gopinath Kaviraj has told him about you."

"Tripathi" was then a state minister and would-be central minister Kamalapati Tripathi, a believer in *tantric* rituals. One can only conjuncture what had actually made Dr Sampurnanand broach the question of Subhas Bose's fate—as was claimed by a former IB man—with Clement Attlee when the former British Prime Minister visited Lucknow in October 1956. [See Appendix V. The land of conspiracy theories]

In a Bangla letter to Leela Roy in 1964 Bhagwanji wrote that according to the Indian government estimate "someone dead is not in south of the Himalayas". "Do you understand? That is, to say that officially Mritabhoot is not on this side...on the other side; somewhere else".

Bhagwanji's strange syntax had to do with caution, sounded to him by Leela Roy. "The vocabulary you use, you cannot change and the vocabulary would lead to your identification. No Bengali uses the words, idioms etc. that you do," she wrote. He replied: "Can you write 20/25 pages in diametrically opposite composition and send to me? I will see if I can change." [39] So he took great care in anything that he wrote. He used capital letters while writing in English and Devnagari script for Bangla.



Bhagwanji is believed to have reckoned that it was around 1959 that the Government came to know of "his" being in the vicinity of India. The year was significant because this was the time when the Shaulmari sadhu emerged from nowhere. Since it has been alleged that he was propped up by the Intelligence Bureau, it must be asked what prompted that sort of measure at a time when the Bose mystery had ceased to be a burning issue.

Bhagwanji offered an alternate abstruse explanation: He himself came up with the Shaulmari stratagem so as to mislead "combine". The believers rebuff the suggestion that "combine" was an imaginary opponent. Bhagwanji counted the then Indian leadership as part of "combine".

Your Dead Man not only believes, but he knows directly that Sri Sri Ma Jagadamba Durga Kali herself is sitting inside him and driving him. There are hundreds of proofs. The biggest proof is MacArthur's final report. Staying like this till now even after that report and its resultant efforts! That is why the arrangements had to be made for the game of Shaulmari. When we used to discuss each move of the JN combine amongst ourselves, I used to choke with laughter. [Translated from Bangla, except the highlighted words]

"You had mentioned about going to Shaulmari," he wrote to Sunil Das once, adding, "go there and you will see the mystery...he [Saradanand] has written this time that he liked Pabitra [Mohan Roy]

very much....” On another occasion he spoke, “If you go to Shaulmari, you will find 200-300 letters in this faqir’s handwriting”.

But what for?

Written in lighter vein was his this comment in Bangla: “Darned stubborn man, like Prahlad [a mythological figure who survived several attempts to kill him], he is alive—this is known to all three parties; they have put the bait on the hook but are not able to pull the fish out on the land.”

Bhagwanji claimed he created the “parallel bluff” of Shaulmari to keep “combine” occupied. That is why Saradanand himself did not emerge to proclaim in front of a big crowd who he really was and end the controversy. If he had, “combine” would have been “free to concentrate” in one direction, in search of the “real” person. Bhagwanji further claimed he couldn’t lower his guards because any “carelessness” on his part would “give the key of the puzzle” to combine. “Then this ghost that is sitting on their shoulders would be removed by the ghostbusters.” [Translated from Bangla]

Stranger still was Bhagwanji’s assumption that the Americans were part of “combine”. This was for the “damage” he had caused them in post-1945 period as his big gameplan for a new order in Asia and also a payback for their contribution to the INA’s defeat. Bhagwanji was determined not to be taken alive and hinted that he carried a cyanide capsule:

Your Dead Man carries something within him, is fully sufficient to bring eternal sleep within 6 seconds...that something cannot be activated accidentally...no one of the combine can ever expect to get him alive.

All this sounds crazy, but it has been reported that in the sixties the CIA had actually “trained senior Indian intelligence officers and helped build the nucleus of India’s counter-intelligence network”. [40] Quite interesting was journalist Barun Sengupta’s evidence before the Khosla Commission that intelligence sleuths of various hues were looking for Subhas Bose in India in the 1960s.

Whenever there is a rumour or a story, the central intelligence people and the state intelligence people go and investigate into it. They also come to us [journalists] for further enlightenment and to know whether we have any information. Not only they but even foreigners like Americans, Britishers and Russians go there and investigate into these things. ...If they are sure that Netaji had died in the plane crash, why...go there to chase this wild story? [41]

And rather perplexing was Gobinda Mukhoty’s point during the argument session before the same commission on 21 January 1974 that the Intelligence Bureau had sought to know from him [Barun] on November 6, 1970 on Netaji’s disappearance”. Mukhoty “asked if the Government was certain about Netaji’s death, what was the purpose of the IB asking the correspondent about Netaji?” [42]

My own guess is that Bhagwanji’s identity and whereabouts were known to some higher-ups in India from the late 1960s onwards. He himself alluded to this in *Oi mahamanaba asey*: “My real identity is that I am a dust particle of Bengal. My false identity is Frankenstein, **which I neither did want nor deserved. You have raised this Frankenstein** and now **feelers** are being sent to him. **It is too late.**” [Translated from Bangla, except the highlighted words]

From 1967 or so Bhagwanji was frequently visited by then UP Home Minister Chaudhury Charan Singh. The would-be Chief Minister, Union Home Minister and Prime Minister remained in the good books of Bhagwanji until the mid or late 1970s. He praised Singh’s ideas and efforts about improving India’s agrarian output.

Perhaps Ajit Singh would be able to throw some light about his father’s reported acquaintance with Bhagwanji. Should the Lok Dal chief—currently a minister in the Congress-led government—speak out by any chance, there is a most revered guest in our midst who might be implored with folded hands to help in clarifying if there was anything more to his arrival in India than we have been told.

Check out another insupposable from Charanik:

The baby ran to the mother without fear and trusting her, but instead of giving shelter to him he was handed over to the dragon. Can there be a worse act of betrayal? When he was helpless and was not able to find a way to protect himself, General Death told him, “I am showing you the way to India as a representative of India. You go to India—the people will

accept you and give you shelter.” The leader of the Indian government gave him shelter because of the pressure of public opinion. [Translated from Bangla]

Bhagwanji claimed that he under the *nom de guerre* of General Death or General Shiva had played a part in the Dalai Lama’s historic escape to India. But how do we reconcile it with the official version that the only outside helping hand to the Lama was of the CIA?

Lowell Thomas, Jr is a man who has been a part of history. Along with his father Lowell Thomas, he was the last Westerner to reach Lhasa before the 1949 Chinese invasion. In 2005, the Dalai Lama bestowed on him the International Campaign for Tibet’s Light of Truth Award. Thomas’s 1961 book *The Dalai Lama* throws some light on an event which probably occurred around 1955 and involved “a spokesman for the Khamba tribesmen”.

He called himself General Siva, a threatening title, for Siva is the god of destruction in the Hindu religion. We may call him General Death as the nearest English equivalent. [43]

According to the book, General Siva was of some help to the living Buddha. But who was this General Death?

“A total mystery to me,” Thomas, a former Lt Governor of Alaska, wrote to me when I emailed him a few years ago.

Bhagwanji made many such imagination defying claims and statements to his followers. One of his two most staggeringly inconceivable claims had it that he from behind the scenes played a pivotal part in the Bangladesh liberation war.

You are free to scoff at it, but the believers take it as the truth. Sunil Das, the publisher of *Oi mahamanaba asey*, recalled before the Khosla Commission on 6 September 1972 that in 1965 Leela Roy had forewarned her close associates about the influx of a large number of refugees from east Pakistan. “In March 1971 Indo-Pak conflict came about... Whether this was a hint sent to her or whether it was a divine disclosure I do not know.”

Das did not tell the commission that months before the 1971 war started, Bhagwanji had asserted that “free Bangladesh will be established due to the secret moves of a particular great chess player” and that “after some time history will record that this area was known for a short time as east Pakistan”. He even said that after freedom in the east, “the other side—Pakistan, Balochistan—will turn volatile”. *Oi mahamanaba asey* has many astounding passages relating to Bangladesh:

One voice, very well known, was heard from the free autonomous radio station. The announcer said, “You will now hear a voice which you have always known.” That voice was heavy and heart-touching. It said: “I have gone around many countries in the world with a rifle on my shoulders. I was in Germany and Japan and have roamed around in many places in Southeast Asia. For the last nine months I was with you and even now I am with you.” ...

Why do we hear in the southern, eastern, western and northern areas of Bangladesh the same story that there is someone, some secret power! He is behind everything, even the inspirer of our imprisoned leader! [Translated from Bangla]

Hidden truth or hallucinatory patchwork, I really don’t know what to make of all this. Bhagwanji’s two closest followers in Naimisharanya and Basti, Srikant Sharma and Durga Prasad Pandey said that during that period former revolutionary Amal Roy involved himself in running of a clandestine radio on India-east Pakistan border at the instruction of Bhagwanji, who knew of the developments “before they were reported on the All India Radio”.

I also heard claims that certain Bangladeshi fighters of those times alluded to the guiding hand of a great figure during the war, but I never saw any of the contemporary press reports people said they had seen. What I find quite interesting is that Sitaram Omkarnath is said to have played some role in the war. The holy man, who had some sort of a connection with Bhagwanji, “directly imparted his spiritual power to the freedom struggle” states a website dedicated to him. It further claims that a general had made a statement that “the commander-in-chief of this war was indeed Thakur!” [44] This general, I learnt from an article by senior journalist Praveen Swami, an authority on Indian intelligence and national security matters, was Omkarnath’s follower Sujan Singh Uban. In 1971 the Uban headed and R&AW-controlled Special Frontier Force had carried out military offensives in the

Chittagong Hill Tracts. According to Swami, who is too sophisticated a person to take any interest in the holy man angle to the Bose mystery, Uban “later said he had received a year’s advance warning of the task that lay ahead from the Bengali mystic, Baba Omkarnath”. [45]

In a letter to a follower, Bhagwanji dissected the semantics of names used in the *Ramayan* and disapproved of Omkarnath’s approach in his translation of the epic. Also located in Rambhawan was a newspaper story about secret visits of some special person, not Omkarnath, to then east Pakistan. I don’t have the details of this newsitem, but I do have a clipping from *Anandabazar Patirka* where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself is quoted as saying on 17 January 1972 that “the fact that Bangladesh has become a reality proves that Netaji is alive”.

“It’s just a general statement. Only someone with a fragile grip on reality can think along the lines the Bhagwanji’s followers do.”

I actually browsed through declassified US records of the 1970s—as far as it was possible for me to—and found only one reference to Subhas Bose. A derisive, stray comment made in a State Department telegram originating from the US embassy in Dacca on 3 January 1975. Referring to the reported shooting of one political leader, the embassy telegram said that unless his body was displayed, “there will soon grow up stories that he still lives, *a la* Subhas Chandra Bose”. The Indian records were destroyed long ago and the surviving ones are classified.

Yes, it is matter of common knowledge that Subhas’s memories were summoned as a psychological boost during the Bangladesh liberation war. Bose’s classmate at Cambridge and later ICS officer CC Desai, who used to be India’s envoy to different countries including Pakistan before becoming an MP, saw shades of his friend in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s tactics. Mujib’s “directives immediately before Yahya troops struck, may be well compared with Netaji’s thesis of anti-imperialist struggle and *Samveda* propounded by him in 1933”. [46]

It is well known that Mukti Vahini’s war cry “Joi Bangla” was inspired by “Jai Hind”. So, Mujib’s statement had to be a metaphoric expression, or he was misquoted. Certainly nothing more than that!

But if you flipped through *Oi mahamanaba asey* and, for a moment, believed in the contents as Bhagwanji’s followers did, you would be tempted to think of Mujib’s statement as a Freudian slip. Because Charanik claimed that “in the three decades between 1945 and 1975 one man has attained a divine power, much above all physical powers, which is beyond comprehension of mind and senses”. [Translated from Bangla]

If it is of any help, here’s how Bhagwanji put it in English: “You cannot comprehend to what end your Mahakaal is working and with what powers. Your imagination will be awed, your brain will reel if even by chance you could come to know even a fractional part of his present activities.”

But why despite such “powers” did he remain in hiding? What was he afraid of? Is it not cowardly for someone who talks so big not to have the courage to come out?

Cowardice is not the right word. Whatever it is, it is an entangled issue involving interrelated conundrums for which there are no quick and simple answers. Bhagwanji was asked several times why he was not going public. His standard answer would be: “It won’t be in India’s interests.” It would seem that circumstances and his “post-death” activities had put him into some sort of spot. He talked about his having been branded an “international war criminal” and his playing some unpublicised role in world politics, all of which put together made him spend years within the confines of four walls—from where he would regularly escape to do things he said people could not imagine.

For the last example I have saved the most staggering of them all. If this Bhagwanji really thought he did what he claimed, then, you would have to agree with me, he was entitled to feel that his emergence would have landed India into serious trouble.

Bhagwanji would claim that he had been involved in the efforts to drive the American forces away from Vietnam. For argument’s sake, if there’s any truth in this fantastic claim, and if this man was

indeed Bose, then this would have been reason enough to make his reappearance rather risky in those days of intense Cold War rivalries. Viewed in this assumed context, Bhagwanji's claim that India would face international wrath by way of economic sanctions and even armed intervention if his location was disclosed rings somewhat credible.

Once in the early 1970s, Bhagwanji claimed that "about 50-60 wars have been fought in the world since WWII, but America has not been able to win even a single one of them". The cigar-chomping holy man pronounced "single" as "thingle"—mocking someone he did not like. "Churchill could not pronounce 'S'; I am alive to tell you this." In a similar tone, he claimed that on his advice Ho Chi Minh dumped free cocaine and opium in south Vietnam. "The Americans have consumed at least a thousand tons till now—avidly," he chuckled, adding derisively, "Keep a pet dog in my name if America, the greatest might of the present world, can win north Vietnam even in thousand years." [Translated from Bangla]

Muddying the water further was this claim in *Oi mahamanaba asey* that

*whenever the country at war had meetings with foreigners, on one side of the meeting used to be, in Mahakaal's words, "**A pride of nine generals and a shadow behind them.**" Charan does not want to say whose shadow it was because that shadow has caused many upheavals in the world in the last few decades.* [Translated from Bangla, except the quote in bold.]

That's kind of interesting because I saw a grainy picture, evidently lifted from an old newspaper, in some conspiracy theory booklets with the claim that it showed Bose at the conclusion of the Paris peace talks between Vietnam and the US on 23 January 1973. But Bhagwanji was in Basti on this day, celebrating his birthday and telling his followers about his secret activities in Vietnam. For instance, he said he was lodged at a "fort" by his gracious host Minh. He wouldn't specify its location and would only say that it faced a bay and mountains in the distance. The first thing he did after checking into his room was to see if it had been bugged—it wasn't. Then he went out on the balcony and saw bombers carrying out strikes far away. Any logical deductions are obviously not possible with such sketchy details.

Bose admirer Siddhartha Satbhai, a Dutch national, and I traced the original of the purported January 1973 picture to an Associated Press wire photo. The picture turns out to have been taken on 25 January 1969 in Paris. It unmistakably shows the Vietnamese delegation at the first open session of the truce negotiations. The eight officials at the table include Le Duc Tho, the former revolutionary and general who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973. Chief negotiator and former foreign minister Xuan Thuy is sitting on left in the cropped picture used in this Kindle edition. He's facing the American delegation led by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge on other side of the big round table. Seen in the picture is a bearded man with an intense look on his face, standing alongside expressionless journalists and other officials behind the Vietnamese.



My efforts to ascertain the identity of the bearded man with a passing resemblance to Bose from Vietnam history experts in America and Vietnam did not yield any results. None could identify him. The Vietnamese foreign ministry did not respond to my email. The Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam directed me to Historical Research Department in the ministry. As of this writing, there was no response from the department.

Anyway, I circulated the picture among a few of my friends. We studied the picture carefully but were unable to form any opinion—either way. But even if we had, it would not have mattered, for this is a job for forensic experts. We observed that the overall contours of the bearded man's visage remind one of Bose. Given the quality of the image, one can't say if he is 72—which Bose would have been in 1969—but he is definitely old as he has bags under his eyes. Much of his face is covered with moustache, beard and big framed glasses, one friend pointed out. It is unusual for diplomats and Southeast Asians to sport beards like this. Another friend thought aloud that the hair and beard of this man looked fake to him.

Bhagwanji not only took interest in makeup tools and accessories, on occasions he altered his facial features to avoid attention as he ventured out, his followers told me. They also said that by the mid-1960s there was considerable loss of hair on his head compared to when they last saw "him" in 1939-1940. He had grayed, put on more weight around waist but his face was not wrinkled. One follower who had seen Bose several times before 1940 caught a glimpse of Bhagwanji and found him to be "more radiant than before".

For argument's sake, if Bose was present in Paris in 1969, wouldn't the Americans spot him? The declassified US records concerning the Vietnam War that I rummaged through show nothing to support the claims made in *Oi mahamanaba asey*. As a matter of fact, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the top US military spy agency, has informed me under the FOIA that it does not have any intelligence information reports pertaining to Bose's claimed involvement in the Vietnam war.



DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20340-5100



U-12-3,827/DAN-1A (FOIA)

JAN 10 2012

Mr. Anuj Dhar

India

Dear Mr. Dhar:

This responds to your request under the Freedom of Information Act, dated September 24, 2007. Therein you requested information concerning copies of Intelligence Information Reports created in between 1962 and 1972 pertaining to Subhas Chandra Bose, specifically in the context of the war in Vietnam. I apologize for the delay in processing your request. DIA continues its efforts to eliminate the large backlog of pending FOIA requests.

Based on the information contained in your request, the Defense Intelligence Agency searched its systems of records for responsive documents. Despite a thorough search, no documents responsive to your request were found.

However, I am intrigued by the fact that when Bhagwanji talked of dumping drugs in south Vietnam, it was not probably fully appreciated that one of the reasons for US defeat would be the use of narcotic drugs as weapons by the Vietnamese. The first hint to this effect came when in 1971 Nixon's deputy assistant for domestic affairs informed him that up to 20 per cent of US soldiers were heroin addicts. Other high-ranking generals and top officials "believed that Chinese Communist and Soviet-north Vietnamese operators had flooded south Vietnam with heroin, facilitating the escalation of use by US soldiers". [47]

I am not aware as to when this became public knowledge. I am also not aware if the typed copy of a newsitem recovered in Rambhawan was actually copied from a published report. If it was, then we are in for bafflement. According to the inventory prepared at the High Court's order, the item No 1767 recovered from Bhagwanji's room was a typed copy of a 15 May 1970 newsitem published in certain "Evening Post", possibly published from Karachi, Pakistan.

The purported newsitem is about the "Asian and Pacific Conference on Cambodia" being held in Jakarta and former US Defence Secretary Clark M Clifford. That Clifford was successor to McNamara and he attended this conference are recorded facts. What are not recorded is what Clifford is seen telling journalist Michael Joseph in the typed copy. He refers to the existence of a "missing WWII general" in the Viet Cong army. According to the typed copy, Clifford refused to disclose the identity of the general.

And I can relate two incidents. I don't know how to characterize the first, but the second is a slim lead—a lead nevertheless.

Late Balraj Trikha, a leading Supreme Court advocate and former Advocate General of Manipur, excelled himself before the Khosla Commission by his incisive cross-examinations of the Japanese witnesses. He first appeared as junior counsel to Amiya Nath Bose and later represented pro-Shaulmari sadhu All-India Netaji Swagat Samiti. Saradanand was at that time in Dehradun, and it was well known to his followers.

In November 1971, Trikha followed the commission to Vietnam. A few days later, Trikha claimed that he had seen Bose at a south Vietnamese airport. Justice Khosla noted in his report that

he spoke of this to Shri Prem Bhatia, High Commissioner for India in Singapore, a few days later, and briefed newspaper correspondents to publish his claim of having met Bose. ... In view of the publicity given to this strange encounter at Saigon, I considered it necessary to call Shri Trikha as a witness, but as soon as summons, for his appearance, were issued, Shri Trikha

completely disappeared, abandoning his brief on behalf of Netaji Swagat Samiti and remained absent until the conclusion of the proceedings. [48]

Thereafter, Khosla summoned the high commissioner. A word about the legendary Prem Bhatia: A British Indian army veteran, Anglophile Bhatia became one of the top most journalists of his times. At present, the trust being run in his name awards India's equivalent of Pulitzer Prize for journalism. The trust has had for trustees luminaries, such as Dr Manmohan Singh, MK Rasgotra, Soli Sorabji, Inder Malhotra, Prof Mushirul Hasan, Shekhar Gupta, Alok Mehta and HK Dua.

Bhatia was too wise a man to have lent ears to a claim that even conspiracy theorists find hard to digest. That being the factual context, just see what Bhatia told Khosla about Trikha's statement:

He called on me at the Chancery, which means the office, and I had not met him before but I recalled his name. He said he had come to pay a courtesy call. We started talking and then I asked him over to a meal at my house and he was good enough to accept my invitation. [49]

Now let me put this to you. How would you react if you were the high commissioner and told by someone that he had seen a man believed to have been dead for 25 years? Would you invite that man to an official dinner after hearing him out?

I tell you what I would do if I were in that position. I would tell that man to get lost and consult a shrink immediately.

But Bhatia—a man of outstanding intelligence, experience and eminence—said he was "taken aback" by Trikha's statement, which he "mentioned to more than one person" [50] and also brought it to the commission's notice through a confidential letter.

of Enquiry. He told me and some press people here that on the conclusion of your enquiry he met, face to face, a person whom he recognised as Netaji. This was at the Saigon airport. I do not know whether you have heard of this fantastic confrontation.
However, can you do me the favour of sending me, in complete confidence, an assessment of Balraj Trikha? The information which you may send me will be entirely personal to me.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,
Prem Bhatia

13
Justice G. D. Khosla,
Chairman,
Netaji Enquiry Commission (1970),

NMML

Therefore, please go easy with all that I have written in this chapter. Like Prem Bhatia I too have been taken aback and am just sharing everything with you.

The second incident is also based on a journalist's experience. It happened in 1994 when she was in Vietnam to cover the state visit of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. The journalist had no interest in Bose and it was just by chance that one official from the Vietnamese foreign ministry passed on a lead to her on condition of anonymity. He said that Vietnam was holding some material which could shed some light on the disappearance of Bose. What made the officer pass this information to the scribe was that the Indian embassy had shown no interest in their documentation.

The journalist filed her story, and it was carried by her paper. Now this makes her story all the more credible. That paper is the *Telegraph*, till recently the no 1 English daily in Bengal. The paper and its sister publication *Anandabazar Patrika* are, for the last few years, scarcely interested in covering the Bose mystery from the perspective of those who seek to resolve it. Many of the stories carried by them are dismissive in tenor and want to establish that Bose died in Taiwan. At a time when

the rejection of the Mukherjee Commission report was getting first page coverage in newspapers in Hindi heartland, the *Telegraph* assigned the news a single column space in one of the inside pages, indicating the importance they attached to this momentous event.

Hence, there is no way the paper would peddle any story which might go so far as to support the Bhagwanji angle. But here is how the relevant portion of the published story read:

"There is accessible material here on Netaji's stay in Saigon in 1945.... However, the Indian government is reluctant to pursue this lead, which is likely to help us unearth some exceedingly interesting material on Netaji's disappearance since it will re-open the entire issue," said a highly-placed source. ...Material on Netaji is also believed to have been accessed by the government here while collecting archival material on both the World War II and the Vietnam war period. [51]

The only historically known contact Bose had with the Vietnamese was when his representative Anand Mohan Sahay met Ho Chi Minh in 1945. It is a matter of common knowledge that the Vietnam war began years after that, so the very existence of some archival material on Bose from that period would be quite intriguing on the face of it.

Okay, okay you are right in concluding that I have raised more questions than answers. Yes, I too am dissatisfied with the things as they are now.

There are several limitations in carrying out a self-funded research on a topic your favourite historian or journalist will never be interested in. We must get at the truth about Bhagwanji—whatever it is. The issue must be inquired into further. There are people saying that he was an impostor, set up by some government agency to throw the public off the scent of Russian angle. Let us factor in every possibility. If Bhagwanji was one, let it be exposed so that those behind him can be unmasked.

We cannot arrive at a conclusion by endlessly arguing what we believe and what we do not. We have to get in proactive mode before it is too late. As I see it there is no sensitivity left in this case on the external front. Even if Bhagwanji was Bose and he really did all that he claimed, still the friendly foreign nations would not let those blasts from the past spoil present-day robust ties with India, and *vice versa*.

It is clear to me that there must be some official record about Bhagwanji in India somewhere. There are good enough reasons to believe that our intelligence agencies must have something on the holy man of Faizabad. Sayed Kauser Hussain, the former *Northern India Patrika* newseditor, told the Mukherjee Commission that "there were four investigations at the instance of central government".

The police inquiry report of 1985 itself stated that when Bhagwanji "was in Basti he had become a matter of inquiry and it is reported that some central intelligence agency had conducted a thorough inquiry about him". So where are the reports of the inquiry by this central intelligence agency (IB)? No such report was made available to the Mukherjee Commission.

The IB's list of records on or about Bose do not show anything about Faizabad. It also doesn't show those reports about Shaulmari and two others who were taken as Bose which were once available with the organisation, as per a document available in the National Archives.

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| 9. | Interrogation report CSDIC (India) No.D 12 dated 2.11.19
respect of N.G.Swamy (Civilian). |
| 10. | Reports regarding the Sadhu of Shoulmari Ashram. |
| 11. | Two reports regarding persons who were taken as Netaji. |
- NAI

It is utterly unlikely that the IB and other intelligence agencies were not drawn to Bhagwanji episode when even the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)—an open source intelligence gathering component of the CIA which is now called Open Source Center—had not failed to take a small note of it. The Near East South Asia report No JPRS-NEA-86-040 of FBIS noted a February 1986 story appearing in a New Delhi newspaper that mercurial politician Raj Narain "firmly believes that one Gumnami Baba who died at Faizabad was none other than Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose" and that he had "sufficient proof of this fact". "The sad demise of the Baba" shocked Narain "to the extent that he had to be hospitalised".

I am not concerned with Raj Narian's standing or credibility here. You are mistaken if you think that when even the Central Intelligence Agency was made aware of an "irrelevant" happening in a remote corner of India, our intelligence officers in Faizabad, Lucknow and Delhi were glued to their radio sets for the latest cricket score. When I visited that area, more than one journalist told me that the spooks snooped around in the area after September 1985. One said that he was sought to be dissuaded by an IB man from dwelling deep into the case. I am not surprised, and nor should you be. Is it a secret that in India until the recent past the focus of the intelligence agencies was on the developments of political importance?

Don't believe me? Then check out the responses of former IB officer SR Mirchandani during his examination before the Khosla Commission on 24 July 1972.

Q: Mr. Mirchandani, I want to understand a little about this Intelligence Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs as you have said. What is the main job of this department which is called Intelligence Bureau?

A: About political activities of various parties.

Q: And about the individuals of political importance also?

A: They would also come. They have been included in the political parties.



Q: Does this department collect this intelligence of its own accord or when it is directed to do so by the ministry?

A: It is a regular function. There is no day-to-day direction; it is a regular function of the Intelligence Bureau to collect about what is happening in the country.

Q: May I take it that supposing something is reported in the newspapers—some story—which has a political bearing, it would be the function of your department to investigate about that?

A: If the Government asks for it.

Q: Otherwise not?

A: Otherwise not.

Q: That is why I asked you in the beginning that is it the function of this department to collect intelligence of its own accord, or as and when directed by the Home Ministry.

A: It is the routine function of the department to collect intelligence and the directions are given by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Q: It is not clear to me. Supposing if a political news or something appears in the Press which has political importance and which can excite the public mind, will you wait for the directions of the Home Ministry or is it your function to collect on your own?

A: That depends upon the importance of the news item.

Q: I say, news about any political leader of consequence. Of course, no one is going to expect you to collect intelligence about the PM.

A: It would depend upon what the contents of the news items are. May be that the news items would be a cock and bull story.

Q: But how can you say it is cock and bull story unless you investigate it? If a cock and bull story appears in the Press, would you or would you not investigate?

A: Yes, I would. [52]

Mirchandani was an R&AW deputy director when he was compelled to admit this before the commission. What more can I say? There is no way the IB had no inkling about who this Bhagwanji really was or what he was up to.

11. Subhas Bose alive at 115?

The belief that Subhas Bose is alive and that one day he would appear before his people is still held by some of his staunch followers. What would you say to that? To the “right thinking” people, it is the most ridiculous thing to say about the Netaji mystery. The most used word to describe people besotted with this fantasy is “lunatics”. [1]

The believers’ core argument that since Bose’s death has not been proven; and given that it is possible for humans to live up to 115 years or more, he could well be alive till today was taken care of by Justice MK Mukherjee. He adjudged in his report that “any person or authority entrusted with the duty of investigating into a question of fact has to find an answer thereto depending on whether it is ‘probable’—and not ‘possible’.” So he concluded, and rightly so, that the “only legitimate inference that can be drawn at this distant point of time is that Netaji is no more”. [2]

The believers lay low for four years after the release of the commission report, until 2010 when Justice Mukherjee’s personal view about Bhagwanji became known. This new dimension revived another theory: That Bhagwanji did not die in September 1985.

But how could that be when his body was cremated at Guptar Ghat?

Hmm, as per the long standing local belief, there is something interesting about “Guptar Ghat”. It means “the river bank of disappearance” and that’s because it was here that Lord Ram entered a temple in *Treta Yug* and then disappeared into the river, now called Gaghar. The urban legend is that this spot was chosen because Bhagwanji had to “disappear yet again”.

The belief in Bhagwanji’s “disappearance” predates September 1985. The holy man told his close followers that he “would go away yet again”, remain “out of touch” for some time and “will come back” at a time when India is facing a war-like situation both internally and externally. “Wait for the appearance and have faith that I am always with you,” he would say. Most died waiting and those living are waiting still. But why now? In 1972 Bhagwanji asked a follower how old he was. The follower said 75. “What? I have to be here for another 46 years?” was his reaction. So, if you believe the believers, the “reappearance” must happen in this decade.

And what is their explanation for September 1985? Some of them I met in Kolkata told me that when they visited him during that period, he asked them not to come again. The local followers who witnessed the death and then cremated the body offer conflicting views. Bhagwanji felt unwell on the evening of September 16 and his attendant Saraswati Devi called Dr RP Mishra and Dr Priyabrat Banerjee. The younger doctor told me that Bhagwanji had died of cardiovascular failure before he arrived. He and Rajkumar, son of Saraswati Devi, said they saw his body.

Dr Mishra, Bhagwanji’s principal follower at that time, has been acting oddly since that time. Now in his late 80s, he is said to have witnessed Bhagwanji’s passing away and there is no manner of doubt that he took custody of the body and was the master of ceremony, which ended with the cremation on September 19. During this period, hardly anyone was allowed to see Bhagwanji’s body by his family who kept a constant vigil around his room at Rambhawan. Landlord Gurubasant Singh was asked to keep out. Dr Mishra was seen to be on the edge throughout, upto the point the pyre was set afire, when he suddenly appeared free of tension.

The former civil surgeon said virtually nothing during his examination before the Mukherjee Commission. However, he told me that Bhagwanji was “Lord Shiva” and that “he shall manifest”. He uses the phrase “went away” to describe Bhagwanji’s passing way in the 2010 documentary “Black

box of history". There are people who think Dr Mishra is "another Habibur Rahman". They think he is refusing to identify Bhagwanji and not revealing the truth about his death as per his instructions. I don't know about death, but having spoken to Dr Mishra, his wife and their sons it is quite obvious to me that they think that Bhagwanji was both a holy man and Netaji.

I have known some close followers of Bhagwanji for long and from them have heard about those who have departed. All carry a religious faith in Bhagwanji's "return". My experience of last decade or so with these people tell me that they have an extraordinary commitment to Bhagwanji/Netaji. To give you two examples, at one point of time one of them wasn't as worried about his cancer condition as he was about the fate of the Mukherjee Commission. Another one was troubled just before he accompanied the commission to Russia. "I have taken huge loan for it, and I have a daughter who will be marrying in future," he said.

I must emphasise that if we are discussing the Netaji mystery in 2012, it is for large part due to the life-long, selfless efforts of people directly or indirectly linked to Bhagwanji. The Mukherjee Commission was set up when Bhagwanji's followers filed a PIL. The origins of the Khosla Commission are in Prof Samar Guha's activism. When the Mukherjee Commission was functioning, Bhagwanji's followers attended each and every session in India and abroad as if they were the biggest stakeholders in the case. They supplied a lot of information to a host of journalists and researchers but never sought publicity for themselves.

All said, I cannot accept all the beliefs of these people I greatly admire for their genuine, life-long commitment to Bose. As a researcher, it is binding on me to draw conclusions on the basis of what can be regarded as evidence in its normal sense. If there is something which is in the realm of paranormal, I am not the one who can dwell into it. But being a part of a society whose all strata put immense faith in things with no scientific explanation, I will not brand some of my friends who are waiting for Bose to return as "lunatics". If I did so, I would be indulging in hypocrisy because when I look around, I find that many beliefs and occurrences unexplained by science or reason are having a wide currency not just in India, but throughout the world.

The belief in Bose's not dying in 1945 and even remaining alive till date has also been kept alive by statements and allusions made by some spiritual leaders with large following. Some time back, millions mourned the passing away of Sathya Sai Baba, regarded by his followers as an incarnation of God. Among those who paid their last respects to him included people as big as Dr Manmohan Singh and Sachin Tendulkar. I saw an interview in the *Sunday Times of India* on 2 May 2011. The headline "Sai Baba, my god, dictated my every single judgment" was the quote of former Chief Justice of India PN Bhagwati.

One person who I think will match Bhagwati's faith is Shivraj Patil. I wish the former Home Minister was there to hear his God publicly rejecting the Taiwan air crash theory during his 15 August 2007 discourse in praise of Bose.

In 2010 there was a newsitem declaring that Barfani Baba, a revered holy man whose followers think he is more than 200 years old, spoke of Bose's continuing existence. Barfani Baba's views on Bose has been dwelt on in a book authored by Ranjit Majumdar, a former senior Intelligence Bureau officer. I cannot name another highly revered holy man who once approached a niece of Bose and told her that he had seen "Netaji" in the Himalayas in the 1960s.

You are free to laugh this holy man talk away in the privacy of your room, but what do you do when the views offered are of someone whose circle of friends included Mikhail Gorbachev and Al Gore? Sri Chinmoy, an India-born spiritual leader who passed away in 2007 in the US, was fascinated with the Bose mystery. Unlike others, Sri Chinmoy actually wrote about it:

Even regarding Netaji's plane crash and death, Nehru's own public pronouncements contradicted each other. Either Nehru suffered from uncertainty-nights or perhaps he deliberately wished to mould reality-day in his own way! ...God alone knows if Nehru deliberately misrepresented the truth or if he himself was a captive of uncertainty. [3]

The belief in the paranormal is universal and it goes right to the top. I don't think I can cite a better example from India than that of President Pratibha Patil. On 25 June 2007, when she was a contender for the top post, Patil made a revelation at a religious gathering that a long dead holy man had given her "a 'divine premonition' of greater responsibility coming her way". [4] The *Times of India* also reported the incident which revealed "another facet of her personality"—"this time, of a mystic nature". [5]

If you will dare to scoff at the President's experience with the paranormal, keep in mind that even the most powerful people in the world, whose mental faculties and experiences people like us cannot match even in our dreams, are reported to have confronted things science doesn't agree exist. A phenomenon your smart co-worker at the office may dismiss as "madness" might have a believer in the man who owns the company. If you have been reading newspapers, you will know what sort of people line up to meet big spiritual leaders.

I do not share Bhagwanji's and many others' belief that we have been visited by alien beings using UFOs. Inter-stellar distances make that possibility impossible. Star Wars and Star Trek are always fun to watch but we know that no machine can ever fly anywhere close to the speed of light. Even if it did, still you won't reach anywhere. There are stars and planets where even light will take decades, centuries and millions and billions of years to reach.

And yet I know that there is this genial-looking old man by the name of Jimmy Carter who holds a different view. If you do not know who he is, and are a big fan of someone who thinks that all UFO spotters are either insane or cheap publicity seekers, you should note that Carter was the President of the United States of America and he spotted a UFO himself.

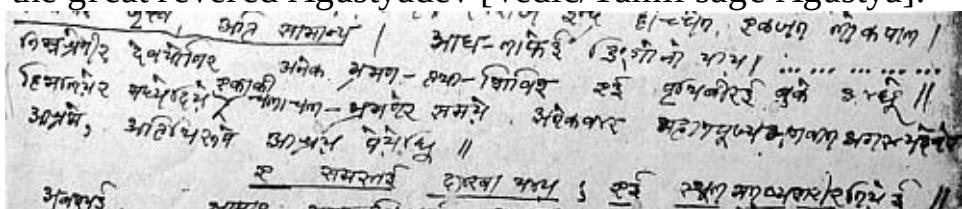
President Pratibha Patil is not the only important person to have communicated with a spirit. Hillary Clinton, current US Secretary of State and wife of former President Bill Clinton, both quite popular in India, according to a recent book by Watergate star reporter and former *Washington Post* editor Bob Woodward, has been friendly with some famous psychic researcher "who often wrote and lectured about the existence of unseen spirits of the dead". [6] Woodward claims that during a session, Hillary even reached out to the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi.

In my scrapbook of newspaper clippings, the oldest one is an *AFP* story of 16 February 1987 quoting then US President Ronald Reagan that he would like to meet Abraham Lincoln's ghost "which haunts the White House". Reagan's wish was not fulfilled—the closest he came to was noticing that his dog would not enter the bedroom Lincoln once occupied and just stand "glaring as if he's seeing something and barking". His daughter and son-in-law were convinced that they had "really seen it". They joined many others who are believed to have spotted a transparent person with a pinkish aura. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman, Winston Churchill...the list is long.

All that Bhagwanji said about himself or all that his followers speak of him is something worth paying attention to in case you think the foregoing narrative is fascinating. Bhagwanji said that before he returned to India he spent some time in Gyanganj, a mythical abode in the Himalayas. Also known as Siddhashram, Shambala and Shangri-La, this Never Never Land of the yogis has fascinated many Indians and Europeans for long, though no one could prove its existence. Most agreed that it was situated close to the Mansarover region in Tibet, but in a different dimension and, therefore, reached only by extraordinary people. "References to Gyanganj or secret ashrams can be found in Hindu scriptures such as Valmiki *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*. Guru Nanak called it Sach Khand." [7] Incidentally, the most well-known, recent book on Gyanganj was authored by Gopinath Kaviraj, who was in contact with Bhagwanji.

Bhagwanji claimed that in Gyanganj he met sages and yogis, several centuries old and capable of performing supernatural feats, like *kayakalp*—leaving one's body and entering into another. A note left by him reads: "Many times, while travelling across the Himalayas alone, I have been taken in as a

guest in the ashram of the great revered Agastyadev [Vedic/Tamil sage Agastya]."



He would call himself a *sadhak*, a practitioner, in *tantra*. Being so, Bhagwanji said, was the consummation of a desire he had always had. "A voice speaks in me. I don't know whose, I think it was there in my infancy—in my childhood: dormant but spurring—spurring me on and on. And oh! I sought after it: just like a musk deer." *Oi mahamanaba asey* quotes him further on his life's aim:

Shakti-sadhana is to awaken the kulakundalini. The Mother is called kulakundalini energy. Shakti-sadhana is to awaken and direct this power. This is also the aim of the extremely secret rajayoga. On the way of awakening the kulakundalini, a sadhak has the option to move ahead of the point where rajayoga stops. He will go on if he has the courage. Rajayogis do not know of this path. That is the main difference between a rajayogi and a tantrik—though both their aim is to awaken the kulakundalini.

Those who are really tantriks will never claim to be one. Anyone who says he is a tantrik, can never be one. The way of tantriks is very hazardous. They are bound by strict laws. The network of their organisation is spread all over the world; but India is their nerve-centre. A tantrik will never divulge their secrets even if you cut them into pieces. Tantra-sadhana is the ultimate of ultimates. [Words originally in English appear in bold]

What was the aim of his gathering these "supernatural powers" then? Bhagwanji said he had been using them and would use them in future for the good of India and other nations. In one of his letters to Pabitra Mohan Roy, he stated:

This old faqir of yours gives his most solemn word of honour in the inviolable and most divine name of Mother Jagadamba Durga Bhavani Chandi that Bengal, India shall rise again in Her full glory. Corrupt people on my Motherland's soil will be completely eliminated gradually.

As I look at it, there is no evidence that I know of which might tell me that Bhagwanji lived after 1985 or is alive today. But if I come across some people of integrity claiming that someone is going to appear in the next few years to start a process to make India "so great that it cannot be explained in words", I might not attribute that sort of public interest myth to lunacy. Any talk, howsoever fantastic, of India becoming prosperous sounds good to my patriotic ears. As an earthling, I feel it would be such a good thing if indeed Lincoln's ghost is there in the White House. With such dead people still around, the world will be a better place to live in.

12. Resolving the mystery

There is no dearth of people who while appearing to be agreeing that Subhas Bose did not perish in the manner the Government wants us to believe in would still argue that the matter should be closed “because there is nothing we can do about it now”. I agree when anyone says that this nation has had enough of the Netaji mystery. But I don’t quite think that being a mute spectator or burying heads into the sand would be of any help in bringing about a full and final closure.

The Bose mystery has to be resolved and there is no way it is happening so long as we continue to have a defeatist outlook. Before we get into the mystery busting mode, we must free our minds of the cynicism fed to us over the years by all sorts of people, ranging from Bose baiters to his pseudo supporters. I regard the second category to be more vicious because they are difficult to spot. One indication that some of them at times give out could be seen in the distracting remark that “we should be celebrating Netaji’s life rather than wasting our time worrying about his death”.

Let’s be frank about it. The people who have done the most for protecting Bose’s legacy in India are those who endeavoured to know the truth about his fate. If it wasn’t for the likes of HV Kamath and Samar Guha, our government wouldn’t be according the rudimentary honour to Netaji that it does now. Beginning 1947, Kamath started making bids to have his leader’s portrait adorn Parliament house. It was only in 1978 that due to Guha’s efforts that President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and Prime Minister Morarji Desai unveiled Netaji’s portrait in the Central Hall of Parliament amid the rendering of *Jana gana mana*, *Vande matram*, *Subhasji* and *Oi mahamanaba asey*. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then External Affairs Minister, called upon the historians and scholars to “find out why the Congress government had done injustice to Netaji by ignoring him all these years”. [1]

Left to Netaji’s “followers” whose overt agenda has been to place him at a rung below Gandhiji and Panditji, our Government would have never put up his portrait in Parliament, nor begin marking his birth anniversary in our missions abroad, nor erected a statue of his near the Red Fort, nor named some public institutions after him.

I heard an INA veteran criticizing Samar Guha for “sensationalising” the mystery and I had to remind him that “Prof Guha was the man because of whom all of you got status on a par with the other freedom fighters”. It was no mean achievement that Guha was able to achieve so much despite his being in the Opposition for almost throughout his political career. Compare his feat of getting Bose’s portrait in Parliament with “let’s celebrate Netaji’s life” propagator and Congressman Dr Sisir Bose’s 1985 fizzle.

In the run-up to the centenary celebrations of the Congress party, Sisir was asked to write a small biography of his uncle. The celebrations got over but there was no sign of the published book, even though Sisir had sent the manuscript to the party bosses much in advance. To find out why, Sisir wrote to AICC vice-president Arjun Singh. On 17 March 1986 he received the rejected manuscript with the explanation that “the aim and object of our committee is to produce mass literature for the common people”. [2] Not just that, Sisir was not even able to ensure “even a passing mention in the editor’s introduction” in the centenary’s key publication “100 Glorious Years: Indian National Congress 1885-1985”. The opening quote in the publication was a joke: Attributed to Nehru, it actually belonged to Bose. But then, it was only a quote. No one remembered who had conceived the Planning Commission in the pre-independence days.

It is not difficult to see why Kamath, Guha acted the way they did. Chandrachur Ghose was once

asked by a foreign filmmaker as to why we were focussed on Bose's "death" when we would have done better to talk about his life and times. Chandrachur, who runs www.subhaschandrabose.org, arguably the best website on Bose, all from his not so big pocket, retorted: "It is like saying, 'I love my father; but I don't care how he died.'" If your heart beats for Netaji, you are bound to get disturbed by the theories of his fate. But if you are a Congress party supporter, there is a good chance you won't undergo any emotional turmoil thinking whether his end came in Taiwan, Russia or Faizabad.

It is the duty of every admirer of Netaji to keep his memories alive for posterity as well as make efforts to know what happened to him. Today, even his former detractors and foreign biographers admit that he was a front-ranking freedom fighter but for whom India would not have attained independence in 1947. In popular imagination he finds his place up there with Mahatama Gandhi.

If you check the Transfer of Power documents, you will know how badly the British Indian Army was affected by the psychological jolt delivered by Bose's INA. So much so that in February 1946, Prime Minister Clement Attlee was told by a delegation of British MPs that most Indians were desirous that the British should leave India.

There are two alternative ways of meeting this common desire (a) that we should arrange to get out, (b) that we should wait to be driven out. In regard to (b), the loyalty of the Indian Army is open to question; the INA have become national heroes under the boosting of Congress.... [3]

A lengthy caveat must be inserted here to provide a correct perspective of our past, which is in stark contrast to its fantasy interpretation given over the years by loyal Congressmen and their cronies in historical and intellectual circles.

PR Dasmunshi wrote in January 2006 that "Pandit Nehru, notwithstanding his political differences with Netaji, saluted the historical march of the INA and came forward to defend it as a lawyer in the Red Fort trials". [4] In August that year, while defending his rejection of the Mukherjee Commission report, his Cabinet colleague Shivraj Patil proclaimed in Parliament that Nehru had "donned the black coat and gown and went to the Red Fort to defend" the INA men.

That was all to that? The Transfer of Power records are clear that the Congress leadership's defence of the INA was motivated by a desire to excel in the provincial elections of 1946. It was a complete turnaround from their previous derisive views.

The British saw through the Congressmen's change of heart. Commander-in-Chief of British Indian armed forces General Claude Auchinleck wrote to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell on 24 November 1945 that "the present INA trials are agitating all sections of Indian public opinion deeply and have also provided the Congress with an excellent election cry." [5] Similarly, Wavell was informed by Sir M Hallett of the United Provinces on 19 November 1945 that "the publicity on this subject (INA trials) has been a useful gift to political parties, especially the Congress, in their electioneering campaign". [6]

The most damning document in the Transfer of Power volume V is a 23 October 1945 report by Brigadier TW Boyce of Military Intelligence for the Secretary of State for India in London. To understand the Congress gameplan, the MI had used a mole of theirs, Capt Hari Badhwar—who first joined the INA, then switched sides and finally gave evidence against the INA men during the Red Fort trials. It is a great shame that Badhwar should have led a comfortable life as a general in free India.

Capt Badhwar reported that the Congress leaders' turnaround had little to do with any love for their ousted former president or the people who fought under his command. He sourced the information to Asaf Ali, a leading Congress Working Committee member. Before taking a stand on the INA issue, Congress high command had sent out Ali on a recce mission to gauge public feeling. He travelled across India and discovered that people were overwhelmingly in support of the INA. "This inflamed feeling forced Congress to take the line it did," Badhwar revealed.

In his free-wheeling talks with Badhwar, Asaf Ali, free India's first Ambassador to the United

States, offered the information that “Congress leaders had realised that those who joined the INA were far from innocent”, and that’s why Nehru always made it a point to refer to them as “misguided men” even in his public speeches. Ali was positive that as and when Congress came to power, they “would have no hesitation in removing all INA from the Services and even in putting some of them on trial”.

Badhwar asked Ali why couldn’t the Congress “repudiate their championship of the INA” when they knew “the true facts”? Asaf Ali replied that “they dare not take this line as they would lose much ground in the country”. Boyace’s comment at the end of his note was: “In other words, the present policy [to back the INA] is one of political expediency which is, I think, well known.” [7]

During my stint with *Hindustan Times*, I saw the evidence. Flipping through 1945-1946 vintage editions I found little sign of any freedom struggle worth the name being carried out by the Congress party at that time. The Congressmen were very vocal about fascism and Japanese imperialism, but no such anti-Churchill feelings were evident. This is when we know how anti-India the British PM was. In all fairness, many British themselves despised Churchill’s anti-India rants. His private secretary recorded in February 1945: “The PM said the Hindus were a foul race ‘protected by their mere pullulation from the doom that is their due’ and he wished Bert Harris could send some of his surplus bombers to destroy them”. [8] A recent book has adduced fresh evidence to the old charge that Churchill deliberately contributed to the famine that devoured millions in Bengal, the hotbed of Indian revolutionaries.

The Red Fort trials led to so much of public outcry that *Hindustan Times*, then functioning more or less as a Congress mouthpiece, had to run big stories with banner headlines, a rarity in those times. Those were the days when Congressmen raised the cries of *Lal Quile se ayee awaz, Sehgal, Dhillon, Shah Nawaz. Inqlab zindabad.* “The war cry comes from the Red Fort. Sehgal, Dhillon, Shah Nawaz. Long live revolution.” They were playing to the gallery than anything else. It is, of course, not to say that all Congress leaders were against Bose or to deny a genuine change of heart at that time. KM Munshi, for instance, wrote that Bhulabhai Desai told him that “his attitude to Subhas Bose had undergone a radical change as a result of his study of Bose’s plans, programmes and achievements emerging from the evidence which he presented to the court in the Red Fort”. [9]

The top Congress leadership’s duplicitous disapproval of Bose and INA was exposed by numerous pre-1947 statements made by its leaders, especially Nehru. The wounds inflicted by the politicking of those days had not fully healed when Subhas’s nephew Dwijendra Nath Bose appeared before the Khosla Commission. He made some real harsh statements, indicating the level of hurt among Bose’s family and his supporters. He spoke of “vindictiveness of Nehruji towards Netaji” and produced a pamphlet published on 19 December 1945. Dwijendra said it had been brought at the direction of his uncle Sarat Bose who could not tolerate Nehru publicly taking swipes at his kid brother.

“[Sarat Bose] called me to get two or three people because Panditji was to address a public meeting in Calcutta in Shadman Park on the 21st December, 1945. He showed us the cuttings of the observations Panditji had made at different times about Netaji and he asked us; rather I would say that he helped us in writing this pamphlet—a few questions to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.”

Dwijen then read out from the pamphlet for the benefit of GD Khosla who said he had “never come across this”. The first para related to a 1942 *Hindustan Standard* report my young friends Abhishek Singh and Saurabh Garai traced for me in a jiffy. I just wanted to check if the details given by Dwijen were correct.

"WE SHALL FACE ALL DANGERS AS MEN"

Nehru's Stirring Speech At Calcutta Meeting

NO CHOICE BETWEEN IMPERIALISM, FASCISM OR NAZISM

People Asked To Follow The Example Of China

"LET us be brave and take courage from the example of China and face any aggressor or any fascist who thinks in terms of subjecting India or dictating India," observed Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru while addressing a vast gathering at Sraddhananda Park, Calcutta, yesterday evening (Friday).

They had always been saying, Pandit Nehru pointed out, that they did not want either British Imperialism, Fascism or Nazism. Let them not commit the error that they had fallen into in the past, by thinking that they could ask for the aid of any other Power outside. Therein lay danger; therein lay peril; and if any of them thought in those terms, it was not any kind of courage, it was a sign of cowardice.

Dwijen resumed reading: "Will Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru kindly answer the following questions at the public meeting he will address in Calcutta on the 21st and 22 December, 1945. On the 21st February, 1942, at a public meeting at Shadanad park, Calcutta, you said the following: 'Let him not commit the error that they had fallen into the past by thinking that they could ask for the aid of any power outside. Therein lay dangers; therein lay peril; and if any of them thought in those terms, it was not any kind of courage, it was a sign of cowardice.'"

"Who was the person whom you are referring to? Was it Subhas Chandra Bose? Did you yourself not seek Chinese and American intervention and aid in the movement for Indian independence?" the pamphlet read.

"Question No 2: On the 12th April 1942, at a press conference in New Delhi, you said as follows. 'It is a slave's sentiment, a slave's way of thinking to imagine that to get rid of one person who is dominating us we can expect another person to help us and not dominate later. Free man ought not to think that way.'"

"Who was the person with a slave's sentiment? A slave's way of thinking, you were referring to at that time? Has your attitude towards that person changed since?"

"Question No 3: On the 12th April, 1942 at the same press conference you also said that you 'would oppose and fight Subhas Bose to death'. How do you intend to fight him? Would you fight him under the British auspices and British control?"

"In numerous public statements and speeches between April 1942 and August 1945, you said that Subhas Bose and his Azad Hind Fauz were 'misguided', 'misled', 'wrong in their methods' and all the rest of it. Does your attitude towards Subhas Bose and his Azad Hind Fauj continue to be the same today?"

“In July-August 1945, in answer to some American journalist at Delhi you stated: ‘Subhas Bose formed the Forward Bloc to attack the Congress.’ Will you kindly tell us in what respect Subhas Bose or his Forward Bloc attacked Congress? Did not the Forward Bloc always function as the left wing within the Congress? Was not Subhas Bose’s suggestion in 1939 to serve a six-month ultimatum on the British Government accepted by Gandhiji in toto in his Quit India resolution of August 1942?”

“In April 1942 you rejected Cripps’ offer and refused to cooperate with the British in defending India against Japanese aggression. In June-July 1945, you accepted Lord Wavell’s first condition, namely, the new Executive Council was to prosecute the war against Japan with the utmost energy till Japan was utterly defeated. What was the change in circumstances in and outside India which led you to accept Lord Wavell’s first condition?” [10]

According to a letter previously written by Dwijendra to Shah Nawaz Khan on 5 July 1956, Nehru was “heckled by the public in meetings addressed by him in Calcutta on the 21st and 22nd December 1945” because of this pamphlet.

Such a scathing attack on the former Prime Minister made the counsel recoil in shock. One of them tried to salvage the situation by reminding Dwijendra that Pandit Nehru had after all defended the INA soldiers during the Red Fort trials. But Dwijendra was not impressed. His response that the Congress support to INA heroes was a pre-election gimmickry matched with the accounts in the yet to be declassified British records.

This pamphlet was dictated at a time Panditji had already put up a garb to show the public. Do you understand the word namavali, which means the words “Hare Krishna Hare Rama” are printed and it is worn by Brahmins. So, Panditji thought it proper to wear that namavali of INA to cross the river of election. [11]

Unrelenting, Dwijendra accused the Congress leaders of “rubbing their noses on the floor” before the British and washing their hands off the Quit India movement after it turned violent. “This is not our movement. This is all violence going on. You have put us in jail before the movement was started,” [12] Dwijendra taunted. There was some force in his argument. The Quit India movement of August 1942 had been “crushed within three weeks,” wrote Khushwant Singh, not a fan of Subhas Bose, in a column in 2003. A person no less than Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhi loyalist, had said that “to fasten the August programme on Gandhiji is a piece of perjury” and put the blame on the British. [13] Khushwant Singh wrote further: “The British were not evicted from India; they found it increasingly difficult to rule it and decided to call it a day.” [14]

Many Indians still do not want to accept, and perhaps never will, that the “failed” INA military onslaught and the Red Fort trials of 1945-46, and not the Quit India movement, majorly impacted the British decision to quit India. The colonial British regarded Bose as their sworn enemy. No top Congressman of the “peace loving” variant fell in that category. Maj Gen FS Tucker, GOC Eastern Command, thought Bose was a “plump Bengali” of “over-weaning personal ambition” and like everyone else demanded a “condign punishment for the INA”. [15]

But in the face of public anger and much in their own interest, they had to backtrack. India was sitting on a tinderbox. The Transfer of Power volume has the text of a letter which Viceroy Wavell received from the United Province in November 1945, saying that “handwritten leaflets are said to have been found in a hotel that if any INA soldier were killed, Britishers would be murdered. These may be rather petty matters, but they do show which way the wind is blowing”. [16] On 12 February 1946 Commander-in-Chief General Claude Auchinleck was forced to explain to his top military commanders through a “Strictly Personal and Secret” letter the reasons why the military had to let the INA “war criminals” and “traitors” get off the hook:

Having considered all the evidence and appreciated to the best of my ability the general trend of Indian public opinion and of the feeling in the Indian Army, I have no doubt at all that to have confirmed the sentence of imprisonment solely on the charge of “waging war against the King” would have had disastrous results, in that it would have probably precipitated a violent outbreak throughout the country, and have created active and widespread disaffection in the Army, especially amongst the Indian officers and the more highly educated rank and file. [17]

Some thirty years later, Lt Gen SK Sinha came out with the inside story in an op-ed article in the *Statesman*. I understand the former J&K Governor still stands by it. You have to pay attention to his every word, for he as a young captain along with fellow Lt Col Sam Manekshaw and Maj Yahya Khan—who took on each other in 1971—were the only natives posted to the hitherto exclusively British Directorate of Military Operations. “The real impact of the INA was felt more after the war than during the war,” Sinha opined, adding: “There was considerable sympathy for the INA within the Army. ...I am convinced that well over 90 per cent of officers at that time felt along those lines.”

In 1946 I accidentally came across a very interesting document...prepared by the Director of Military Intelligence. It was classified document marked “Top Secret. Not for Indian Eyes”. ...The paper referred to the INA, the mutinies at Bombay and Jabalpur and also to the “adverse” effect on the Indian officers and men of the humiliating defeats inflicted by the Japanese on the white nations in the early days of the war. The conclusion reached was that the Indian Army could no longer be relied upon to remain a loyal instrument for maintaining British rule over India. [18]

The touchstone for Indian leadership’s bona fide with regard to Bose and INA was in the way they expressed gratitude towards them after 1947. The start was ominous: Nehru’s stirring “Tryst with destiny” speech had not a word about the man but for whom the day would not have come in 1947. On August 28 the Constituent Assembly of India decided to have a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi in the House. HV Kamath pleaded that portraits of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Subhas Bose be also given place. The president of the House, Rajendra Prasad, just cut him out. The same year, the Intelligence Bureau prepared a report about the re-employment of INA personnel in public service. Some of Bose’s top aides were eventually taken into government service so that the INA veterans could not regroup in India. Most were assigned overseas postings and the rest, as I heard from a disgruntled veteran, were treated “like they were stray dogs”. The Indian Army, which had fought against the INA, had no compunction in appropriating their battle cry “Jai Hind”. And yet, no serving Service chief ever paid tributes to Bose or the INA.

Maj Gen Mohammad Zaman Kiani, the INA’s head after Bose, took umbrage over the Indian government’s attitude in his memoirs published in Pakistan. He described how once in Parliament Nehru had described the liberation of Indian land by the INA as “occupation”. He felt that Nehru was simply trying to belittle “the historical role of his dead rival”. [19]

Indian embassies world over celebrated birthdays of Gandhi and then of Nehru, but Bose was not even discussed. Radios constantly blared out eulogies on Nehru-Gandhi, but even on Bose’s birthdays the broadcasts would not last more than a few seconds. Top historian Dr RC Majumdar was deprived of a deserving chance to write the official history of India for his views that Bose played an unrivalled role in making India free were anathema to the establishment. In the hands of court historians of free India, history became exclusionist. In 1984 the Government of India financed *Gandhi* swept the Oscars. In the entire movie, not even one shot depicted Subhas Bose. It would take many years before sane voices would appear. An *Indian Express* editorial touched the raw nerve in 1997:

If comic-strip accounts of the past are anything to go by, Netaji’s contribution to the freedom struggle has been reduced to the two slogans which have been associated with him: “Chalo Delhi” and “give me blood and I will give you freedom”. Juxtaposed against the more enduring images of Mahatma Gandhi and even Jawaharlal Nehru, these have the effect of reducing Subhas Bose’s to the periphery of Indian nationalism. [20]

The reason why all these details have been gone into—even though in essence they are well known—is to emphasise the point that we must bear in mind who Subhas Chandra Bose was while deliberating the matter of his fate. The role that he played in making India free was on a par to that of Gandhiji’s. And when someone has got such an exalted position, outrageous one-liners such as “why waste public money on resolving the Bose mystery”—“let’s move on”—“how many years will we go on inquiring into the mystery” must be rebutted with the contempt they deserve.

First the issue of money. There are hundreds of ways to save precious public money in India. For example, huge swathes of prime land in Delhi worth billions of rupees have been turned into

memorials for the dead leaders. This is when there is no such custom among the Hindus and many of the deceased would have preferred if the land was better utilized for the poor. Recently the authorities decided to add a spectacular addition to Vir Bhumi—one of the two memorials dedicated to Rajiv Gandhi—after having been “inspired by the illumination at 9/11 memorial at Ground Zero in New York”. [21] “Three high-intensity lamps will fire shafts of light into the sky that will intersect 400 feet above ground and will be visible 12 km away” [24] in a city which suffers from perennial power breakdowns. The immediate cost of the venture would be four million rupees. But then there are many valid arguments for having such memorials and landmarks—huge costs notwithstanding—in a country where, according to the government estimate, no man who spends more than Rs 32 or half a Euro a day can call himself poor.

In Gujarat, the pipe dream of “prohibition” is the state policy in deference to Gandhi’s views. All it does is cause loss of revenue worth millions of rupees each year. Of course it doesn’t work and never will. Prohibition has never worked in India; even the 14th century tyrant Allauddin Khilji failed to stop Delhi tipplers from having their daily doses. If one extends this line of argument, there have been talks of doing away with extravagant Republic Day military parade, more so because it does not behove Gandhiji’s nation—which won freedom “solely due to non-violent efforts”—to make a display of its military might. Are we game for it?

My own personal survey tells me that people who usually display great concern for the public exchequer while the Bose mystery is being discussed are scarcely interested in public interest drives to expose gigantic loots running into billions of rupees. A question was asked a few years back in Parliament by Dr Daggubati Purandeswari, current Minister of State for Human Resources. I don’t know what made her put the question about the amount of money spent on the Mukherjee Commission’s foreign visits. The UPA Government was ready with the details: UK, Rs 3,13,760; Japan, Rs 4,39,635; Taiwan, Rs 1,47,288; Russia, Rs 2,01,761.

Some will say these one million-odd rupees are a lot of money for a nation whose hunger and debt-ridden farmers commit suicide routinely. But that’s not too much of money when you consider the real wasteful expenditure of public money. I have yet to see a newsitem where Dr Purandeswari is talking about massive scams to the tune of billions of rupees or is backing Swami Ramdev’s movement to bring back the black money stashed abroad.

I live in Delhi and if you happen to take a tour of the city at night, you will find thousands of homeless people sleeping on the roads. Isn’t it criminal that when Commonwealth Games were organised in Delhi in 2011, some of these roads were spruced up with imported streetlighting! Did anyone suggest that this money would have been better spent in making shelters for the poor? And do you know of the net loss the exchequer had to bear as a result of fraud in giving parts of the city international standards lighting? Rs 46.02 crores!

The cost of free food distributed during a typical political rally in India is far more than what Justice Mukherjee incurred during his trips abroad.

To get into a cost-benefit analysis over the Bose mystery is to sidestep the basic issue. Even a court case involving petty theft incurs costs many times over than the cost of stolen items. But that doesn’t mean we will stop following the procedures. Justice has to be done and at times the costs are not factored in. Has anyone tried to analyse expense how much the police, investigative agencies, forensic labs and courts have in recent times incurred in resolving the much-publicized murder cases involving ordinary people? Has anyone suggested that the inquiries be stopped because they are costing too much even as farmers are committing suicide? Has anyone suggested let’s not inquire into the death of someone because inquiry won’t bring them to life. Pardon my polemical tone, but I am just reacting to what many people opine privately. “What is the use of inquiring about his fate? He is not coming back to us!”

This abhorring approach towards Bose's fate is the biggest hurdle in resolving it today. There is nothing novel about this argument also; it was being parroted in the 1950s and 1960s when the case could have been cracked with relative ease. Writing in 1965, Dr Satyanarayan Sinha tackled the oft-repeated query as to "what is the use of your reviving Netaji affairs if he is not returning to us in any case?"

Although I don't share many of his views, I find myself in complete accord with Sinha's counter-statement that "no living creature is more to be pitied than a man who thinks that his personal interests alone constitute the centre of the cosmos". "Concerning Netaji, such questions amount to an expression of betrayal to him," he forcefully added. "Posterity will never forgive us for such criminal negligence in the affairs of a national hero of the highest order." [23]

Of course many years have passed since Sinha wrote this. But aren't there cases which have remained unresolved for a very long time? Do we brush them under the carpet? I hate to recall this here, but in October 2010, the *Times of India* reported how "40 years later" an ex-IG was found guilty of gunning down a Naxalite in a fake encounter case. This case involving a former Inspector General of Police in Kerala "took a decisive turn" when a cop admitted to have shot the Naxal 28 years earlier on the orders of the DIG in question. "Following this, human rights activists sought reopening of the case...seeking a detailed CBI probe...." [24] *OutlookIndia.com* further reported the judge's observations as he delivered the verdict:

Truth by its very nature does not yield to be kept hidden for ever. Truth which has been hitherto hidden as covered by the glitter of golden plate, has by now, though belatedly, been discovered. Truth triumphs; truth alone.The offence of custodial murder, be it of an extremist, terrorist or Naxalite, in the hands of the police whose duty is to produce him before a court for trial, does not get wiped off merely by efflux of time, be it decades... cannot be justified in a society like ours.... [25]

In no compassionate society would the issue of such magnitude and consequence as the issue of Bose's fate be forgotten just because a few decades have gone by. The United States continues to make efforts to locate the remains of its soldiers lost during the Vietnam and Korean wars. In 2004, a senior Pentagon official visited New Delhi just to hold discussions with officials of ministries of defence and external affairs to locate remains of airmen who went missing on the Indian side of the Himalayas in the 1940s. [26] Earlier in 2002 a 14-man search and recovery team of the US Army Central Identification Laboratory traced remains of four American service members "whose C-46 transport plane crashed in the Tibetan Himalayas of China in March 1944". [27]

For more than a decade beginning 1992 the United States-Russia Joint Commission (USRJC) served "as a forum through which both nations seek to determine the fates of their missing servicemen". [28] In search for the remains of personnel lost during the Vietnam war, the US "organized its accounting efforts in 1992 into large-scale field operations that continue to this day".

Teams work several periods each year in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia alongside their foreign counterparts. Together, they have interviewed thousands of witnesses and conducted archival research in all five countries regarding the fate of missing Americans. Their hard work has resulted in the continuous location of crash and burial sites all over the region, from the highest mountain top to underwater sites. Archeologists and anthropologists use meticulous site exploitation rules to find possible remains and material evidence. This is followed by a scientifically rigorous and forensic process that leads to an identification of the missing service members and a return to their family for burial. [29]

In 2012, some Japanese war dead were exhumed from their graves in India for repatriation to their homeland. Researchers have continued to dig into the causes of Napolean's death—whether he was poisoned or not—and new findings about how Egyptian pharaohs died thousands of years ago have made news the world over. I read a story in the *Times of India* the other day. It said: "Egyptian queen's death case solved 3,500 yrs on". [30]

And yet we have researchers and journalists, historians and politicians telling us in India that there is no need to discuss the Bose issue, which is "boring and unimportant". If it is boring what is interesting? Have you ever taken a look at the list of research projects undertaken at Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR)? British writer William Dalrymple recently nudged that "Indians feel

that freedom of speech is for journalism” only. “But freedom of speech is not only about present, it should permeate into all layers of life. You should be able to talk about Shivaji and his poor administration and Subhas Bose and debate whether he is still alive.” [31]

That the controversy surrounding Bose’s fate has lasted for such a long time is not the fault of those who are seeking to resolve it. It is essentially the result of the sins of those who covered it up and the disdainful inaction of those who looked the other way. In a plebeian sense, the reasons why we should ascertain what happened to Subhas Bose are the same as those which are driving us to seek answers in the much-publicised cases of murders of ordinary people. In all such cases, not once has any one suggested what has often been flung to Bose’s admirers for the last few decades. They are often told to stop worrying about his fate because he is not going to come back now even if we found out the truth. But can we apply this sick argument to the other cases? No one who has departed, or has been killed, is going to come back to life, but that does not mean we don’t seek truth and justice for them. The need for justice and transparency is far more greater in the case of Bose. As the head of the Provisional Government of Free India, he was our first President.

Another pressing circumstance which makes it vitally important for us to get at the truth is the need to shut out many conspiracy theories related to the Bose mystery [See Appendix V. The land of conspiracy theories]. If you lend your ears, a caution sounded in the 1997 report of the Moynihan Commission on Government Secrecy tolls loud enough to be heard by us on the other side of the globe. “Secrecy begets suspicions, which can metastasize into belief in conspiracy of the most awful sort.” [32] The reason Indian conspiracy theories have remained alive for decades is that they have been put on the ventilator of official secrecy. It is in India’s interest to take this sustaining mechanism off. The release of official information is the best antidote for conspiracy theories and stifling charges of governmental wrongdoings. “Sunlight is the best disinfectant,” famously said the US Supreme Court in support of openness and transparency.

But as I write this, our Government is showing no sign of changing its dark culture of secrecy. It is quite clear that one cannot hope to get files on Netaji’s fate declassified when even the non-controversial documents are not disclosed. After Independence, someone in the Government commissioned a historian to chronicle the role of the Indian National Army. Compiled by Dr PC Gupta, the manuscript was completed in 1950, but it was never released to the public “due to objections raised by Army Headquarters”. [33] Only late in the last decade was the manuscript declassified and opened to public consultation. Asked in the Lok Sabha in September 2007, “whether the Government proposes to publish the manuscript to make the book easily available to scholars and readers”, Defence Minister AK Anthony stated that “there is no such proposal before the Government”.

The ministry, however, changed its stand in July 2009 when an RTI request query was made by Chandrachur. It first denied him a copy of the manuscript and then informed the Central Information Commission in 2010 that it was “contemplating” the publication of the history. Chandrachur and I made the case for disclosure before Information Commissioner ML Sharma. The former CBI Director agreed and issued a favourable directive. The MoD then went to the Delhi High Court against the CIC’s decision, but was ordered by the court to publish the manuscript. Put another way, we are paying from our pockets to see that the record goes public, and the MoD is drawing from public exchequer to keep it hidden from people.

In the early 1990s, Americans faced a situation the like of which we are confronting today. The controversy surrounding the assassination of John F Kennedy had been revived by Oliver Stone’s *JFK*. The movie suggested that the CIA had some hand in the assassination. “Stone suggested at the end of *JFK* that Americans could not trust official public conclusions when those conclusions had been made in secret.” Consequently, “the American public lost faith when it could not see the very

documents whose contents led to these conclusions". [34]

Despite critics reviling it in several newspapers, the movie became a runaway hit and stirred public conscience. The movie's achievement, wrote one reviewer, lay in the fact that it marshalled "the anger which ever since 1963 has been gnawing away on some dark shelf of the national psyche". [35] The result was the enactment of the landmark JFK Records Act of 1992 as a "unique solution to the problem of secrecy".

The problem was that 30 years of government secrecy relating to the assassination of President John F Kennedy led the American public to believe that the government had something to hide. The solution was legislation that required the government to disclose whatever information it had concerning the assassination. [36]

The JFK Act established an independent Assassination Records Review Board to smooth out the process of declassification of all assassination-related records. The very first chapter in the board's final report was titled "The problem of secrecy and the solution of the JFK Act". It was set off by a quote attributed to a US government official: "Uncage the documents. Let them see light." [37] In compliance of the board's directive, many US departments and agencies released their records. While releasing the CIA files, its then director Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defence until recently, "spoke in a voice breaking with apparent emotion":

The only thing more horrifying to me than the assassination itself is the insidious, perverse notion that elements of the American government—that my own agency—had some part in it. I am determined personally to make public or to expose to disinterested eyes every relevant scrap of paper in CIA's possession in the hope of helping to dispel this corrosive suspicion.... I believe I owe that to his memory. [38]

The review board came out with its report in September 1998. On its cover was printed the core message to the US government: "All government records concerning the assassination of President John F Kennedy should carry a presumption of immediate disclosure."

It is about time we Indians followed suit of the Americans and the Swedes to rid our nation of the mystery and the conspiracy theories surrounding Netaji in public interest. Public interest means the compelling interest in the prompt public disclosure of Bose related records for the purpose of fully informing the people of India about the fate of Subhas Chandra Bose. Truth has no need for secrecy. My own wish list of the steps that might be taken to resolve the mystery would be the following:

1. Parliament may pass a resolution declaring Subhas Bose to be the first President of free India as well as expressing gratitude to Japan for its support to India's freedom movement. Such a declaration would accord Bose the status he rightly deserves and from this changed status shall flow the rest of the extraordinary process. It would also effectively end the conspiracy theory—which I think emerged from Bhagwanji—that even after turning a republic in 1950, India remained tied to its former colonial ruler under some hidden Commonwealth clause.

2. Parliament may call upon friendly nations of Russia, the UK, the USA, China and Vietnam to share with the people of India all the information that can help ascertain Bose's fate. Such an appeal may contain a clause assuring these nations that no disclosure would be allowed to affect the existing friendly relations.

3. Parliament may enact a "Subhas Bose Records Act" on the basis that since the Government view is that Bose died in an air crash 67 years ago, there is no legitimate need for continued state protection for the records related to him. The act may stipulate that as a special case all official records on or relating to Netaji and people connected to him or the issue of his death or continuing survival in any way should be sent to the National Archives within a specified period with a view to making the people of India fully informed about the information available to their Government. The act should include provisions for proper accounting for all missing records and stipulate prosecution of any government official, serving or retired, who either doesn't comply with the act or is found to have concealed or destroyed Netaji-related records.

4. The act may create an independent task force to enforce the implementation of the act with the objective of determining whether any information is available to validate the assertion that Bose had

not died in any crash and was subsequently alive; and if yes, was there any conspiracy to keep the matter under wraps and who all were party to that conspiracy.

5. The constitution of the task force must be such as to command public confidence. In view of the peculiarities of the matter, anyone having any link with the Congress and Forward Bloc parties must not be associated with it. The task force may comprise retired IB and R&AW chiefs—because only they know the system well enough to get things out of it— former Home and Foreign secretaries, a retired CBI director, a leading lawyer, a reputed historian, a representative of the civil society and an eminent journalist who should function as the main interface between the public and the task force.

6. In compliance with the people's wish as revealed through parliamentary actions, the Government may declassify all records on or concerning Bose, including the intelligence reports on the people associated with the mystery. Record would mean information available on any format—electronic, paper, picture or microfilm—in the possession of all ministries, departments and agencies of the Government of India. After the release of records, the concerned ministers, secretaries and heads of the intelligence agencies may make written, unqualified, sworn declarations that the disclosure is full and nothing that they know of has been concealed from the people of India. In addition, the Government may take necessary steps to secure the papers, belongings etc. left by Bhagwanji and deposit them at the National Archives till the time a final decision is made.

7. The records to be released may not only include those held in the office but also those under the personal custody of the people holding the office. Therefore, while making declaration on declassification of Bose related records, the ministers and heads of the departments should make that abundantly clear. Finally, the Prime Minister may make a similar statement to the effect that all information concerning Subhas Bose known to him and his government in any which way has been made public.

8. As it declassifies the records, the Government may make a declaration through the Gazette of India freeing all serving and retired government officials, especially those with the intelligence services, from the provision of Official Secrets Act and other regulations so that they may freely share information about Bose with the task force and media. If some relevant information emerges from records and it becomes known that any minister or government servant, serving or retired, had some vital information but did not share with the task force, that individual may be charged with the obstruction of justice in a case of utmost national importance, and, as such, inviting the charges of treason.

9. Having taken all the above steps, and in deference to public will as expressed by Parliament, the Government may take up at the head of government level the issue of Bose's fate with the Russian Federation, the US, the UK, Vietnam and China. All such correspondence should be placed in the public domain to ensure transparency.

10. At the end, the task force may make public its assessment in a report based on information having become available following the enactment of the act and submit the same to the Chief Justice of India for necessary action.

Though the idea behind putting down these ten points was not to entertain, I wouldn't be surprised if these are laughed at. I know none of the above would be feasible in the present scenario, and I am no one to be suggesting such radical steps. But the underlying thought that has made me enumerate them is to confront Bose's admirers with the reality that the resolution of the mystery will not be possible so long as they continue to restrict themselves to making occasional comments and essentially uphold the status quo. If you wish to crack the case, think of proper measures which can yield results. So, if any of the above nebulous ideas could somehow lead to a reasonable line of action, the main purpose of this book would be served.

Appendix I: The loot of the INA treasure

On 16 May 1951, the head of the Indian Liaison Mission in Tokyo received a secret telegram from New Delhi. He had been directed to obtain clearance from SCAP, the HQ of Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, for a two-week holiday to Japan by a government official. KK Chettur, Ambassador Extra-ordinary and Plenipotentiary, KK Chettur, flared up on seeing the official's name.

SA Ayer, also spelt as Iyer, had just finished his assignment as director of publicity with the Government of Bombay and was taking a break before joining the Central Board of Censor. It was going to be his second trip to Japan. Earlier, Ayer had arrived here on 22 August 1945 as information minister of the Azad Hind Government. The task that he had carried out then was to draft the news of Subhas Bose's death to be circulated worldwide. On 7 September 1945 at around noon Ayer had attended a brief ceremony at the entrance to the Imperial Military Headquarters. Here he had been handed over a small box said to be containing Bose's ashes. A big box was passed on to Munga Ramamurti, or Ram Murthy, the Tokyo head of Indian Independence League, who had accompanied Ayer.

Ayer and Murti disposed of the ashes ceremoniously, enshrining them in suburban Tokyo's Renkoji temple. And what the duo did with the big box gave birth to another mystery, which while occasionally hitting the headlines in Japan, never tickled the fancy of any Indian journalist. No one ever knew what all was there in the official files about the big box.

The Japanese officer who formally handed over "three" boxes to Ayer and Ramamurti, Lt Col Morio Takakura, was told by his fellow officers that two of them contained "gold bars and diamonds". [1] Vouching for a non-existent air crash, the Japanese government later said there were two boxes only. The big one was sealed. In it was an 18-litre petroleum can filled with the charred jewellery and suchlike items collected from Taipei. This is what the air crash had reduced the INA treasure to.

Takakura wished the HQ had kept some material evidence of the transfer of the boxes by way of receipts or photographs. "We thought we had taken best possible measures as in our power in those turbulent days...but since things have now turned out like this, it may be said that we should have been more careful." [2] His post-war dismay was result of the malicious threats Ramamurti had administered to him over and again. "Keep silent about the treasure." Takakura endured for a decade or so, "out of fear of war crimes prosecution", [3] and then bared his heart before the Japanese media.

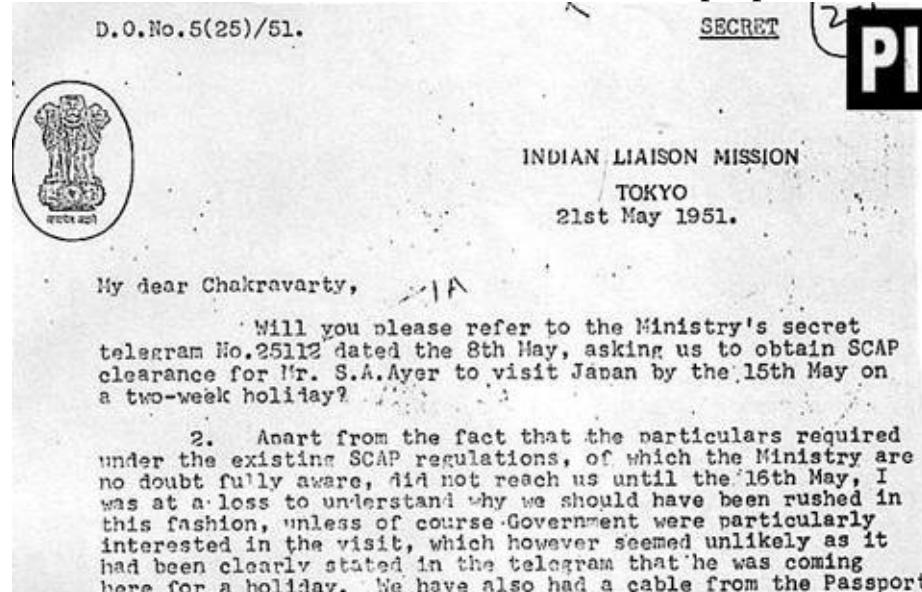
Meanwhile, Ramamurti and his younger brother J Murti had caught the eyes of local Indians. According to a Japanese media report, the brothers "bought two sedans and were seen riding about in them, seemingly leading quite a luxurious life" at a time when even the affluent Japanese were reeling under the financial miseries brought about by the world war their country had lost. "Later they were caught for illegal dealings in US dollars," [4] the report said of the brothers. J Murti often spotted his big brother in the company of Col John Figges—the Military Attaché at the British embassy, who many learned writers of today think had the last word on Subhas Bose's reported death in Taipei.

The Indian mission knew it all. A complaint by the local Indians had reached its first head back in 1947. Sir Benegal Rama Rau, later the longest-serving Reserve Bank of India Governor, and his successor Bahadur Singh repeatedly enquired from Ramamurti, who flatly denied possessing any INA treasure or a trace of it. Rau informed New Delhi about the treasure scam—free India's first—on 4

December 1947, but received no encouraging reply.

When Ayer returned to Japan as Ramamurti's guest in 1951, the process of ending the state of war between Japan and the Allied nations, including India, had reached its penultimate stage. In Ayer's own words, what had brought him back was to make sure that both the gold and the ashes were intact. While his entire mission was surreptitious—no one in India except some top officials knew anything about it—all the more secretive was his self-proclaimed intention to get the Indian mission take charge of the gold, "so that Mr Ramamurti can be relieved of his duties". [5]

The first obstacle in lending credence to Ayer's claim was that the mission head had no clue why he was coming to Japan. On 21 May 1951 Chettur wrote to BN Chakravarty, Secretary Commonwealth Relations, in New Delhi that he had reasons to feel perplexed.



I was at a loss to understand why we should have been rushed in this fashion, unless of course Government were particularly interested in the visit, which however seemed unlikely as it had been clearly stated in the telegram that he was coming here for a holiday. We have also had a cable from the passport officer, Bombay, in this connection. This sudden hurry over what is purported to be a holiday trip and the fact that he is visiting this country as Ramamurti's guest makes one wonder if there may not be more in it than meets the eye.

There was. Chettur elaborated to Chakravarty, who had served in the mission earlier:

As you are no doubt aware, there have been serious allegations against Ramamurti with regard to the misappropriation of the funds of the late Indian Independence League, as also the personal property of the late Subhas Chandra Bose, consisting of considerable quantities of diamonds, jewellery, gold and other valuable articles. Rightly or wrongly, Ayer's name has also been associated with these charges.

There was no reaction from either the ministry or Chakravarty to Chettur's letter.

On May 29 Ayer arrived in Tokyo and met Chettur. He told Chettur—who was not amused on hearing this—that he had been entrusted by the Government of India to verify the authenticity of Bose's assumed ashes and recover the gold and jewellery salvaged in Taiwan.

Ayer told me that he had received a letter on the subject from you and that he had left it behind at Bombay to avoid its contents being revealed during the journey or in any customs examinations and that this precaution was taken at your instance. You will no doubt be in a position to verify his statements. All that I can say is that I cannot quite see why you should have left me in the dark with regard to this matter. I should have thought that in the circumstances it was most essential that I should be kept in touch with what was happening, particularly in view of Ayer's past history, his relationship with Ramamurti and the scandal connected with the disappearance of Netaji's collections.

Chettur could hardly digest it when Ayer told him that "he had been trying to return to Japan for the last four years to pay his respects to Netaji's ashes". That very evening he apprised Chakravarty of his forthright views:

(4-A)



My dear Chakravarty,
Isaac A. Ayer
[initials]

Ayer, the Publicity Officer attached to the Government of Bombay, who is now in Tokyo, saw me this morning. He dwelt at some length on his previous trip to Japan, his relationship to Netaji, his knowledge of the tragic circumstances in which the latter met his death and his various interviews with P.M., particularly his recent one at the I.M.A. Relief meeting. He confided to me in this connection that he had been entrusted by the Government of India with two missions: (1) verification of the authenticity of Netaji's ashes which he and others had placed for safe deposit in a temple in Tokyo and (ii) recovery of the gold and jewellery which had been collected from the plane in which Netaji met his death. Ayer told me that he had received a letter on the subject from you and that he had left it behind at Bombay to avoid its contents being revealed during the journey or in any customs examination and that this precaution was taken at your instance. You will no doubt be in a position to verify his statements. All that I can say is that I cannot quite see why you should have left me in the dark with regard to this matter. I should have thought that in the circumstances it was most essential that I should be kept in touch with what was happening, particularly in view of Ayer's past history, his relationships with Ramamurti and the scandal connected with the disappearance of Netaji's collections. ✓

Ayer's unexpected return here as Ramamurti's guest has, I may add, given rise to considerable speculation however and that many of the local Indians are now seething with indignation at the manner of his return and his renewed association with those two brothers. Not that I personally see any reason why Ayer's choice of his friends should be anybody's business except his own, but the fact that both Ramamurti and Ayer were alleged to have had something to do with the mysterious disappearance of the gold and jewellery collected by Netaji should, I think, have deterred us from encouraging him in his visit to this country or in giving his visit an official backing.

During his meeting with Ayer, Chettur confronted him with what was being said about the INA treasure. "Indeed he had a hearty laugh when I told him that local rumours have estimated the value of that property at some millions of rupees." Ayer admitted that "some part of Netaji's collections had been saved" but it largely comprised "fused and melted gold ornaments" worth "about a lakh of rupees of so".

This was for the first time the mission was getting a confirmation that some INA treasure existed. But Ayer "completely pooh-poohed the story that some crore worth of jewels and gold had been saved".

It does seem odd that he should now be so anxious to divulge the existence of this gold, stranger still, if rumours speak correctly, that Ramamurti should have blossomed overnight into comparative affluence in 1946 when his compatriots were on the verge of starvation and misery. As you are aware, as well as I am, of the past history of the case, I am desisting from further comment, but I shall be grateful for your very clear instruction as to how I should further proceed in this matter.

There was still no response from New Delhi. On 5 June 1951 Chettur sent a Top Secret telegram to New Delhi seeking "immediate instructions as Ayer [was] leaving on the 8th". This evoked an answer the next day. Chettur's letter had been shown to the PM, who issued the following instruction through the return "Top Secret" "Personal for Chettur" telegram:

Ayer's visit to Japan is in no sense official. If he gives you paper giving details of Subhas Bose's collections you should examine and keep it in safe custody without commitment as to its disposal and await further instructions from Government. Disposal may be considered later on.

Chakravarty followed it up with an explanatory Top Secret on June 7. He repeated that "Ayer's visit to Japan is by no means official or even officially sponsored". He wrote—it sounds unbelievable—that "Ayer had approached the Deputy Minister through somebody for obtaining the SCAP clearance and a telegram was sent to you under instructions of the Deputy Minister".

We wondered what the nature of his business was in Japan and we did not know what he was up to. After some consideration we decided to not to ask him point blank what he was going to do in Japan. We suspected that while in Japan he might be doing something about Netaji's ashes. I therefore rang up the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bombay and requested him to tell Ayer that if he visits Japan and if he can find any authentic information about Netaji's ashes he might pass on that information to you and to us.

Chakravarty stated that there was "no truth in the other stories" Ayer had told Chettur.

The statement that he had left behind in Bombay a letter which I am supposed to have written to him to avoid its contents being revealed during the journey or in any customs examinations and that his precaution was taken at my instance reads too much like a six-penny novel. In fact I have never written to him.

This version was reliable, though Ayer was to introduce a technicality in his deposition before the Khosla Commission on 20 January 1971. He produced what he claimed was the text of the letter written to him by the Bombay Chief Secretary, directing him to convey his findings about the ashes and treasure to Chakravarty. Khosla made this copy an exhibit, but since most of his exhibits have vanished from high-security government record rooms, there is no way to trace it now.

Significantly, Chakravarty—a state governor in the 1960s—admitted that when he was in Japan, he had “also heard about Ramamurti misappropriating the funds of the Indian Independence League as also the personal property of the late Subhas Chandra Bose. Ayer’s name was also mixed up with this”. But

Ramamurti in fact denied all knowledge of gold and jewellery. It is therefore interesting to know that Ayer is now able to produce some part of Netaji’s collections.

He further clarified the PM’s position:

The Prime Minister thought that there is no point in refusing to accept the gold if that is made over to you by Ayer for safe custody. It is realised that it may not be possible to bring this gold out of Japan, but that it is a matter which can be considered later. Similarly, if he wanted to show you the papers giving details of what was left there is no objection to your receiving these papers and examining them.

At this, displaying remarkable courage, Chettur almost accused New Delhi of neglect in the matter. He did not hide his annoyance in his letter dated 11 June 1951, even though he had known that the Prime Minister was in the loop. Chettur had been enraged by an article in the *Nippon Times* on Ayer’s visit and the interest it had aroused among the Indian expats.

I have heard the most scandalous reports about the Ayer-Ramamurti link and I have no reason whatsoever to doubt their authenticity. But in view of lack of interest evinced by Government in this matter in the past, I have refrained from pursuing it. In any case, I believe that you know as much about the case as I do and my comments on the subjects might seem superfluous.

Chettur informed New Delhi that Ayer had not been forthright and holding back things from him.

He called at my office on the 5th to bid me good-bye and to tell me that the BOAC had confirmed his booking and that he was definitely leaving on the morning of the 8th. I understand, however, that he is still in Tokyo, though he has made no attempt to contact me or to apprise me of the reasons which have led to the extension of his stay in Tokyo—which incidentally has prevented me from passing on to him the gist of your cable of the 6th June.

New Delhi did not respond. On June 22 Chettur sent more Top Secret information:

I now understand that Ayer left by BOAC on the 11th for Calcutta, though I have not been able to verify the earlier report that he had gone to Hokkaido, as subsequent reports indicated that his ostensible visit to this island was designed with a view to covering his tracks. One such report alleged that he did not in fact visit Hokkaido, but had gone to Sendai, about 300 miles north of Tokyo, to contact an old Japanese colleague who was also closely connected with Ayer and Ramamurti and the Netaji collections.

The last I saw him was on the 5th when he called on me to say that he was definitely leaving on the 8th and to enquire whether any instructions had been received from you regarding his proposal to dispose of the Netaji collections. ...As he was very anxious to ascertain your reaction before his departure, I sent you, at his request, a most immediate cable on the 5th and assured him that a reply would be received by the 7th at the latest. That he did not bother to see me again, much less hand over the gold as previously promised, or even make an attempt to find out whether any reply had been received from you to the cable despatched at his instance, has added to my suspicions regarding the motives behind his holiday visit to this country. His extraordinary statement that he had received a letter on behalf of the Government of India, is also a point worth investigating.

The last paragraph in Chettur’s letter was going to make Chakravarty feel nervous.

3. If Government are seriously interested in unravelling the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the Netaji collections, I shall be only too glad to make further investigations in the matter, but it should be understood that such investigations may involve a degree of publicity which might well prove embarrassing not only to the Mission but also to the Government of India.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
(K.K.Chettur)

PI

B.N.Chakravarty, Esq., I.C.S.,
Secretary, Commonwealth Relations,
Ministry of External Affairs,
New Delhi..

13A

Chakravarty consulted the Prime Minister who said he "did not quite think" why Chettur "should think that there is a lack of interest evinced by Government in this matter". When Chakravarty referred to Ram Rau's complaint and the inadequate response sent by Harishwar Dayal, still serving the MEA as a Joint Secretary, the "PM thought that that letter was issued without his being informed about it". On his instruction, Chakravarty sent the following telegram to Chettur on June 23:

You are wrong in thinking that Government are NOT interested in this matter. Government are greatly interested in recovering all gold or other forms of treasures belonging to the Indian Independence League or INA. ...You should endeavour to get possession of all the treasure on behalf of Government and keep it in safe custody pending further instructions.

Chettur's bold rejoinder, which isn't there on the relevant file in original, was that

all the treasure, if it existed, save the two boxes now promised by Ayer which are I understand in Ramamurti's possession now, must have long been converted into hard cash, commodities and landed property. The proceeds must also have been distributed between the parties concerned.

He named the "three members of this gang": Ramamurti, Capt Thairatatte and Col JG Figgess.

answered "all the treasure, if it existed, save the two boxes now promised by Iyer which are I understand in Ramamurti's possession now, must have long ago been converted into hard cash, commodities and landed property. The proceeds must also have been distributed between the parties concerned", three members of this gang being

Ramamurti(IIL), Capt. Thairatatte and Col. Figgess. It

He said it was too late to "undertake a treasure hunt" and repeated that if undertaken it would involve "a degree of publicity which might well prove embarrassing not only to the mission but also to the Government of India". In reply, Mr Chakravarty explained that he did not think it necessary for the mission to start an actual search for the treasure "but that they should ask Ramamurti to hand over the gold which was with him".

Chakravarty consulted the PM and wrote to Chettur on 25 June 1951 that "now that PM desires that we must take interest in this matter, I would request you to make a confidential inquiry and try to ascertain the facts. Every Indian in Japan says that Ramamurti became rich almost overnight and probably there is some truth in their allegation". On July 2, he sent another:

I do not quite understand why Ayer did not hand over the treasure to you as previously promised. You might enquire from Ramamurti what happened. If Ayer contacts us on his return here we will also tackle him. As I told you in my last letter we were

anxious to know all about the gold and the treasure and we had asked you to make necessary inquiries. We had in view only some confidential inquiries and we never thought that this might lead to any embarrassment. We will naturally have to reconsider the matter if the inquiry involves a degree of publicity which may prove embarrassing not only the mission but also to the Government. Before we can consider the matter further I shall be grateful if you can let us know why you think that the inquiry may be embarrassing.

Either Chettur did not respond to this, or his responses were removed from the file. Maybe he wanted clear instruction from the Prime Minister, also the External Affairs Minister. On 12 July 1951 Chakravarty wrote:

I myself feel that the guilty persons should be exposed. If that cannot be done by confidential inquiries without causing any embarrassment to the mission, I suppose we will have to give up the idea altogether. I have not been able to show your latest letter to the Prime Minister. When he comes back from Bangalore I will mention the case again to him and obtain his orders as to whether he would like the matter to be investigated further. I will let you know his decision in due course.

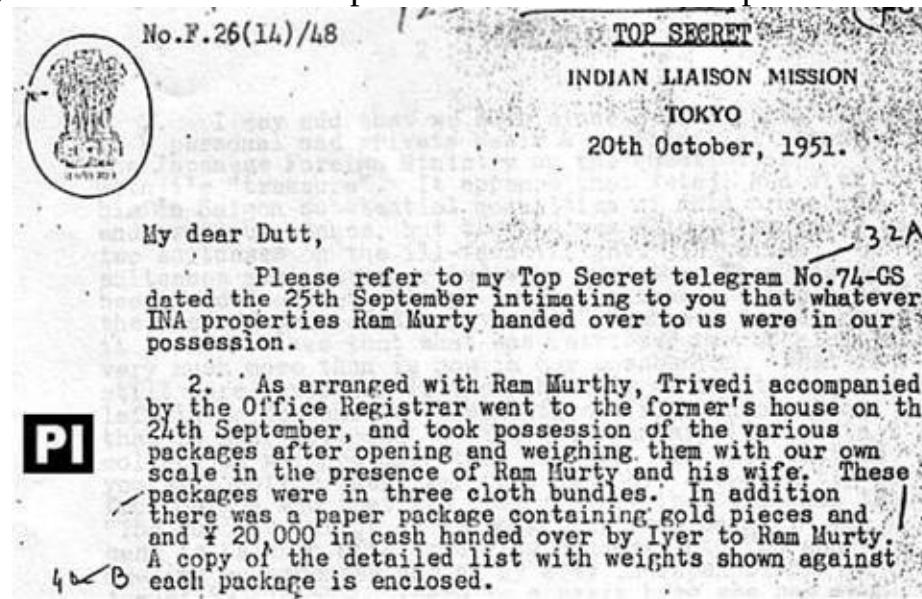
Six days later Chettur was informed that the

Prime Minister does not want any open investigation and to the Government. If any confidential inquiries are possible without causing any embarrassment to the mission you will no doubt make such inquiries.

Chakravarty stated that Chettur should "try to take possession of the gold from Ramamurti". But Chettur was waiting for clear orders. On August 23 Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt issued the orders through a Top Secret telegram:

Prime Minister desires that you should, without further delay, take over from Ramamurti all INA treasure in his possession and keep it in the Mission until further instructions.

Two days later Chettur responded to the Foreign Secretary: "Whatever INA properties have been handed over by Ramamurti are now in our possession. Details follow." Those were contained in his 20 October 1951 letter, the last and the centrepiece of Chettur's correspondence on the issue.



As arranged with Ram Murthy, [First Secretary VC] Trivedi accompanied by the Office Registrar went to the former's house on the 24th September and took possession of the various packages after opening and weighing them with our own scale in the presence of Ram Murthy and his wife. These packages are in three cloth bundles. In addition there was a paper package containing gold pieces and ₹ 20,000 in cash handed over by Iyer to Ram Murthy. A copy of the detailed list with weights shown against each package is enclosed.

Two points worth noting in this connection are that the twenty thousand Yen handed over by Ram Murthy are in current notes of ₹ 1,000 each, and not in note which were current in 1945 nor their equivalent in actual value on account of the changes in Yen currency values. Secondly, the gold lumps given by Iyer, which are obviously pieces from melted ornaments are bright and completely untarnished. You will no doubt consult whether gold will remain entirely untarnished after nearly six years.

In the final para, Chettur summed up his damning findings on Ayer and Ramamurti with the aid of startling inputs obtained informally from the Japanese government:

I may add that we have since been able to secure on a personal and private basis a confidential report from the Japanese Foreign Ministry on the question of Netaji's "treasure". It appears that Netaji had with him in Saigon substantial quantity of gold ornaments and precious stones, but that he was allowed to carry only two suit-cases on the ill-fated flight. These two suit-cases must have carried very much more than has now been handed over to us, and even if allowances are made for the loss of part of the treasures when the plane crashed, it seems obvious that what was retrieved was substantially very much more than has now been in our possession. What is still more important is that the bulk of the treasures was left in Saigon and it is

significant from the information that is available that on the 26th January, 1945, Netaji's collection weighed more than himself.

In this context you will notice that Iyer came to Tokyo subsequently from Saigon and that his statement of that time was that: "The gold is intact as I have brought it from Saigon. The cash is the balance after changing Piastres into Yens and meeting my expenses during my stay in Japan since August 22nd 1945".

There is a party here who has seen the boxes in Iyer's rooms and who was also to buy off the contents of these two boxes. What happened to these boxes subsequently is a mystery as all that we have got from Iyer is 300 gms of gold and about 260 rupees worth of cash. You will, no doubt, draw your own conclusion from all this, but to me it would appear uncommonly as if Iyer, apprehensive of the early conclusion of the Peace treaty came to Tokyo to divide the loot and to salve his and Murthy's conscience by handing over a small quantity to Government in the hope that by doing so he would also succeed in drawing a red herring across the trail. How far he has been successful, time will show.

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Yours sincerely,

(K.K. CHETTUR)

S. Dutt, Esq., I.C.S.,
Secretary, Commonwealth Relations,
Ministry of External Affairs,
NEW DELHI.

PI

On 1 November 1955 a Top Secret report on the issue was made in the Ministry of External Affairs for the perusal of the Prime Minister. Titled "INA treasure and their handling by Messrs Ayer and Ramamurti", it was authored by RD Sathe—who became the Foreign Secretary later and whose son-in-law is National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon. Sathe drew mainly from Chettur's report and agreed that "Mr Iyer's activities in Japan have been rather suspicious". Sathe also added this damning detail:

Suspicion regarding the improper disposal of the treasure is thickened by the comparative affluence in 1946 of Mr Ramamurti when all other Indian nationals in Tokyo were suffering the greatest hardships. Another fact which suggests that the treasures were improperly disposed of is a sudden blossoming out into an Oriental [word unclear] expert of Col Figges, the Military Attaché of the British mission in Tokyo, and the reported invitation extended by the colonel to Ramamurti to settle down in UK.

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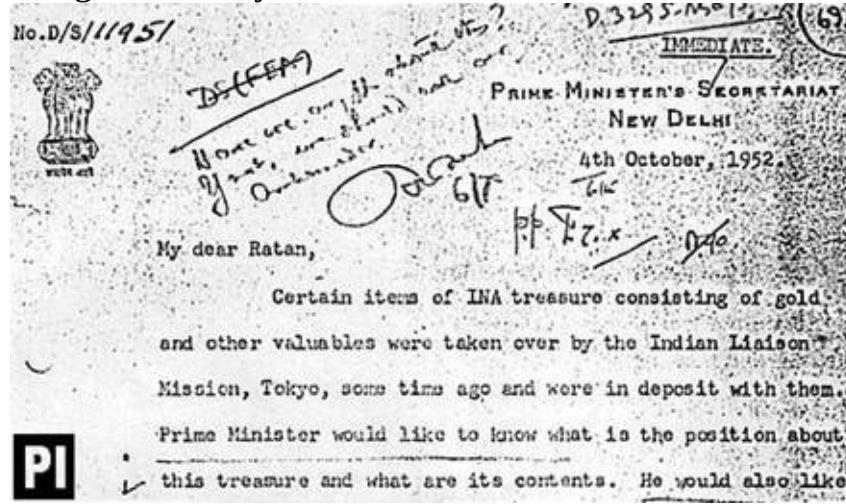
PI

(R.D. Sathe)
1.XI.51.

P.M. has seen this note. This
may be placed in the relevant file. J.S.

The note carried the PM's signature with date 5 November 1951 and the noting of the Foreign Secretary that "the PM has seen this note".

Almost eleven months later, on 4 October 1952, BN Kaul of the Prime Minister's Secretariat wrote a letter to the new Foreign Secretary RK Nehru, the Prime Minister's cousin.



Certain items of INA treasure consisting of gold and other valuables were taken over by the Indian Liaison Mission, Tokyo, some time ago and were in deposit with them. Prime Minister would like to know what is the position about this treasure and what are its contents. He would also like to know whether these articles themselves or whether their equivalent in money can now be brought over to India. Some time ago, there was some difficulty about transferring the treasure from Japan to India. I shall be obliged if a note on this subject is sent to me, at an early date, for the Prime Minister's information.

The "difficulty" in transferring the treasure to India pertained to the "state of war" which had existed between Japan and the Allied nations. Most of these nations signed the Treaty of San Francisco with Japan in September 1951 and India signed a separate, more humane Treaty of Peace with Japan in June 1952.

Whatever note the Foreign Secretary prepared is not available in the relevant file because it was probably destroyed. But what the file does contain is an October 16 Top Secret letter from MEA Deputy Secretary Leilamani Naidu to the first Indian Ambassador in Tokyo, Dr Mohammed Rauf. The PM wanted the treasure to be brought to India.

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
NEW DELHI.

(2)

the 16th October, 1952.

My dear Rauf,

Will you please refer to the correspondence resting with Chettur's d.o. letter No. F.26(14)/48, dated the 20th October 1951, about the IIMA properties taken over by our Mission in Tokyo from Ram Murthy ?

2. The Prime Minister wishes to know whether the treasure or its equivalent in money can now be brought over to India. As our Treaty of Peace with Japan has come into force, this should be a comparatively easy matter.

3. We would be grateful if you would kindly make the necessary inquiries and cable your reply.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Leilamoni Haidu)

M. A. Rauf, Esq.,
Ambassador of India,
Tokyo,
Japan.

In response, Rauf sent a telegram proposing to send the treasure. He saw no need to inform the Japanese government.

FILE COPY

OUTGOING

3673
2. OCT 1952 50

ISSUED

C.S. No. 131

(3)

O.T.P.

Telegram TOP SECRET.

From Indembastry Tokyo.

To Foreign New Delhi.

DTO October 271500

.....
S-2

No. 131-G. Top Secret. RAUF to LEILAMANI NAIDU.

Reference your Top Secret D.O. No. F.25(6)/NGO-52,
dated 16th October.

Propose to send the stuff in our custody with
DAMLE, Joint Secretary, Agriculture Ministry, who is
returning to India on 7th November. Reference to
Japanese Government NOT considered necessary and may
involve delay. Japanese Government has so far evinced
NO interest in the matter.

Amb. and FS

27-10-52

PI

This “treasure” was eventually brought to India in utmost secrecy in 1952 by KR Damle, then a Joint Secretary in Ministry of Food and Agriculture and later the Governor of Goa in 1960s. According the MEA records, on his arrival to New Delhi Damle handed over the valuables to Harishwar Dayal, then Joint Secretary (Administration). As per the official estimate, the valuables were considered to be worth about Rs 90,000. “This is presumably based on a message from the mission in Tokyo before despatch of the goods that they might be insured for Rs 90,000,” a note explained.

The officials who saw the “treasure” in New Delhi described it as a “miscellaneous collection of broken fragments of jewellery, ornaments etc. some twisted metal, presumably from an aeroplane and some dust and ashes”. They suggested that the “best way of dealing with treasure may perhaps be to hand it over to Shri Bose’s family. They may exhibit it in the Subhas museum which is proposed to be set up in Cuttack”.

This secret official memo was seen by Minister Abul Kalam Azad who favoured that the “treasure” be “handed over to the family of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose”.

M.191

میں اسے نہیں دیکھتے ہیں کہ جیزین
شری سبھاس چندر کے میراث کے حوالے کر دی جائیں
میں نہیں سمجھتا ہے کہ ایک ماہ کے لئے اسکے کو جسمہ کی نمائش کرنے
سائب ہوگے کیونکہ کوئی کوئی جیزین نہیں ہے جس سے کوئی

اے جسے اسکے
لئے
کوئی کوئی کوئی
کوئی کوئی کوئی

I agree that all these things should be handed over to the family of Shri Subhas Chandra Bose. Since there is nothing in these objects of any particular interest, I do not think it is necessary to keep these objects on exhibition for a month here.

SD/- (A.K) Azad.
28 - 11 - 53

P

The Prime Minister disagreed: "These articles cannot be sent to Shri Subhas Chandra Bose's family. They have shown no interest in them and they are not even now prepared to admit that Shri Subhas Chandra Bose died in this accident." He personally inspected the so-called INA treasure on 9 January 1953. He observed that it "made a poor show". "Apart from some gold pieces, it consisted of charred remains of some rather cheap jewellery chiefly some silver and gold articles, all broken up. I think that this should be kept as it is. Apart from everything else, it is some evidence of the aircraft accident and subsequent fire."

With that the case was closed. Ayer was never asked any of the questions Chakravarty said he would be. In fact, Ayer received a warm welcome by the Prime Minister when he met him in New Delhi on his return. Secret records show the MEA finding fault with Chettur for questioning Ayer's integrity and not collecting the treasure in time. Ayer's report that Subhas Bose had died in Taipei, which he had prepared on the basis of his inquiries in Japan, was read out by the Prime Minister in Parliament. On 2 March 1952 Nehru wrote to Bengal CM Dr BC Roy, "I have no reason to doubt the correctness of the report [of Ayer] and I think I must accept the final conclusion also." [6].

Knowing the antecedents of Ayer, the Prime Minister should have them aplenty. But those did not stop him from giving Ayer a promotion. In 1953, he appointed him as an adviser for the publicity of his flagship Five Years Plan.

For a while, Ramamurti prospered in Japan. His brother's marriage was a memorable family event. Col Figges was an honoured guest. J Murti's Japanese bride wore Indian jewellery some people alleged had come from the INA treasure. Then in late 1952 Ramamurti and his Japanese wife were caught up in case of tax evasion and were forced to shift to India.

J Murti went on to open a restaurant of Indian cuisine in Tokyo. Today, it is a hot spot for the diners. Figges became famous as well, just as RD Sathe had noted in his Top Secret note. He is now remembered in the UK as late Sir John Figges—a leading authority on oriental porcelain.

Chettur was forgotten for he did not live long. He signed the historic peace treaty with Japan on India's behalf and moved to Brussels as India's Ambassador to Belgium. There, he collapsed while playing golf. His young daughter—former Samajwadi Party president Jaya Jaitley—never learnt of her father's glorious role in almost pinning down the looters of the INA treasure.

II: The strange case of Taipei air crash

17 August 1945, 5.00pm: Subhas Bose and Habibur Rahman board a bomber in Saigon

What was the need for Bose to get into a cramped bomber when his personal 12-seater twin-engine with the INA insignia was available? In his October 1945 report, PES Finney noted that “apparently Bose’s plane was not allowed to go beyond Saigon for reasons which are not quite clear”. [1] By March 1946, the doubts had turned to suspicions. “It would appear more likely that a person of Bose’s importance even though he may have been discredited, would still be allowed to travel in his own special aircraft.” [2]

GD Khosla’s report said the “Americans had laid a strict embargo on all flights by the Japanese”. [3] But ruling this out was Matsuyama aerodrome ground engineer Capt Nakamura’s statement to the Shah Nawaz Committee that “the flight of Japanese aircraft was restricted only after the 25th of August, i.e. eight days after Netaji’s departure from Saigon”. [4] The committee report commented that “perhaps, it was not so difficult to arrange for seven seats in an air transport”. [5]

Suresh Bose in his *Dissentient report* cited Pritam Singh’s evidence that “the Japanese were talking among themselves at Saigon aerodrome that it would be difficult to conceal such a big party, which, however, consisted of only seven persons and so they decided to take away Netaji alone”. [6] That brings us to the 17 October 1945 intelligence report from Director of Military Intelligence in China referring to the interception of a secret Japanese message advising Bose “to be separated from his fellow travelers”. [7]

2.00pm: Bomber lands in Taipei but there’s no one to receive Bose and Shidei

The authorities in Taipei did know that Subhas Bose and Gen Shidei were supposed to land and yet not a single high-ranking official cared to receive the dignitaries. War veteran Shah Nawaz Khan could understand that something was amiss and that it could not be attributed merely to the breathless aftermath of the Japanese decision to surrender to the Allies.

General Harukei Isamaya, chief of general staff of the Formosan Army, appeared before the committee and failed to provide any logical reason as to why Shidei and Bose were not received at the airport.

Shah Nawaz was annoyed to learn that barely a week later, Lt Gen Shinichi Tanaka, chief of general staff, Burma Army landed at Matsuyama aerodrome with Dr Ba Maw, Japan-backed President of Burma, on their way to Tokyo. This time the dignitaries were accorded an official welcome by Isamaya and his boss General Rikichi Ando, commander of the Formosan Army and Governor-General of Formosa.

If there was general disorder in Taipei on August 18 and Bose was but a “puppet” of the Japanese—the thrust of Khosla’s and the Government of India’s argument—would the situation be normal a week later? General Ando observed the protocol even though he had been wrecked by the outcome of the war and was to commit *harakiri* a little later. Then how was that the same Ando, as per Isayama’s testimony to Shah Nawaz, “shut himself up in his house and did not come out” [8] when Bose and Shidei reportedly arrived in Taipei?

The tantalizing possibility that Bose and Shidei never landed in Taipei on 18 August 1945 cannot be ruled out, actually.

2.30pm: Bomber takes off only to go down

It is not very uncommon for the witnesses of plane crash to give out somewhat divergent versions.

But then, the people who lived through the air crash in question were war-hardened soldiers with plenty of flying experience. Three of them were air force officers. Maj Kono knew how to fly and both he and Nonogaki could fix up aircraft glitches. Due importance had to be given to such men's words.

Rahman's statement to the Shah Nawaz Committee was that the plane went down after it had been airborne for "five or six minutes" [9]. Some ten years later, he repeated to Tatsuo Hayashida that the plane was in the air for 10 minutes. Mitsubishi-Ki-21's climb rate was 19,685 feet in 13.2 minutes, so it must have gone a few thousand feet high. Kono, in fact, told the Khosla Commission that the rate was "about seven metres per second." He added: "To reach the height of 700 metres, it might have taken 100 seconds." [10]. Capt Arai, Suresh Bose wrote in his *Dissentient report*, estimated that "in a few minutes after taking off, the plane attained a height of about 500 metres, equivalent to about 1,600 feet". [11]

In striking contrast, the Shah Nawaz report conceded that the "witnesses inside the plane have given different estimates of the heights but most of them say that maximum height gained was about 30 metres." [12] Anyhow, the plane then nosedived, leading to the death of Bose, Shidei and pilots—the people heading to Russia—with the rest miraculously surviving the impact.

2.40pm: Bomber hits the ground

What was the exact impact point? The "eyewitnesses"—people who had seen it all with their own eyes—could not be of one mind in pinpointing the precise location. One said it was towards the south-end of the airport near a temple.

Shah Nawaz's report stated that "some witnesses, like Lt Col Nonogaki, have stated that the plane crashed on the concrete runway; on the other extreme, Col Habibur Rahman has said that the crash took place one or two miles outside the aerodrome." [13] Appearing before the Khosla Commission, Nonogaki said that "the plane crashed into a bomb crater...near the end and not beyond the runway;" [14] Kono's impression was that the plane had "hit from the right wing against the dyke within the compound of the airport" [15] and Takahasi thought the "crash was at sand...within the compound of airport; but beyond the runway". [16]

Imagine some daredevils inside a plane that's crashing. It hits the ground and they have no seat belts. Nonogaki, the person incharge of the plane, told the Khosla Commission that he saw Sakai, Arai and Takahashi "rolling like stones". [17] He told the committee that upon impact, the plane split in two parts and these "went in different directions". [18]

The survivors were either thrown out or they ran out to safety. And from a distance they looked back at what had become of the plane. Was the plane still intact or broken apart? Arai, Nonogaki, Kono and Sakai told the committee that they saw the plane broken into two but Nakamura was "positive that the plane was intact and the body was not broken". [19]

Both the committee and commission sought expert opinions as to what had led to the air crash. AMN Shastri, an aircraft accident inspector of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, was the last witness before the committee. A selected lot of excerpts from the witnesses' statements, sketches drawn by them and the pictures of the wreck were sent to him in advance, without notifying the committee's non-official member Suresh Bose.

According to the *Dissentient report*, Shah Nawaz put a loaded question to Shastri: "In the event of there being discrepancies between the statements of some witnesses, could you say from the statements and other evidence placed before you, which statement or statements you consider the most reasonable from your point of view as an air expert?" [20]

Shastri answered that he considered Kono's and Nakamura's statements "to be reasonable". Suresh Bose disapproved of the "funny manner of believing only one portion and disbelieving the remaining portion of the statement of a witness relating entirely to the same simple point" and accused Shah

Nawaz of getting “hold of this aircraft accident investigation inspector” from a government department to “explain or reconcile the glaring discrepant statements of all the witnesses regarding the plane crash”.

But even Shastri’s explanation was unsatisfactory. For instance, he admitted that “it is not possible to establish the exact cause as to how the propeller came off from the engine from the details available”. [21]

GD Khosla took the opinion of Air Vice Marshal DAR Nanda, who was at a loss for words: “From the statements [of the witnesses] there is such a lack of essential details that it is humanly impossible for any person to give any sensible assessment of the things even at this stage. ...I tried my best to get something [out of the pictures of the plane wreck], but it did not make any sense. No specific details could be obtained from them. [22]

2.43pm: Bose emerges from the burning plane

After the crash, Bose was said to have come out of the plane almost unhurt but was caught in flames. This was supposedly seen from a close range by Japanese officers and Rahman. And yet all of them came out with divergent accounts.

Rahman’s take that Bose’s clothes caught fire the moment he emerged and he had to tear them off was not backed either in part or in full by others.

Rahman also contradicted himself more than once. In 1967, he told Shaharyar Khan, a future Pakistan Foreign Secretary, that he “himself had been thrown clear as the plane plunged into a thicket because he was sitting near the tail of the aircraft”. Then he “ran immediately towards the burning aircraft...[and] he saw the charred body of Subhas Chandra Bose lying beside the aircraft”. [23]

Takahashi version to the Shah Nawaz Committee was that he saw Bose “trying to take off his coat”, which Rahman insisted Bose was not wearing. Rahman told the committee that on the way to Taipei he felt cold but Bose did not and therefore Bose did not put on warm clothes. Ever heard of a young Kashmiri feeling cold while a middle-aged Bengali is not?

Anyhow, Takahashi then “went up to Netaji and made him roll on the ground and managed to put out the fire from his clothes”.

He says that Col Habibur Rahman was there, but assigns him a passive role. ...While the other witnesses have said that Netaji had to take off his clothes and was naked, Major Takahashi says that Netaji had his clothes on. [24]

The committee’s report also touched upon ground engineer Nakamura’s claim that it was he who had actually “rescued the passengers from the burning plane, and specially Netaji”. The *Dissentient report* gave enough space to this rescue act:

He [Nakamura] at once jumped on to the shidisha waiting near him and rushed to the place of crash and was followed by three of his men.... They rescued the passengers through a normal door of the plane.... Mr Bose was the last person to come out and he did so by walking out of the plane. The engineer continued that...then saw that Mr Bose was within the reach of the flames and as his clothes had been splashed with petrol, they caught fire. Mr Bose then lay on the ground, where the engineer and three of his men took off his coat and stripped him of all his clothing. [25]

Kono, described by the committee report as an “alert and observant” eyewitness said he saw Bose standing near the plane, completely naked and with no “fire on his body”. And while Kono could feel “the heat of the flames 30 metres away, Netaji was standing a couple of metres away from them seemed to be oblivious of the heat. His face did not show any sign of pain. Then Col Habibur Rahman moved him away from the burning plane”. [26]

The Shah Nawaz Committee report deduced somehow that “the version given by Colonel Habibur Rahman and supported by the two more observant witnesses, namely Lt Col Nonogaki and Major Kono, appear more credible than the version of Major Takahashi”. [27] If the committee had been provided with the July 1946 report of Col Figges, who also testified before it in Tokyo, it would have been compelled to revise its opinion about Nonogaki as well. Before Figges, Nonogaki had narrated an altogether different story. He said he saw Bose “lying on the ground in flames” and then

Habibur Rahman and Nonogaki between them succeeded in beating out the flames and Bose was removed immediately to

a nearby emergency dressing station where the burnt clothing was cut away from his body. He was then taken...to the nearest army hospital.... [28]

But as a Khosla Commission witness, Nonogaki had no such memory. He merely watched Rahman trying to save Bose and he did not help him take off his clothes.

The Shah Nawaz Committee report also recorded that “when the crash took place, it was dealt with in a somewhat casual manner. No officer of any standing came to the spot”. [29]

2.44pm: General Shidei dies in the plane

Very little was heard of Shidei after the plane hit the ground. The witnesses provided sketchy, discrepant details. Kono said that moment the plane impacted the ground, a petrol tank fell on the general and he died on the spot. Nakamura said that along with the pilots, the general too perished in the flames. But Arai insisted Shidei was taken to hospital, where he expired. No one knew when, how, by whom and in which condition the general's body was extricated from the wreck.

In the hospital no one saw his body or even heard about it. Since the body was not available, no death certificate was issued. There was no cremation permit either. No one knew for sure when and where Shidei was cremated because no one attended his cremation. Nakamura claimed that he buried Shidei's entrails and put his ashes in a box. A box said to be containing Shidei's ashes was found placed at the same crematorium where Bose was allegedly cremated, but neither his name nor that of the general appeared in medical or cremation records.

Although Major Nagatomo claimed before the Shah Nawaz Committee that General Ando had visited the hospital to see Netaji and attended his funeral ceremony, “General Isayama, chief of the general staff, who should know what the Army commander was doing”, clarified to the committee that “neither he nor Gen Ando went either to the hospital to pay respects to Netaji’s body, nor attended any funeral ceremony”. His excuse was that they did not do so because they did not want “to give prominence to the fact that an important person like Netaji was fleeing to Tokyo”. [30]

The committee report dismissed this explanation as unconvincing. All the more unconvincing was the circumstance that the general should have remained clueless about his Manchuria-bound batchmate. Isayama never saw Shidei’s body either at the hospital or elsewhere and never did attend his cremation and funeral. A pot said to be containing Shidei’s ashes was later delivered to his family in Kyoto along with some of his belongings.

The Japanese did not seem interested in conducting even a cursory inquiry to find out the reason for the crash. “One would have at least expected a formal inquiry into the air crash, which is more or less a routine matter,” Shah Nawaz complained. “More so, as the plane carried distinguished persons like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Lt Gen Shidei.” And when Shah Nawaz sought a clarification from General Isamaya, he received two contradictory versions.

On being questioned, General Isayama first denied that Formosan Army had any responsibility to inquire into the accident of an aircraft that did not belong to them—the plane in question belonged to the Third Air Army at Singapore. [But] later on he admitted that the local army command was expected to hold an inquiry, and went on to say that a report about this particular plane crash was submitted through him, by Lt Col Shibuya, to the Imperial General Headquarters. [31]

Colonel Shibuya flatly denied that any such report was ever sent and passed the buck on “the Air Division concerned”. The final word came from the Japanese Foreign Office on 4 June 1956: “As a result of investigation...it has been revealed that no official inquiry commission to determine the cause of the accident was held so far.” [32]

III: Views of Subhas Bose's family on his fate

The Bose family members that I have known often tell me that “Netaji belongs to the nation” and that’s why they do not want their views on Subhas’s fate to be given any more importance than those of the other Indians and his admirers worldwide. Much as I respect their feelings, I cannot desist myself from reacting to the instigator of a book titled *His Majesty’s opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India’s struggle against Empire*. With all of its 388 pages, this is not exactly a tome, and if you check out the back jacket, you will find a hyperbolic claim: “Finally, an authoritative account of his untimely death in a plane crash will put to rest rumours about the fate of this ‘deathless hero’.”

“Finally” and “authoritative” are much too flashy an adverb and an adjective for an outdated account that’s around 8,000 words long, even after adding lengthy footnotes and a long discourse on Netaji’s legacy. “A life immortal”, the final chapter in writer Prof Sugata Bose’s book, is roughly half the size of this appendix. It is not even an honest summary of a nearly seven-decade-old controversy raging in a country whose people are not known for their sense of history. If the utter lack of details isn’t bothersome, the hackneyed content surely is.

His Majesty’s opponent has spawned many rave reviews and inspired stories, almost all of which are taking pot shots at the subject matter of my book. That it is myth, a conspiracy theory, and all that. I wish someone had fired a cannon ball; it would have been worthwhile in that case to start pounding back. Well, there is no big bang happening because Prof Bose’s much-hyped book is a fizzle so far as the controversy surrounding Netaji’s death is concerned. I am no one to raise a finger so far as Prof Bose’s command of the English language is concerned. I quite admire the way he writes and delivers speeches. But his book is of no consequence in taking the case forward.

I do not blame the reviewers for getting swayed away by the professor’s persona. My case would have been the same had I not known a thing or two which one can’t find either in the book or shimmering anywhere on the bubble of hype around it.

Prof Sugata Bose does come across as a highly credible individual because he is a Harvard university don, a grandnephew of Subhas Bose and is effectively heading the Netaji Research Bureau (NRB) of Kolkata. But no one is telling us that Prof Sugata Bose’s parents were once loyal members of a particular political party chiefly responsible for downgrading Netaji’s legacy. No one is telling us that on the whole the Bose family disapproves of whatever the professor has to say about Netaji’s death. No one is also telling us that the professor’s sister, another mouthpiece for the official version, has propounded one of the most revolting conspiracy theories of our times. And, there is no one to tell us about the openly flung charges of NRB benefitting from the largesse of the Government of India (GoI) engaged in covering up the truth about Bose’s fate.

These are not below the belt barbs but well-entrenched factors in appreciating the case the professor has made out for Bose’s death in Taiwan. The following elucidation will demonstrate that the writer of *His Majesty’s opponent* is by default “On Government of India Service” for he toes the official line so zealously that he ends up glorifying those who betrayed Netaji and those who tried to degrade him. And he doesn’t realize the mistake he has made by throwing stones at others, thinking that only his targets are living in glass houses.

Subhas Chandra Bose’s family is not just about Sugata Bose’s immediate family. His father Dr Sisir Kumar Bose was one among the eight children of Sarat Chandra Bose, the closest person to his younger brother. Sarat and Subhas had 12 more siblings. Elder to Subhas and younger to Sarat was

Suresh Bose, whose maternal grandson Bengal Finance Minister Dr Amit Mitra, who taught in the US previously, is perhaps the most outstanding Bose kin today. Of Sarat and Bivabati's eight children—Ashoke, Amiya, Mira, Sisir, Gita, Roma, Chitra and Subrata—the first three brothers have died. Mira Ray, Gita Biswas, Roma Ray, Chitra Ghosh and their younger brother Subrata Bose live in Kolkata. Subrata, the uncle of Sugata, was a member of the last Lok Sabha. He and his cousins Pradip, Suresh Bose's son who passed away in November 2011 and Supriyo, son of Dwijendra Nath Bose, took keen interest in the Mukherjee Commission's inquiry as deponents.

In all, there are something like 50 close relatives of Subhas Bose scattered across the world today. Everyone knows that Dr Anita Pfaff lives in Germany. Anita's mother Emilie passed away in 1996. The youngest brother of Subhas, Shailesh Chandra Bose, who was his lookalike, died in the late 80s. Shailesh's son Ardhendu used to be a Bombay Dyeing model in the 1970s. As of this writing, the oldest surviving member of the family is over 100-year-old Lalita Bose, widow of Dr Sunil Bose, the second eldest brother of Subhas and India's first cardiologist.

If I can put it in percentage, 98 per cent of all of Netaji's dead and living kin put together rejected the air crash theory. Prof Sugata Bose has edited the facts about his family in his book to give the wrong impression as if his immediate family has been the core of the Bose family close to Subhas. And that the family has agreed with the Government of India.

This is when even the Government of India files from the 1950s onwards are littered with evidence that Subhas Bose's family never accepted his death and that's why the Renkoji ashes could not be brought to India. Two documents will suffice to underline this point. The first one is a letter from Bengal Chief Minister BC Roy telling his friend Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952 that Bose family doesn't want the Renkoji ashes in India.



Sc. 807-NCo/SL (6)A
CHIEF MINISTER

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

50 M. 82. CM

Calcutta.
The 10th March, 1952.
IHR.

My dear Jawaher

57A

Kindly refer to your letter regarding the
ashes of Subhas Bose.

I referred the matter to Sri Asoke Nath
Bose, the eldest son of late Sarat Chandra Bose. He
evidently consulted his people and telephoned to me
yesterday to say that at the present moment they do not
desire to move in the matter, and they also wish that
the matter be not pursued at the present moment. So
I think there is nothing else to be done for the
moment.

Jawaher 1/13
Sec. of R

O (W.M.D.)
ESR

Hon'ble Shri Jawaharlal Nehru,
Prime Minister,
New Delhi.

Yours aff
B. Das

PI

The second document is a 1990 note prepared by then PMO Director Meera Shankar, India's Ambassador to the United States until recently. Here she refers to a letter by Ashis Ray, a first cousin of Prof Sugata Bose and the *Times of India* correspondent in London at present, stating that Emilie did not want the ashes in India. Ray for his own reasons subsequently became a believer in the official version.

PM has also recently received a letter from Shri Ashish Roy, the great grand son of Netaji's eldest brother Sarat Bose, in which he has remarked that if the ashes in Tokyo are indeed those of Netaji's, then they ought to be brought to India with due honour and publicity. But before this is done, it must be incontrovertibly proved that he died as a result of the air crash and that the ashes are his. He has also mentioned that Netaji's wife, Emilie Schenkl Bose, has also expressed the view that the ashes should not be brought back to India.

It is, therefore, apparent that a consensus has not developed in favour of bringing the ashes back to India and there are strong feelings among a section of the public about the facts surrounding the death of Netaji.

In view of this, it would not be appropriate to take steps to bring the ashes back to India.

A draft reply from PM to Shri Shantilal Patel, MP, is placed below. *

Meera Shankar
(Meera Shankar)
Director
23.8.90

JS(R) LCh-24/s
PRL SECY. Why are we then doing
P.M. X - proposal
H.S. 2m



A few months before her death in 1996, Emilie had shown then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee the door after he tried to coax her into signing a paper which said Subhas's ashes were enshrined in Renkoji temple. The entire episode from Emilie's perspective was narrated in an affidavit handed over to the Consulate General of India in Hamburg by Sugata's first cousin Surya Kumar Bose, the eldest son of Sisir's elder brother Amiya Nath Bose, for relay to the Mukherjee Commission.

This moving account of a normally quiet Emilie Schenkl losing her temper when Pranab Mukherjee raised the issue of the ashes is confirmed by the other family members. It is astonishing that Harvard historian Sugata Bose, who was quite close to his grandaunt, should have censored it in his "authoritative account" of his granduncle's death in his book. He opens "A life immortal" by dramatising Emilie's obvious reaction to the 1945 radio announcement of Subhas's death. Later he quotes from another letter to insinuate that she believed in the air crash.

I can hazard a guess as to what could possibly be the motive behind erasing the all the more dramatic happening of 1996 and misrepresenting Emilie's real views. Maybe the professor doesn't want to embarrass his late father's good friend Pranab Mukherjee, and the Government which is known to fund NRB. According to the government figures, the amount sanctioned towards the corpus fund of NRB during 1996-1997 only was Rs 3,00,00,000.

I cannot imagine a grandson of Sarat Bose's having the temerity to overlook his publicly spelt out views, and present them in a way that is tantamount to distortion. He writes that his grandfather accepted "with grief and fortitude" the news of his brother's death when he first heard it in prison. How in the world Prof Bose can possibly leave out what a wizened Sarat told openly to media

afterwards is beyond me:

When the story of (of the air crash) came out, I [Sarat Bose] was in prison. I shall confess that as long as I was in detention, I felt upset. I had not had any materials then to enable me to judge whether the aircrash story was true or not. [1]

Out of prison, Sarat Bose made his own enquiries, in the course of which he received inputs from European and American journalists:

I met a lady journalist, Dr Miss Lily Abegg, representative of the widely-circulated journal, Weltwoch of Switzerland. She came to meet me in an interview at Glyon. In course of her conversation, I gathered that she was in Japan at the time of Japan's collapse in the last world war. She had contacted important and informed British and American sources and that none of them believed in the air crash story or that Netaji was dead. [2]

Prof Sugata Bose spins the excuse that his grandfather died in February 1950, before convincing evidence was collected. To me, this is a case of falsifying facts. Sarat Bose did not need to browse through the edited testimonies of crash survivors years later. Prof Bose himself speaks in the language of Government of India regarding the discrepancies which the passage of time can bring about. Sarat heard it all from the horse's mouth there and then. Sugata Bose is a famous historian; Sarat Bose was an ace lawyer. Just as we can't teach our grandmothers how to suck eggs, Sugata Bose can not claim to have a better understanding of the event than his grandfather. Sarat Bose personally examined the most important witness to Subhas's "death"—Habibur Rahman—and continued to make his assessment public as late as October 1949. I am not aware if some Harvard scientist has devised a technique enabling people to change their mind after they are dead.

After I came out of the prison in 1945, I had the opportunity of talking to Colonel Habibur Rahman of the INA. ...the impression left in my mind that he (Habibur Rahman) had orders from his chief (Netaji) to come out with that story. As a man and officer of the INA, Colonel Habibur...was sterling gold and...the only conclusion I could come to was that he had orders from his chief to keep his whereabouts a closely guarded secret. [3]

All these quotations appear in big fine print in Sarat Bose's own newspaper the *Nation*. He was so dead sure that his brother was alive, and in China, that he had it splashed on the page one after briefing an American journalist.

Sugata Bose provides a quotation in "A life immortal" from a letter by Sisir Bose to his mother Bivabati consoling her on Subhas's "death". For a long time Subhas had lived with Sarat Bose, so obviously the views of his affectionate sister-in-law, who outlived her husband, have a bearing on the issue. The effect that this quote creates is far from the reality. I don't know whether Sugata ever saw his grandmother or not, but his uncle Subrata Bose surely knows what his mother thought. He told me that at the time of her death one of his mother's last wish was to see Subhas. I am sure Bivabati's daughters will vouch for it, for all of them have the same views as Subrata and their late brothers—except Sisir.

Prof Bose has given his late pediatrician father Dr Sisir Kumar Bose a larger-than-life image. That is quite natural for a son to do, but it is very conceited of him to project Sisir Bose's pro-air crash views as if they were some sort of last word on the issue. The professor writes that after Sarat Bose's death, Sisir studied all evidence, carried out what he calls "investigations" in Japan and Taiwan and reached a conclusion. To that I can add what Sisir stated in his last interview to the *Times of India*: "All evidence indicates that he died in the air crash. Anything to the contrary is not based on evidence." [4]

The narrative in the professor's book precludes any references to Sisir's other brothers, especially Amiya Nath Bose but for whose seminal work there would be no Netaji Research Bureau today. You see him with Subhas and Emilie in the following picture taken in Badgastein in December 1937.



Amiya also made his own enquiries about his uncle's disappearance. I leave it to your discretion whether to rely on this London-educated barrister's wisdom or that of a child specialist. Amiya, who was a lawmaker and high commissioner during the 1960s and the 1970s, came to contest the Taipei death story like his father and all the siblings, except Sisir. He did so publicly till his death in 1996. For instance, brothers Ashoke, Amiya and Subrata wrote to Prime Minister VP Singh in May 1990 that

during the lifetime of our youngest uncle late Shailesh Chandra Bose, a statement signed by him and all sons of every one of Netaji's brothers was issued to the Press at Calcutta stating that the "ashes" at Renkoji temple were not the "ashes of Netaji".

They termed any attempt to bring the Renkoji remains to India and fob them off to the people of India as Netaji's ashes as "an act of sacrilege".

finally decided that the story of Netaji's death in an air crash cannot be accepted as conclusive.

We are firmly of the view that to bring the 'ashes' now lying in the Renkoji Temple in Tokyo to India as 'ashes' of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose will be an act of sacrilege, which should not be allowed by the people and Government of India.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Ashoke Nath Bose
(ASHOKE NATH BOSE)
Amiya Nath Bose
(AMIYA NATH BOSE)
Subrata Bose
(SUBRATA BOSE)

ABF

Interestingly, in his 27 January 1996 letter to then Leader of Opposition Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Amiya disclosed in Sisir's and his presence Radha Binod Pal had told Sarat Bose about an American intelligence report dismissing the air crash story.



Dear Sri Atalji,

I am writing to you today about a matter which concerns not only the Bose family but the entire people of India.

In September 1946, Dr Radhabinode Pal, then a member of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, informed my father in my presence as well as others including my brother Sisir Bose, that according to an American Intelligence Report, which was shown to him by the American Judge of the Tribunal, Subhas Chandra Bose did not die in any air crash, but had safely reached Manchuria in the month of August 1945. On 23 January 1947, addressing a public meeting at the

In contrast to Amiya's frank demeanour, Sisir was not very forthcoming in making his case. Nor did he appear before any of the official inquiries set up by the Government and enlighten them with his great discoveries that have given the professor the courage to allude that the findings of a former Congress party MLA carry more weight than that of the Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry.

Dr Sisir Bose did not put his money where his mouth was; his own siblings said that in front of media in 2005. After the Mukherjee Commission was set up in 1999, it was expected of him and the Harvard professor to file affidavits as other family members did and help the commission and the nation in overcoming the controversy. When Sisir did not, the commission summoned him. He refused to appear. The nephew showed no inclination to cooperate with the inquiry into his uncle's fate. "Since the end of World War II in August 1945 till today I have not received any direct information from him (Netaji) or about him," he wrote to the commission on 22 September 2000 and made this eye-opening admission. "I have no personal knowledge as to the issues referred to the commission. I am therefore not competent to depose in this matter." [5]

The motive for Dr Sisir Bose in backing the official line on the sidelines, before media and inspired elements, has been explained in most uncharitable words by his own relatives as well researchers in private as well as publicly. Ever since Subhas and then his brother Sarat were ousted from the Congress, the Bose family in general and Sarat Bose family in particular has come to detest the grand old party. Dr Sisir Bose, in a sense, became the black sheep of the family by joining it and becoming an MLA on the Congress ticket.

In April 1999 a rumour circulated in Kolkata that Sisir Bose would be given an official position in the new commission. This sent tempers soaring high. "I will file a case in court if Dr Sisir Bose is included in the probe panel," Dr Purabi Roy foamed at mouth as she spoke to the *Pioneer*. "He is making money by trying to prove to the world that Netaji died in the air crash at Taihoku." [6]

It wasn't just Sisir, his wife Krishna Bose, a Congress MP who shifted her loyalties to the Trinamool Congress as the Congress faced a rout in Bengal, implored the Mukherjee Commission to excuse her "from any personal appearance as a witness". She preached a former Supreme Court judge that he should study "the relevant primary evidence". [7]

The commission also summoned Sugata Bose to make an appearance so that he could spell out his stand. The professor was busy with his work in America, so the commission requested him "to send an affidavit duly sworn by him in respect of his contention that there is strong evidence that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was tragically killed in the aircrash in Taipei on 18th August, 1945 and that

there is absolutely no evidence that Netaji was spotted in a variety of places subsequent to that day". [8]

Sugata never turned up and nor did he ever file any affidavit detailing his case for Netaji's death in Taipei. What would have happened if he had can be gauged from the record of the examination of someone associated with him. Netaji Research Bureau treasurer Suman Chattopadhyay, a stylish senior journalist we often get to see on TV, penned some articles supporting the NRB-GoI view around the time the commission was formed. He even prejudged the inquiry in one such piece: "It will be a sheer idiocy to even say that the findings of the third commission of inquiry would be different of the earlier two commissions [sic] appointed to solve the mystery of disappearance of Netaji." [9]

It was assumed that such a knowledgeable man must have based his writings on something solid. Summons for appearance before the commission were served on him by registered post, but he had no time to respond to the commission's office situated in the heart of Kolkata. Justice Mukherjee stated on 28 September 2000 that "Chattopadhyay has neither presented himself before the commission nor sent any communication explaining his failure to appear". Issuing fresh summons, he pressed that if Chattopadhyay failed to appear "this time as well" without any justifiable reason, "appropriate legal action" would be taken against him. Chattopadhyay finally showed up on November 23. All those who were present there remember how he took the commission on an ego-trip:

For the information of the commission, I like to mention that I am the translator of Netaji's work from English to Bengali published by Ananda publishers. Currently, I am the treasurer of the Netaji Research Bureau. I had the privilege of travelling to various places including Tokyo, twice with then Prime Minister [Narasimha Rao]. During one of such visits, I took off time from my official assignment to visit the [Renkoji] temple to see for myself what was happening there. [10]

Justice Mukherjee interrupted this pompous speech to ask Chattopadhyay if his faith in the crash story stemmed merely from the reports of Shah Nawaz and GD Khosla.

Chattopadhyay responded: "As I told you, I am associated with the job for quite some time now. I tried to do my own research. It is a fact that I have not been able to get any fundamental evidence, but I have been trying to collate all the evidence that have been recorded already in the various forms." [11]

Justice Mukherjee wanted substance, so he put to Chattopadhyay if he had "any documentary evidence" to back his case. "I don't have," was the answer he got.

Thereafter, a counsel drew Chattopadhyay's attention to one of his articles: "You have written that John Figges who was the head of the British intelligence agency at Mountbatten's headquarters conducted an inquiry into the plane crash... and came to the conclusion in his report that Netaji expired in that air crash. Do you have any copy of the said report?"

"I don't have any copy of such report. I am told that the report is in the India Office Library in London and I think it is now available for anyone."

"Did you yourself see the report?"

"No."

"In the article you have mentioned that in 1945 the Government of India deputed two teams of representatives headed by Finney and Davies to Saigon and Taipei and they came back and submitted their reports. Do you have a copy of that report?"

"No. I don't have. These are available in the office of Government of India."

"Have you seen the report?"

"[I] Have seen the gist of the report."

"Gist prepared by whom?"

"Prepared by biographers and scholars." [12]

The counsel felt irritated. "You have written the articles on the basis of this type of evidence?!" he poked Chattopadhyay. Shaken, the journalist divulged that the moving force behind his belief was information given by Pranab Mukherjee. I don't know why all of this comes around to this man.

After Justice Mukherjee's report was made public, Sugata Bose's family went hammer and tongs

against him. The tirade continues in *His Majesty's opponent*.

Back in May 2006, in a well-orchestrated media blitz, Krishna Bose and her children targeted Mukherjee. Krishna Bose's editorial opinion in the *Times of India* countered the commission's finding and asserted that "Netaji's remains were received in Tokyo by his trusted colleagues SA Ayer and Ramamurti". Ahem! "The Taiwanese authorities have always said they could not provide any documentation of that period." [13] To whom did they tell this to?

Prof Sugata Bose's write-up in the *Indian Express* on May 21—"The mortal end of a deathless hero"—attempted to beguile the readers into accepting a seemingly impartial view of a Harvard don and a representative of the Bose family. But what the paper described—on the basis of the professor's piece—as "compelling facts" were selective tit-bits lifted from some readily available sources. The same pattern more or less is there in the book. Dishing them out, the professor pontificated in the *Express* article that "there is a good deal of pertinent documentary evidence regarding Netaji's mortal end". [14]

A former judge of Supreme Court of India would have known better what constituted evidence. Especially, if he had studied the records of complete, on-oath depositions of Japanese and Indian witnesses to the events in 1945, examined the living ones and scoured through voluminous official records consigned to the Government of India's vaults as classified material, not accessible from the Harvard University library.

At the end of his *Express* piece, Professor Bose used the greatest stratagem available to naysayers to block the voice of truth seekers in this case. The Netaji mystery, Prof Bose wrote, "has been mercilessly exploited by a handful of people to make all sorts of fraudulent claims". [15] *His Majesty's opponent* uses it again, much to the delight of some of the reviewers mesmerized by the writer's credentials—the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs, Harvard University. Here too the professor makes a sweeping remark that the widespread disbelief in Bose's death in 1945 was misused by "a handful of people" to "advance their own interests". In one swoop, he questions the motives of numerous eminent people, including great historian Dr RC Majumdar, whom the UNESCO had entrusted with its compilation of world history, and several members of his family, beginning with his own grandfather.

Sorry to be bursting the bubble, people! Celebrated writer Nirad C Chaudhury, who was at one point of time secretary to Sarat Bose and whose niece married one of his sons in 1957, held up a mirror to those claiming they were celebrating Netaji's life with no ulterior motive. In 1996 Chaudhury told an *Asian Age* correspondent at his residence in Oxford that Subhas Bose had become "a good business preposition" for a section of his family. He minced no words in identifying which section it was. It was the one which included his niece Krishna:

The likes of Sisir Bose cannot shed new light on Netaji's life. All they can do is encash on their rangakaka [uncle] and claim that they have been an inseparable part of his struggle. [16]

I can't leave out Sugata's sister Sharmila, who had a go with her op-ed article "Death by war" in the *Telegraph* on 28 May 2006. Sharmila too conjured up a narrative on a grossly faulty premise, quite similar to her brother's. She began with recalling her grandfather Sarat Bose's initial reaction to the news of Subhas's death and, building on this, claimed that since Sarat Bose never got the opportunity to hear the testimony of the survivors of the aircrash before his death, he could not "bring his brilliant barrister's mind to the considerable and consistent evidence regarding the tragedy".

In case Sharmila's pediatrician father did not tell her, she could have asked her dad's elder brother whether or not her grandfather was able to examine anyone who claimed to have a direct knowledge of Bose's reported death or the claim of his being alive somewhere. Being a barrister himself, Amiya Nath Bose knew better all the more. The following is what he mentioned to Prime Minister VP Singh

in his joint letter with brothers Ashoke and Subrata:

In August 1946, General Zaman Kiani, Col Habibur Rahman and Col Gulzara Singh, all top-ranking officers of the INA, spent a fortnight at our Woodburn Park residence. ...Our father Sarat Chandra Bose questioned Col Habibur Rahman in detail and rejected his version of the alleged air crash and Netaji's death.

Sarat Bose did examine Habibur Rahman, the main man of the air crash story. How can two highly gifted, top-ranking academic grandchildren of Sarat Bose gloss over what is known to their entire extended family?

Referring to the mystery, Sharmila wrote that there was “no excuse” for the Indian subcontinent “to be held hostage to the endless conspiratorial fantasies”. [17]

Oh boy! Some time back I googled “conspiratorial fantasies” and somehow landed on a Pakistani defence forum where Sharmila Bose was being showered with praises. On the Indian forums that I later visited she was being savaged. Apparently she had come up with some fanciful ideas about the Bangladesh liberation war. I gathered from a quick read that at one place she painted in good light a man known to us as the “Butcher of Bangladesh”. Then she went on to question the charges of mass rapes and other atrocities perpetrated by the Pakistani army, thereby accusing the Bangladeshis and the Indians of bloating the figures. I am not sure how the people of the subcontinent would take it, but in the West, where Sharmila Bose is based, any attempt to lower the magnitude of war crimes invites instant censure. They don’t brook any argument there.

Recently the *Times of India* carried an interview with Sharmila Bose. Here she urged “India to set an example in openness to the region”. What she implied was that there should be comprehensive declassification of Indian records pertaining to the 1971 war so that her conspiracy theories can get into prominence. Responding to a question, she characterized the Bangladesh freedom war, “a brutal struggle for power” whose “no warring party”, including India, “is in a position to take the moral high ground”. In other words, she wants us to feel that the Pakistani leadership of that time wasn’t as in the wrong as we, the Bangladeshis and the right-thinking Pakistanis have made them out to be. “India’s role [in Bangladesh freedom war] can only be properly assessed if official documents from 40 years ago are made public....” [19]

I am all with Sharmila Bose so far as declassification in general is concerned. I myself have secured release of some secret Indian Cabinet and Nixon administration records on the 1971 war under the RTI and Mandatory Declassification Review. But I cannot fathom why at no point of time has Sharmila Bose or her brother, or their mum, or their know-all late father uttered a single word about the crying need to declassify dozens of classified files on Subhas Bose being maintained by the Government of India? Sugata Bose doesn’t make any allusion to this inexcusable secrecy in his “well-researched” book. What sort of academics are these people? They are associated with the finest academic institutions in the US and the UK, where transparency and declassification are the buzzwords, and yet there’s no inclination on their part to seek disclosure of secret records concerning their own granduncle?

This lengthy backgrounder serves to give you an idea about the milieu from which the writer of *His Majesty’s opponent* comes and the context of his approach towards the issue of Subhas Bose’s disputed death. This will also enable you to better appreciate the following dissection of the “evidence” he has cited in “A life immortal”.

Prof Bose begins filling the space on page 306 of the chapter with the account given by SA Ayer: How he heard with doubts the news of Bose’s death and how he received “Bose’s” ashes in Tokyo in the company of Ramamurti, who has also been given considerable importance by the professor. The whole account has been clobbered together with such a finesse that not so informed readers, especially foreigners, would take it for gospel.

The problem is that this gospel doesn’t come from saints. Since it comes from sinners, it can’t be gospel. SA Ayer, Ramamurti have been exposed in the official files as the plunderers of the INA

treasure and personal property of Subhas Bose. By placing too much reliance on such characters, the professor proves the shallowness of his research and ulterior motives at the bottom of it. The charges of these individuals appropriating the INA property were levelled by many people over the years, so the excuse that all this was official secret hitherto won't wash. The whole thing was so blatant that even Shah Nawaz Khan had to refer to it in his report. A member of the Bose family should have been quite sensitive to it, but I suppose Prof Sugata Bose, as well as his mother, think very highly of late SA Ayer and Ramamurti. On the backcover of *His Majesty's opponent* one of the laudatory editorial reviews has been attributed to Arjun Appadurai of the New York University.

Prof Appadurai does not teach history and his interest and expertise concerning Subhas Bose is mainly due to personal reasons as the son of late SA Ayer. The senior Ayer was surely a close aide of Bose at one point of time, but post-1945 he worshipped the ground Nehru walked on—as evidenced by his own unabashed proclamation before the Khosla Commission:

21-1-1971.

1732

Mr. Mazumdar: Please excuse me asking you something of a personal question. When you first met Jawaharlal Nehru who came along to pay visit to you at the place where you were staying, how did you greet Jawaharlal Nehru, kindly describe before the Commission.



Mr. Iyer: I bowed to him and I touched the ground.

Mr. Mazumdar: You were not admonished by somebody that you should not have done so?

Mr. Iyer: I was not falling on his feet. I bowed to him, I touched the ground that was my idea of respecting him.

It takes one to know one. Prof Bose's father also admired Nehru a lot.

Elsewhere in the book, the professor has indicated his proximity to Ramamurti's nephew, son of Jaya Murti. He would have done it better to examine Murti junior on the issue of INA treasure handed over to his uncle, which then vanished and next we know from various accounts that Ramamurti and J Murti have struck it rich.

On pages 307-308, the professor reproduces the account of Bose's death made by Habibur Rahman. May I ask what is the big deal in quoting from the Shah Nawaz Committee report? Where is the additional information, where is the analysis? This account of Rahman, like his others before the investigating officers, adds to the contradictions he couldn't have made if the events described by him had indeed taken place. For example, the professor writes that "Bose" gave his last testament to Rahman at the hospital before his death.

But in the statement that Rahman wrote in Taiwan just two days after the so-called crash and later handed over to SA Ayer, this took place several hours earlier, near the wreck of the plane at a time when, according to the professor's book, Rahman had probably passed out. When Rahman appeared before the committee, he remembered everything down to its minute details so the question of misplacing such a heart-wrenching moment—if it had indeed happened—did not arise.

On page 310, Prof Bose says public reception to INA heroes from November 1945 onwards startled the British and they came to suspect that Bose was alive. However, an inquiry headed by

Finney “reached definite conclusion” that he had died. This he has sourced to Shah Nawaz’s report to play it safe so that if it comes to that, the blame can be shifted on others. So where is the application of a great mind of the Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs?

The dossier of selected reports sent by the Intelligence Bureau to the Shah Nawaz Committee contained three reports Philip Finney had sent from Bangkok. The first was dated 5 October 1945. Its very vintage belies the professorial whim that the British were led to believe that Bose was alive only after the INA trials began. This report was based on the view of two informants. Finney wrote that one informant was of the view that Bose was on his way to Tokyo and that this was corroborated by the statement of General Isoda. But he also added that Bose had been trying to persuade the Japanese to allow him to go to Moscow since October 1944. This piece of information defeats another of the professor’s claim—which is also the view of the Government of India—that the “inclination” on the part of Subhas to go to Russia first manifested in May 1945.

Towards the end of his report, Finney wrote that the possibility of Bose being alive at that time could not be ruled out in view of his intention to escape to Russia. I have already demonstrated in chapter “The search for Bose files” that the IB doctored this report so that the official line that Bose had died in 1945 could be substantiated. Government men Shah Nawaz Khan and GD Khosla supported the authorities in boosting this impression; and now we have Prof Bose doing the same even though he is aware of File No INA 273 kept at the National Archives in New Delhi. This file contains a copy of Finney’s report in full.

Finney’s second report was dated 10 November 1945. It added further little information received since Finney’s previous note. It said nothing to approve the air crash theory and only dwelt on the information provided by a source. The third report of November 12 outlined the information given by a Japanese interpreter who had attended a confidential conference where Isoda was speaking about sending Bose to the Russians. The report falsified Isoda’s previous statement that Bose was going to Tokyo.

I don’t know how these three reports put together can give any impartial person the idea that Finney reached a “definite conclusion” about Bose’s death. Finney’s name also appears on an intelligence record in INA 273 in a summary of information on record. This summary was prepared for a meeting to be attended by Finney. If Finney had firmly concluded in November 1945 that Bose was dead, why was he going to attend this meeting in April 1946? To exorcise Bose’s ghost?

Prof Sugata Bose is clearly aware of this record as he has quoted from it. And like GD Khosla, he has tried to undervalue it by quoting one part of it where some unsubstantiated intelligence report about Nehru receiving a letter from Bose in Russia has been discussed. Sugata characterised it as a “rumour” which is not fair. One can excuse a commission of inquiry for not acting on intelligence reports because they are inadmissible in evidence, unless someone associated with them comes and testifies. But researchers and journalists cannot and should not dismiss intelligence reports. Interestingly, while trying to support the official view based on doctored and selected intelligence reports, GD Khosla, ended up making a most valid remark about the war-time intelligence reports about Bose’s death.

These documents were prepared officially by an agency directed to find out the truth and not serve a partisan cause or purpose, nor to make a tendentious report. The Government of India and the Army authorities wanted to know what had happened, and deputed their trusted and reliable officers to enquire, to interrogate individuals and submit the conclusions of their investigation. These officers made direct inquiries, not lending a credulous ear to rumour and gossip. The officers knew that they would be judged by the measure of their competence and honesty in conducting the business entrusted to them. They did not want to, indeed they did not dare to, invent sensational, unwarranted or unsupported stories of deep intrigues, miraculous escapes and fantastic encounters. [20]

So it would have been better if Sugata Bose had also touched upon the report’s other explosive content—that Rahman and others had not been truthful and Russian diplomats were giving hints that Bose was in the USSR when there was no reason for them to “bring Bose into fabricated stories”—

and especially its conclusion that “Taihoku, Congress and Russian representatives in Tehran and Kabul are the most important objectives in this case as it stands now”. If this is where the case stood in April 1946, how could one accept that Finney had in October 1945 uncovered convincing evidence of Bose’s death?

The British suspicions had nothing to do with whatever happened in India after the INA men and women were brought back. From the time the news of Bose’s death was announced and the manner it was released made the British suspicious at the level of the Viceroy. Wavell’s personal diary and his comment that he thought Bose had probably escaped was made public in a book form several years ago. I am sure a copy must be available at the Harvard University library.

Professor Bose regrets that the mystery did not end even after the July 1946 inquiry of Colonel JG Figges confirmed Bose’s death. Yes Figges does write that in his report after speaking to some Japanese and his friend Ramamurti, but there are some hiccups in accepting his finding as final.

The need for this inquiry in Japan arose because Finney and other officers in India, who had carried out the most detailed investigation, were not sure of Bose’s death. In any case, if one takes a look at the copy of Figges’ report, one finds pieces of information countering the other in different reports. For instance, according to this report, Dr Tsuruta issued a death certificate for Bose in Taiwan. But on page 313 of his book Sugata Bose states that it was Dr Yoshimi who, according to his statement to Captain Alfred Raymond Turner in October 1946, issued the same. The professor writes that this certificate was not found and spares his readers of the vital details as to why the death certificate for a VIP had vanished when the records concerning an ordinary soldier dying at around the same time were found intact?

The professor has tried to whitewash the numerous discrepancies in the so-called eyewitness accounts before the Shah Nawaz Committee insisting, just as Government of India does, that they were “minor” and were due to eleven-year gap. What eleven years? The contradictions were there in the first year itself. How could the doctors, who were to remember minute details for decades afterwards, make contradictory claims about Bose’s death certificate in 1946? The answer was later uncovered: None of them ever issued any certificate for Bose; they merely put their signatures on papers concerning the death of a Japanese soldier whose body was passed as that of Bose’s.

Prof Sugata Bose teaches in a top American university and if he had tried a little he could have easily accessed a declassified US army dossier on Bose. My friends and I did so sitting in New Delhi. It has Figges’s July 1946 report and other American intelligence reports of 1945 based on the interrogation of Habibur Rahman. There is also the all-important May 1946 assessment made by the Pentagon and State Department. The higher-ups did not find Rahman’s version conclusive. They said “there is no direct evidence of Bose’s death”. I do not know about the reviewers, but I am going to place my trust in the word of State Department and the Pentagon. Just because a professor can play with words it doesn’t mean he one ups the US Government.

More importantly, Ramamurti’s pal Figges figures in official Indian records as one of the members of “the gang” which looted the INA treasure. Jaya Murti himself admitted before the Shah Nawaz Committee that Figges wanted them to take up British nationality—something that a secret GOI record confirms. [21] This sort of association is better explained by the idiom “birds of same feather flock together”. In Hindi there’s a better substitute which when translated implies that two thieves are cousins by virtue of their being in the same profession. I put it to you my dear reader: Will you believe the words of those dacoits? Isn’t obvious that all of them—the father of professor’s friend Arjun Adurapai, the father and uncle of his acquaintance Anand J Murti and the British officer whose report he regards credible—stood to gain from the continuation of the official version that Bose died following the crash and the treasure was burnt with the plane?

Prof Bose has made one or two arguments that I gather have been found convincing by those who

have little idea how deep the rabbit hole goes. The first of which is discussed on page 313 of the professor's book. It is to the effect that in 1946 Indian journalist Harin Shah visited Taipei in 1946 and collected evidence of Bose's death. The centrepiece of his evidence was the account given by nurse Tsan Pi Sha who had taken care of dying Bose.

I can see why Sugata Bose is giving importance to Harin Shah. He was not an ordinary journalist, but editor of the official journal of an organisation affiliated to the Congress party. Shah gathered evidence which he thought proved Bose's death but actually blasted the official version.

The professor should have told his readers that this journalist narrated his story under his own name ten years after he visited Taipei. To make it appear credible, he created at least two fictitious characters, one of which was nurse Tsan Pi Sha. *His Majesty's opponent* has infused life into this figment of Shah's imagination. Too bad that Her Majesty's Government had carried out an investigation in Taipei in 1956 with the assistance of the Taiwan government and figured out that there was no proof evidencing the existence of this nurse.

This British/Taiwanese report was given to the Government of India and was hushed up. It was shown to GD Khosla who did the same, even after his personally finding out in Taiwan about the factitiousness of some of the characters in Harin Shah's tale. And looking at the "A life immortal" and its footnotes, I can't find any reference to this report, now available at the National Archives in Kew. How can a "well-researched" study undertaken by a Harvard professor overlook a record so important that even the Lord Chancellor should have mentioned it in his letter to a House of Lords member who helped Justice Mukherjee?

Two records from a secret government file would be sufficient to prove the fictitious origin of nurse Tsan Pi Sha. It so happened that Shah Nawaz himself knew that no nurse by that name was anywhere around when "Bose" died at Namon hospital. On 23 May 1956 Shah Nawaz wrote a secret letter to AK Dar, the pointman for his committee's inquiry in Japan, giving the names of some people he wanted as witness. From the evidence of Dr Yoshimi—whose bona fides Sugata Bose doesn't question—Shah Nawaz named four nurses who were there at the hospital in August 1945.

SHAH NAWAZ KHAN, M.P., V.I.C.
Chairman, Netaji Enquiry Committee, ~~100~~ (150) 126
No. PS/56/NEC.



EMBASSY OF INDIA IN JAPAN
TOKYO
Dated the 23rd May 1956.

My dear Dar,

In addition to the list of witnesses already sent to you, we would like to examine the following, for whom the Japanese Foreign Office may please be approached to make them available for examination by the Committee:-

(1) Lt. General Isayama, Chief of General Staff, Formosa Army in 1945.

(2) Buddhist Priest at Taihoku who is reported to have held the funeral ceremony [of] Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at Taihoku in August 1945.

(3) Kazuo Mitsui (Address: No. 15, Nishihata-cho, Wakamatsu City, Fukuoka-Ken), a soldier at Taihoku in August 1945, who claims to be present at the time of death of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

From the evidence of Dr. Yoshimi, names of the Japanese nurses which were not available to us when I wrote to you on the 11th May, are now available. These are:-

(4) Nakano, Ohama, Tomimoto and Nishimoto.

These names may kindly be communicated to the Japanese Foreign Office for tracing them.

Yours sincerely,

(SHAH NAWAZ KHAN)

Shri A.K. Dar,
First Secretary,
Indian Embassy,
Tokyo.

These names were then forwarded to the Japanese foreign ministry by Dar. And as you can see, there was no Tsan Pi Sha even on Yoshimi's list.

As item (3) in my letter of May 14th we have requested for the attendance of Japanese nurses who were on duty in the Nannan Hospital, Taihoku, Taiwan when Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was reportedly brought there. Dr. Yoshimi has now informed the Committee of the names of these nurses. The names as given are :-

- (a) Nakano,
- (b) Ohama,
- (c) Tomimoto, and
- (d) Hishimoto.

I would be grateful if you could kindly make arrangements for the persons listed above to meet the Commission at mutual convenience.

Yours sincerely,

A.K.Dar
(A.K.Dar)

Mr. Hisaji Hattori,
Chief of the 4th Section,
Asian Affairs Bureau,
Gaimusho, Tokyo.



When the back jacket of a book touts that the inside contains an “authoritative” account, one expects some erudite exposition. But how come is Prof Sugata’s version “authoritative” when all he has done is to serve a mishmash of known knowns?

He has mentioned on page 315 that the “most compelling evidence” of Bose’s death came from the testimony of interpreter Juichi Nakamura who talked to a badly burnt Bose in Taipei. The professor also quotes from the testimony of Dr Yoshimi that Nakamura was a civil government official.

There are good reasons to think that Nakamura’s evidence to the Shah Nawaz Committee can’t be taken on its face value. One, his case is no different than the other Japanese who kept repeating the official version in their national interest. Their national interest was not going to be served by causing furore in India, USSR, the UK and elsewhere by stating that they had misled the Allies and had actually helped a possible “war criminal” escape towards the Soviet Union.

Two, Nakamura was not properly introduced by Shah Nawaz and Dr Yoshimi. He was, as Habibur Rahman identified him in his deposition before the committee, someone who “belonged to intelligence or security service”. Now isn’t that somewhat different from the innocuous sounding phrase “civil government official”?

There is a scene in classic movie *All the President’s men*. The Watergate burglars are in the courtroom and Bob Woodward, played by Robert Redford, taxes his ears as the judge asks them to introduce themselves and state their professions. One says he is a “security consultant”. The judge asks, “Where?” and he replies: “Government...recently retired.” “Where in the government?” the judge wants exact details. He speaks in a muted voice, “Central Intelligence Agency”. “Where?” says the judge, startled. “The CIA,” the man says. The camera zooms in to capture Woodward’s astonishment. Rare are the occasions when a former spy decides to spill the beans. In India the most outstanding example of someone talking facts was of former IB Joint Director Maloy Krishna Dhar and his treasure trove of a book *Open secrets*. For most part, intelligence operatives, even when they have long retired, talk only the official version or something that has been sanitised by the

government. So where was Nakamura exactly placed?

The Shah Nawaz's report—which the professor repeatedly cites as if it's a holy scripture—claims that Nakamura appeared before the committee on his own violation on 30 May 1956 in response to a newspaper notice. The Government of India files that I have accessed give no such indication. On the other hand, there is a secret letter dated 18 April 1956 through which TN Kaul is telling Ambassador BR Sen to request the Japanese foreign office to ensure the presence of Japanese witnesses. The attached list names Nakamura. The description next to his name is inspired by Habibur Rahman's evidence before the committee on 9 April 1956. The next we know is that this former intelligence officer travels 1,200 km to tender his evidence before the committee in Tokyo. Can we rule out the possibility of his being propped up to support the official view?

Four, according to the record of Nakamura's evidence recorded on 30.5.1956 at 12.45pm in Tokyo by the Shah Nawaz Committee—the “full text” of which is with the professor as claimed by him in footnotes 26 and 27—the interpreter clearly states that when he reached hospital Dr Yoshimi identified a badly burnt man to him as Chandra Bose.

hospital. (I left for the hospital. On arrival there, I was taken inside by a military soldier. When I entered the room, I saw Captain Yoshimi, the Chief Medical Officer of the Hospital and he told me that the person who was lying on the bed was His Excellency Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The name of the hospital was PI Nammon Rikugun Byoin (Nammon means South gate). The room in which Netaji was lying

But Dr Yoshimi told the BBC for its documentary “Enemy of Empire” in the 1990s that he did not know who the burnt man was until Nakamura told him so. “After he died, I was told by the interpreter Nakamura that it was Chandra Bose” were his words. Habibur Rahman, to add to that, told the committee that Bose was barely conscious after he was brought to hospital and soon slipped into coma. And yet Prof Bose claims that Nakamura still managed to talk to the comatose patient of Dr Yoshimi. Which researcher in the world would describe such evidence as “most compelling”?

In his numerous media interviews after the release of his book, Prof Bose went around trumpeting that “contrary to doubts raised about his death, historical evidence indicates that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose died in an air crash”. [22] What is this “historical evidence”? Shah Nawaz’s “made to order” report?!

During a chat on the *Rediff.com*, Sugata Bose was asked why there was so much “secrecy surrounding Netaji”. He ducked it by answering that “we should pay less attention to myths and mysteries, and concentrate more on his life and work from which there is a lot to learn”. [23] Speaking to the *Economic Times*, he said, “I think his life and work is more important and fascinating and it should be before the reading public, especially those belonging to the younger generation.” [24] Now, believe me you, when I read this, my mind was transported to a newsitem from 1980. It was when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had launched the first volume of the *Collected works of Netaji* edited by Dr Sisir Bose. She said, and I find some echo of hers in the professor’s statements, that Bose’s name was being “misused for political purposes by some people” she wouldn’t identify.

The PM added that “Netaji should be an inspiration to the younger generation” and complimented Sisir Bose for his compilation. The government-approved Khosla Commission report had already inspired the youth by calling Bose a puppet of the Japanese.

PM feels Netaji's name being misused

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said on Friday it was sad that the name of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was used for political purposes by some people, reports UNI.

Such misuse of name would not do any good to any one, Mrs Gandhi said while releasing the first volume of 'Collected Works of Netaji'.

Mrs Gandhi said Netaji has a very special place in the history of India and no body ever doubted his patriotism and emotional involvement in the freedom struggle.

Netaji should be an inspiration to the younger generation. His courage, perseverance and determination were examples for all time, she said.

Congratulating the Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta, for bringing out the volume, she called for developing a sense of history. Netaji's awareness of the needs of the hour and his sense of history made what he was, she said.

The first volume of the 10-volume book in English contains Netaji's unfinished autobiography, a collection of his letters and contemporary documents. It has been edited by his nephew, Dr Sisir K Bose.

If you are still wondering exactly what does "authoritative" in the "authoritative account" of Sugata Bose mean, here is the right context. According to the Webster's dictionary, "authoritative" means "having or proceeding from authority". Since "authority" also means "government", what it really connotes is that the version offered by the professor is that of the Government of India and that makes it "authoritative". The blurb writer is right, after all. It is perfectly all right to back the government of one's own country. I wholeheartedly support the stand of my Government on almost every issue of present and past. But on the Netaji mystery there is a major trust deficit.

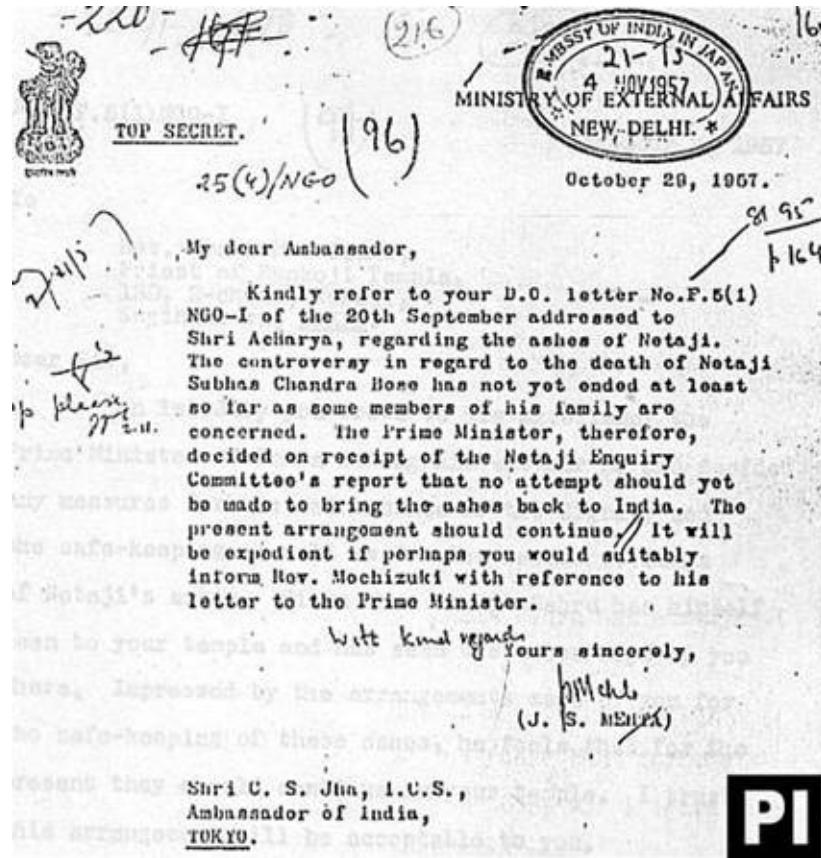
It is only when the professor covers the events of beyond 1947 that one realizes whose version he is amplifying. He writes that in 1951 SA Ayer met the crash survivors in Japan and on his return gave a report to Nehru. He feels sad that despite the Prime Minister's presenting this report to Parliament, there was a "widespread refusal" to accept Bose's death. We should be happy that the people did not agree with the treasure hunter's findings. Because Ayer's surreptitious visit to Japan, according to the records the Government of India refuses to share with the people, was essentially to cover his tracks and "divide the loot"—as then head of Indian Mission in Tokyo puts it.

Ayer's report placed before Parliament was its doctored version. It had been divested of the references to Bose's plan to escape towards the USSR and the Japanese assurance of help.

Then Sugata Bose asserts that Nehru formed the Shah Nawaz Committee in deference to public demands to take what he calls "a comprehensive look at all the evidence". As a grandnephew of Suresh Bose, Sugata Bose should have known that the committee was set up by the Government only after they were confronted with the prospects of a civil society inquiry headed by Justice Radha Binod Pal. The classified notes discussed in the chapter "Big brother watching" support the long-standing allegations that Shah Nawaz's inquiry was initiated with a view to meeting certain predetermined objectives.

The professor could have been oblivious to the secret records, but not to the allegations. Yet, by not paying any heed to them, and supporting the government line without demur, he shows where his heart lies.

The professor lauds the Shah Nawaz Committee's recommendation that the Renkoji ashes be brought to India and is disappointed that the Government failed to follow it up. He doesn't tell why. The Bose family refused to have them in India and the Government had no option but to let them where they were. Sometimes you need a secret report to confirm something that is a matter of public knowledge. The following 1957 Top Secret letter written by Joint Secretary JS Mehta to CS Jha, the Indian Ambassador in Japan, reiterates that Bose family did not share the government view about his death.



PI

Sugata Bose also joins the league of some extraordinary men—Jawaharlal Nehru, his minister Shah Nawaz, his friend GD Khosla and his ardent follower Shivraj Patil—in branding his own granduncle Suresh Bose a liar. All on the basis of a note created fraudulently by the government nominee on the committee. Blood is usually thicker than water, but political inclinations often dilute family ties. Sugata Bose should have known better that Suresh Bose had no need to change his mind about Subhas Bose's assumed death after June 1956, as this "injustice league" propagated throughout the years. From the day one to his last, Suresh shared his elder brother's, Sugata's grandfather's, views about their younger brother's disappearance.

A few years ago Chandrachur and I met a former Gaimusho official in New Delhi. Tomoji Mutoh had in May 1956 liaised with the Shah Nawaz Committee and especially Suresh Bose. He told us that he accompanied Suresh Bose to the residence of Katanko Tojo, the widow of war-time Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. "He cried there. He said 'my brother did not die,'" the retired official told us. Mutoh asked us to visit the Renkoji temple and see for ourselves how respectful the Japanese are towards "Chandra Bose's ashes". "Your respect for Netaji is not in doubt, and we are grateful for that," we told him.

If he were alive today, Suresh Bose would have been greatly pained to see his own grandnephew terming his view as "rambling dissent", borrowing the word "rambling" from GD Khosla. Suresh Bose was not an accomplished writer and at that he was not given enough documents or facilities to

produce a slick report. But he did make some valid points and he did set a standard in probity and openness as he called upon the people to not to believe his dissent or the majority report until the Government had made public all relevant records.

There is no chance of misconstruing that the Harvard professor is so impartial and objective that he has not even spared his granduncle. Because in his zeal to back the government version, he has lauded someone who came closer to getting jailed for trying to vilify Subhas Chandra Bose and a friendly foreign nation which sacrificed thousands of its men in helping India attain freedom. This was GD Khosla, whom Sugata Bose describes as “eminent jurist”. Worse, Sugata makes libelous statements against Justice Mukherjee.

It is horrendous that a Bose family member should use a glowing term for a man who portrayed Subhas as an impractical hothead and a puppet of the Japanese in his report. This abhorring idea was not an aside but part and parcel of Khosla’s report. The Bose family dragged him to court and he could wriggle out only after rendering a written apology.

According to Prof Bose, Khosla’s report “fell victim to political partisan” whereas the Congress-led government “quite sensibly, rejected outright” the Mukherjee Commission’s report. He is disheartened, as a Congressman at heart should be, that Indira Gandhi’s government which had been compelled to institute Khosla’s inquiry lost elections in 1977 and the Janata government set aside Khosla’s findings. Such unabashed whitewash makes me feel worried about the professor’s American students. Between September 1974, when Khosla Commission’s report was tabled in Parliament and 1977, when Moraraji Desai became Prime Minister, India had for most part been under an authoritarian rule. It was the biggest blot on Indian democracy, the best legacy of the British Raj. It was during this dark age, when prostitutes were paraded to create fervour in favour of the government and innumerable people were forcefully sterilised to stem India’s population boom, that Khosla’s report was finally approved in Parliament *sans* Opposition.

The people who fought against the Emergency were the people forming the “political partisan” against Khosla’s report. They included politician Samar Guha, lawyer Gobinda Mukhoty—who went on to fight for justice for the victims of 1984 genocide—and journalist Barun Sengupta.

Disregarding the actual turn of events, Sugata Bose further writes that more than twenty years after Khosla’s report was rejected, “yet another” commission was appointed by the Government. There is no light what had led to all this momentous decision. The setting up of new commission was not a government decision *per se*; it just had to obey the order of the Calcutta High Court. Sugata Bose is giving his readers an impression as if the formation of the new commission was result of some governmental whim at a time when his favourite dispensation was out of power.

The facts of Khosla’s closeness to Nehru, his self-proclaimed disagreement with Bose during their student days in London, his writing the biography of Indira Gandhi during the period he was heading the Netaji Inquiry Commission and his churning out a book from his inquiry, the apology he rendered to the Bose family have not shaken Sugata’s faith in him. But *His Majesty’s opponent* describes Justice MK Mukherjee as “retired Bengali judge” to impute impartiality to him. Added to it is the disparaging remark that he “held court” and provided “a venue for increasingly fanciful stories”.

Sugata Bose goes on to allege that Mukherjee “himself harboured a preconceived notion”. He thinks it is proven by two factors: In October 2002, the commission had asked some Bose family members to provide blood samples for a DNA match with Bhagwanji of Faizabad. Then in 2010 Mukherjee was seen on TV, making an off-the-record remark filmed without his knowledge that he was sure that Bhagwanji was Netaji. The history professor adds that there is no evidence to back this theory and Mukherjee’s entertaining a “most preposterous” claim about Bhagwanji caused confusion among the public. His stray comments about the Mukherjee Commission occupy no more than two

paras and just with these he has trashed an inquiry which lasted for six years and indicted the Government of India on several points.

As a non-Bengali who followed commission's work closely, I am in a position to assert some facts. The Calcutta High Court judgment which directed the central government to form a commission was issued by then Chief Justice Prabha Shankar Mishra. It is the norm in India nowadays for the chief justices of the state high courts not to be hailing from those states. Things seem to have changed from the days when Lahore-born GD Khosla could have become Chief Justice of the Punjab High Court.

I had the opportunity to speak with retired Justice Mishra in New Delhi a few years ago. He told me that the main reason for his reaching that decision was the disclosure made by the Government that it itself was not sure of Bose's death.

Justice Mukherjee's name as the chairman of the new commission was recommended by the Chief Justice of India. Incidentally, I don't find Sugata Bose mentioning, much less underlining, in his book that Mukherjee is a former Supreme Court judge. He just sees a "Bengali" in him. It is as if Sugata Bose is taking a leaf out of GD Khosla's book. The judge's personal papers, now kept at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, also reflect a similar parochial point of view. Even after a case was filed by the Bose family against him in Kolkata for trying to defame Subhas "to please patrons for largesse and assignments", Khosla was unrepentant. He filed—and apparently later withdrew—a transfer petition in the Supreme Court in which he painted the entire matter as a Bengali issue. He described Prof Samar Guha "a prominent Bengali member of the Lok Sabha" and claimed that he did not expect to "receive a fair and impartial trial" in Kolkata, home to his sister, and had "every reason to apprehend physical danger and injury to himself in the event of the trial being held in West Bengal".

Sugata Bose's description of Justice Mukherjee a "Bengali judge" is a low blow. This is not how we look at our judges. Justice SH Kapadia is not a "Parsi judge"; he is the Chief Justice of India. We associate people who occupy or have occupied high offices with a particular region or religion only in the complimentary sense.

Sugata Bose was nowhere in sight when Justice Mukherjee examined the witnesses. Mukherjee put pointed, pertinent questions to probe whether or not the person standing in the witness corner possessed any evidence to back his statements. The former Supreme Court judge did not "hold court"; he conducted proceedings according to the Commission of Inquiry Act.

Two of Sugata's uncles that I have known, know it well because they didn't have to let their imagination wander to visualize what had actually happened. Late Pradip Bose was there on some occasions, and Subrata Bose attended most of the commission's public hearings. Later 43 members of the family, including these two cousins, issued a statement which expressed deep appreciation for "the arduous efforts" of "Mr Justice MK Mukherjee and his team in the commission". [25]

Sugata Bose's charge about Mukherjee having preconceived notions reflects his own. He was propagating them much before the commission's inquiry ended. Sample two of his statements made on 23 January 2002 in Kolkata:

I have seen a lot of evidence from across the world and have also met people who claimed to have spotted him somewhere or the other...these do not amount to anything more than canards. Evidences to the contrary are so strong that one is forced to believe that Netaji's life was tragically cut short.

Our family has all through been convinced that Netaji died in the air crash. But popular sentiment barred us from strongly opposing the theory of his "disappearance". [26]

I don't know which people claiming to have spotted "Netaji" met Sugata Bose but am sure that no one with reasonable knowledge of the Bhagwanji angle ever divulged anything to him.

Sugata's charges about Justice Mukherjee prejudging the issue can be easily run down in a court of law. The former Supreme Court judge's inquiry was one of the most transparent that this country

has ever seen. At every hearing, the judge would release to deponents and one or two odd media representatives the copies of periodic status reports detailing that steps taken by the commission, why they were taken and a summary what responses had been given by the Government and others. All these reports were made part of his final reports as Vol IIA and IIB. These volumes are available on the Home Ministry website and it is for everyone to see that Mukherjee's inquiry progressed logically on most reasonable grounds. His report clearly states that terms of reference assigned to the commission made him "proceed on the assumed premises that there was a plane crash as testified to by the witnesses". [27]

Mukherjee did not discover the Faizabad angle; it was brought to his notice and he took steps he was supposed to under the law. The commission report appends a copy of the notification issued by it, which says the commission called upon everyone interested to make their case before it. [28] Since Sisir Bose's family did not pay any heed to the notification, they assumed that others did not as well. The commission report says:

The story relating to death of Netaji in Faizabad originates from the statements (supported by affidavits) filed by Dr Alokesha Bagchi of Gorakhpur, Shri Ashok Tandon, Shri Shakti Singh and Shri Kailash Nath Jaiswal of Faizabad in response to the statutory notification issued by this commission. [29]

The professor's next charge that the commission became a venue for "increasingly fanciful stories" is true for the Khosla Commission. The "eminent jurist" allowed all kind of people, even a person who testified that he was of unsound mental health, just to give credence to the view that the Bose mystery was a product of such minds. [30] Justice Mukherjee was a complete no-nonsense as chairman of the commission. He dismissed implausible and irrelevant accounts out of hand. I myself witnessed him cutting people short when they made allegations against Nehru. Mukherjee did not even bring such things on the record of proceedings. That is why his report contains no mindless elaborations, howsoever titillating to read.

The Faizabad angle was dwelt at some length because it entailed startling evidence. What Sugata Bose calls "preposterous" was found to be of significant importance by several journalists and had the backing of Suresh Bose's daughter Lalita Bose, who had gone to court in its favour. With such being the state of affairs, no inquiry commission could have dismissed this angle out of hand just because it did not appear plausible.

Justice Mukherjee's seeking blood samples from some Bose family members, including Sugata Bose, was perfectly in sync with his inquiry to ascertain the identity of a man whom many Bose aides of indisputable integrity had apparently taken to be the long disappeared INA leader. Going for the DNA test was an obvious decision. When this test was carried out first, *Hindustan Times* had already published a report of mine on the first page saying that the handwriting samples of Bose and the holy man were found to have been authored by same person by a top expert engaged by the paper.

Even if GD Khosla had occupied Justice Mukherjee's position, he'd have to order a DNA test in the circumstances. But it is to be noted that none of the family members who actually gave blood samples—Nirupam Som, grandson of Netaji's elder sister and former Police Commissioner of Kolkata; Tripti Nag, granddaughter of Netaji's sister; Sadhan Kar, son of the daughter of Netaji's eldest sister; Subrata Bose, the son of Sarat Bose and Prof DN Bose, son of Dr Sunil Bose—protested even though they had little faith in Bhagwanji episode. Prof DN Bose went on to publish an article in the *Statesman* repudiating the Bhagwanji angle. So I don't why Prof Bose has been making a dance and show about his being asked to provide a blood sample along with his other family elders.

Sugata Bose's deduction that Justice Mukherjee's 2010 admission about Bhagwanji was "preconceived" is awful because it is based on his insufficient and highly prejudiced knowledge of this particular episode. Justice Mukherjee came to hold this belief **after** he had assessed the evidence linking Bhagwanji to Bose. Sugata Bose does not have any idea what Mukherjee actually said because his source of information is a media report, which, like all the other media reports, contained only

one-two bytes from Justice Mukherjee's off-the-record interview lasting for 10 minutes or so.

In the full recording of the interview, Justice Mukherjee is seen giving his reasons, like apprehensions of a forensic fraud, Leela Roy's belief etc. before expressing his belief about Bhagwanji's identity. He is as much of a human as we are. He has remained dignified, but that is not to say that he is not dismayed with the way government trashed his historic inquiry and report. Sugata Bose appears to be gloating in *His Majesty's opponent* the way Government covered up the issue. He supports the report's arbitrary, undemocratic dismissal by the Congress-led government. What else would one expect from someone whose parents were in that party?

Just as the line taken by the Government of India in the Calcutta High Court, the professor has tried to prove in his book that the commission relied on the Taiwan government's assessment that there was no air crash in 1945 solely because there are no records. I must press that the message from the Taiwan government originally sent to me is far more credible than the opinions expressed by our Government that has engaged in cover-up and those who have benefited from its largesse.

The professor's idea that since the Japanese were in control of Taiwan till the spring of 1946, the Chiang Kai-shek government which came afterwards couldn't possibly hold any record relating to the event that took place before 1945 is wrong because the Japanese records of 1945 vintage are very much there even today.

On page 316 of his book, Prof Bose refers to an urn containing the ashes of General Shidei at the very crematorium where Bose too was allegedly cremated. The Taiwan government gave Justice Mukherjee the crematorium register for the entire period, not just the date on which Bose and Shidei were allegedly cremated. This Japanese register proves that neither Bose nor Shidei were cremated in Taipei during that period.

Lastly, Prof Bose has elaborated an instance of implied foreknowledge where Netaji had allegedly told some acquaintance of his in Mumbai that he would like to die by falling from the sky. I don't know what it is that the professor is trying to convey through this anecdote. Premonition is an absurdity, scientifically speaking.

I make simple deductions. There was a man called Major Bhaskaran Menon. Blind and staring death in the face, he could have told the Mukherjee Commission like Sisir Bose that he should be excused from making an appearance before it due to reasons of health if nothing else. But the sense of duty towards his leader and the quest of truth made Menon file an affidavit and then request that he be examined in his daughter's home in Chennai because he could not get up from his bed.

His younger daughter Rema Ravindran standing by as a witness, Menon recalled for one last time before the commission's secretary PK Sengupta what he had on several occasions for the last five decades. Convinced to his last that his leader went to Russia, Menon thought back to 17 August 1945—a day before Bose met with his death as per his greatnephew—when the INA leader was dictating him some letters. And then Bose said the words that he was leaving on a plane and was apprehensive that an accident might overtake him.

Menon's simple mind was to later deduce that these words were loaded with pointers. But, amazingly, this "prescient" statement did not create any curiosity in the great mind of the Harvard professor that has all the evidence for Netaji's death. The great mind gets fixed on Subhas Bose "foretelling" one Nathalal Parikh about his death in 1939, but blocks out the words of a man who was confidential secretary to Subhas till 1945 and then to Sarat till he died in 1950. This great mind also does not attach any significance to Menon's statement to the Mukherjee Commission that Sarat Bose "never believed air crash story". It doesn't see the signs that are clear because they won't be visible to all those who prefer to have the "brand Congress" wool pulled over their eyes.

With that being the case with Congressman Sisir Bose's family, what makes Bose's daughter in Germany to support the air crash theory? This should be next natural question. She backs the NRB

view; doesn't she? Why should we not believe her?

For reasons I am not able to understand so far, Dr Anita Pfaff has supported the minority view within the family. But her view is not worthy of credence because most of her family elders vehemently opposed the air crash theory. Her mother Emilie told her nephews and their children several times that she had been informed that Subhas Bose was in the Soviet Union after 1945. In his affidavit before the Mukherjee Commission, Surya Bose averred that his grandaunt told him "in January 1973 that Mr Raimund Schnabel, a German journalist who had settled down in East Berlin after the 2nd World War, had told her in early 1950 that he had been informed that Netaji was in the Soviet Union after 1945".

Pradip Bose repeated this view of his aunt before Kolkata media in 2006. Pradip was on very good terms with his cousin sister. Surya remains close to his aunt Anita as ever, and, therefore, there is nothing more to be read in these statements. But I see in the official records an outline of machinations to bring around Bose family members to a specific view. I don't know for how long this has continued and what all has been gone into. All I can do is to show you part of the "Top Secret" note No I/12014/27/93-IS (DIII) of February 1995 written by then Home Secretary spelling out the instrumentalities to achieve the desired results.

It would, therefore, be necessary to take the members of Netaji's family into confidence in the first place by convincing them as to the genuineness of the ashes. It should then be easier to handle opposition from other quarters like the Forward Bloc. Netaji's wife and the only daughter are at present living in Angsburg, Germany. It is felt that they can best be approached through another nephew of Netaji, Dr.Sisir Bose. Shri Amia Nath Bose, the most vociferous sceptic of the air crash story, needs to be brought around by approaching at an appropriately high level. There is good chance that if reasonably approached, the family members may drop their opposition. The question of an appropriate memorial involving the mortal remains shall also have to be addressed in due course.

15. This issues with the approval of the Home Minister.

PI

L.K.P
(K.PADMANABHAIAH)
HOME SECRETARY

F.No.I/12014/27/93-IS(D.III)
Ministry of Home Affairs

In pursuance of the government plan, futile attempts were actually made to bring Amiya Nath Bose around the official view.

Another Top Secret memo, No G-12(3)/98-NGO for Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister, hints that the government objectives were probably partially met. The note informs that

Indian Ambassador in Germany met Anita on 2 March 1998—after Emilie had passed away.

Dr Pfaff conveyed that she had not consulted all the family members regarding the proposal to move the ashes to India, but was confident that it would be acceptable to the family. She was also keen that there should be national consensus among political parties on this subject and that the best time for transferring them to India would be the second half of 1998.

The memo further states that Anita “has been to India twice in order to build up a consensus in favour of the return of the ashes, but is clearly uncertain about the results of her efforts. ...She is equally uncertain about a consensus within the family”.

Another Top Secret memo on the subject "Return of Netajis ashes to India" dated 1 April 1998 by the same officer states:

EAM [Pranab Mukherjee] visited Germany in October 1995 and met Dr Anita Pfaff, who said that the ashes should be brought to Germany if their return to India was a matter of controversy. To this, it was pointed out that Japan was not in favour of moving the ashes to any third country. She also discussed the possibility of a suitable memorial for Netaji in India. EAM made no comments on this.

He couldn't have. The official line in this regard had already been specified by Jawaharlal Nehru in a confidential letter [No 2474. PMH/60 dated 2 December 1960] to Bengal Chief Minister BC Roy:

As for a memorial, I do not think that such a thing before the Red Fort in Delhi can be done.... I should imagine that the ashes, if brought here, should be kept in Calcutta.

It is an open secret that Nehru did a wee bit for Bose's legacy and whatever little he did, it projected Bose as a regional leader. Against such a backdrop, it is surprising that Anita should have told the *Times of India* in February 2000 that she “dismissed the popular perception that Jawaharlal Nehru looked upon Netaji as a rival and that Nehru and Indira Gandhi had ensured that Netaji's role was ‘ignored’”. She even said, “It is unfair to paint Panditji as a villain.” [31]

Dr Pfaff appeared reluctant to spell out her view when my friends and I met her in New Delhi. Like her famous academic nephew and niece, she too—someone who taught in a university in the West till retirement—has not said a word about declassifying Netaji- related records.

A reading of the footnotes to “A life immortal” has now made me realise that before we met Dr Pfaff, she had quietly approved the bringing of some ashes alleged to be of Netaji to India in 2006 without the knowledge of her other family members. This information was contained in two interlinked footnotes in Sugata Bose's book. One stated that the Murti family had hidden away a portion of the ashes kept at Renkoji temple. The source for this information was an August 2008 affidavit signed by J Murti's son Anand J Murti and attested by the Embassy of India. Prof Bose was apparently thrilled about this. “Copy in my possession,” he underlines in the footnote as if the affidavit contains some earth shaking new information from the R&AW.

The claim that the Murtis kept a small part of the ashes separately “lest the major might be confiscated by the British” [32] is not new. Ramamurti told this to the Khosla Commission. Restaurateur J Murti of failing memory was grilled by lawyers before he was able to recall “some kind of opening and dividing” [33] by his brother and SA Ayer who, on his part, told the commission that “nobody would commit the sacrilege of opening the casket”. [34]

Anyway, what makes J Murti's son's 2008 affidavit appear suspicious is the other claim of Prof Bose in the other footnote that the ashes kept by the Murti family were brought to Kolkata in March 2006 with Anita's approval. He asserted that Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was informed of the hush-hush transfer. It is obvious that whoever brought the ashes to India on the sly calibrated his moves with Anand J Murti. In March 2006, Justice Mukherjee's report was yet to be made public and Pranab Mukherjee was back as the External Affairs Minister. Therefore, there was some definite intrigue behind the secret transfer of the ashes. Why did Anand J Murti not inform Justice Mukherjee about the ashes? Why was the entire operation carried out a month before his report was made public? Was this secret backchannel operation the reason behind the delay in tabling the report in Parliament?

I had a bad feeling about this and so did Chandrachur, who filed RTI applications to cross-check

the professor's statements. The Prime Minister Office denied outright having any knowledge about the secretive transfer of ashes or the receipt of any such communication, belying Sugata Bose's assertion. Regarding his friend Anand J Murti's affidavit, the initial response of the Embassy of India in Japan and the Ministry of External Affairs was that the "attestation of affidavit does not mean that the Government of India is aware of the contents of the affidavit". Following an appeal, the ministry repeated that "the attestation of an affidavit by Indian missions deals only with authentication of the identity of the person. Missions do not go into the content of the affidavit". The ministry emphasised that the "Government has not been made aware of the existence of the ashes of Netaji in the custody of Shri Ramamurti or his family".

This just about brings out the catch in Sugata Bose's much-touted "authoritative account" of the Bose mystery: The professor has falsified facts and distorted perspectives. Here too lies the rub.

IV: Was Subhas Bose a war criminal?

The genie of “war criminal” controversy surrounding Subhas Chandra Bose was released on 1 April 1956. Once out, it could hardly be contained in the secured premises of the Netaji Inquiry Committee. Soon people across India knew—courtesy the man who had let it out.

Deposing before Shah Nawaz Khan, Forward Bloc leader and Bose’s friend Muthuramalingam Thevar said he wanted the Government to “make it known categorically to the public whether Netaji’s name is still in the list of war criminals and if not, when it was removed and how?” [1]

“Will you please wait outside for some time?” the committee chairman requested him after hearing this. The proceeding was being held in camera. A foreign ministry officer was around and Shah Nawaz wanted to have a word with him in private. After an hour he sent for Thevar and told him, “The Government of India is not in possession of any information on this point.” Having waited for that long and then getting a non-answer annoyed Thevar. “Why is this information not in the possession of the Government when an Indian national of such eminence and importance as Netaji is involved?” he asked.

“The information lies with the UK and the USA,” Shah Nawaz replied.

Dissatisfied Thevar now pounded away at Shah Nawaz. “So, does the declaration made by the Allies in regard to war criminals has nothing to do with this Government? Would the Government state categorically that the declaration in regard to war criminals does not bind it?”

“Why should I go into the details?” Shah Nawaz retorted.

“And why should I cooperate with a committee constituted by a Government which is not in a position to be able to extricate Netaji from the position of a war criminal or give protection to him against previous commitment, if any, in regard to the ‘war criminal’ list,” Thevar rejoined. [2]

That was then, but even today some of Bose’s admirers feel perturbed about his name appearing on the “list of war criminals”. There is an online petition to get his name off it and an appeal was made in 1997 to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for the same purpose. Replying to Air Vice Marshal Surendra Goyal (Retd) on Annan’s behalf, his deputy Shashi Tharoor—former Minister of State for External Affairs—wrote that the Secretary General was “powerless to undo any reference that may have been made in the past”. Many read too much in this consolatory response, seeing it in an admission that Bose had been declared a “war criminal”.

But was he?

There is no doubt that several INA men were branded “war criminals” by the Indian Army under the British. It is quite evident from the pre-1947 Ministry of Defence files now available in the National Archives in New Delhi. Many records provide details of alleged torture to which the loyal Indian Army soldiers were subjected to after they refused to join the INA. File No INA 221 even contains a list of “war criminals”:

Those responsible for, condoned or took part in atrocities against Indian P.S.O.W.

L.A. Rank.	Name.	Unit.	Category.
Captain	MOHAN SINGH	1/14 Punjab	I.N.A.
Lieut.	MUHD ZAMAN KIANI	"	"
Major	AZIZ AHMED	Kapurthala S.F.	"
Major	PRAKASH CHAND	R.I.A.S.C.	Ex-I.N.A.
Lt-Col	A.C. CHATTERJEE	40 I.G.H., I.M.S.	I.N.A.
"	S.C. ALAGAPPAN	12 I.G.H., I.M.S.	"
Capt.	B.M. PATTANAYAK	att 2/1 G.R., I.M.S.	"

Mohan Singh was the INA founder, Mohammed Zaman Kiani was the INA head after Bose, AC Chatterjee [Chatterji] and SC Alagppan were Azad Hind Government ministers. The list contains the names of many more “war criminals”: GS Dhillon, the Red Fort trial hero; Mahboob Ahmed, Bose’s military secretary; “plus complete staffs of all INA concentration camps”.

If that was that, why shouldn’t we assume that the leader of all these people was also regarded a war criminal by the colonial British and their Indian collaborators? Well, maybe we shouldn’t because all of the men listed in the National Archives list were formerly in the Indian Army. Unlike them, Bose was a civilian.

Suresh Bose reasoned in his *Dissentient report* that Subhas as “a British Indian subject” had “waged war against his king and emperor” and therefore invited this tag. In his view, Bose was “a top-ranking ‘international war criminal’, against which persons, after the last war, the maximum penalty was generally inflicted”. Bose had “collaborated” with the Axis countries whose leaders, like Japanese Premier Hideki Tojo, were hanged following war crimes trials.

The impression that Bose was going to be treated as a war criminal by the Allies was prevalent even among the Japanese and the Indians who backed him. Bose’s personal physician learnt on August 17 that he was going to Manchuria because “the Japanese did not want him to be caught as a war criminal”. [3] A similar suggestion was made openly as early as 29 August 1945 by *Chicago Tribune* stringer Alfred Wagg. In a press conference in New Delhi, Wagg asked Jawaharlal Nehru why shouldn’t Bose “be treated as a war criminal because his men fought and killed many Americans and he extorted money from the poor in Burma and Malaya”. [4] He was given a rebuttal by an Indian journalist who said there was no case of the INA “having fought the American forces had ever come to light” and “Bose’s Government levied some kind of tax on Indians only”. Nehru too rebuffed the idea that Bose was a war criminal.

Personally I should be very happy if all persons considered as war criminals are brought to trials and facts come out. ... And in my list there will be many high officials sitting in Delhi who will be war criminals. [5]

We can go on and on with such arguments and their counters, but the only way to reach a conclusion is to assess the official information which has become known in the last few decades.

So far as the Raj era is concerned, the records released by the British Government create the following picture. On 28 July 1945, Home Member Francis Mudie received a letter from Viceroy Wavell’s Private Secretary EM Jenkins. Capturing Bose was on Wavell’s mind now that the defeat of Japan seemed imminent. Jenkins wrote:

His Excellency has just noted: "We should be thinking what to do with SC Bose. If the Japanese surrendered, we should presumably require him to be handed over to us. What then, should we try him in India, and if so by what kind of court?"

I do not know if this matter has been considered before, and His Excellency would like your advice, I am not sure of that because Bose is an Indian who joined the enemy by evading restrictions imposed on him in India, he must necessarily be tried here. He is one of the bigger war criminals and has offended against His Majesty's Government quite as much as against India. [6]

Mudie received another letter from Jenkins on 11 August 1945. Thinking of the surrender terms to be imposed on Japan, Wavell was now not too sure if Bose and his immediate associates should be brought to India for trial. “It might be better to have them dealt with as war criminals outside India.

His Excellency would like you to advise about this.” [7]

On the same day, Wavell sent a personal telegram to the Secretary of State for India in London apprising him of India’s “special interest” in dictating armistice with Japan with a view to sealing Bose’s fate.

It may be best that Bose and his immediate associates should be dealt with as war criminals outside India and should not be returned to this country.

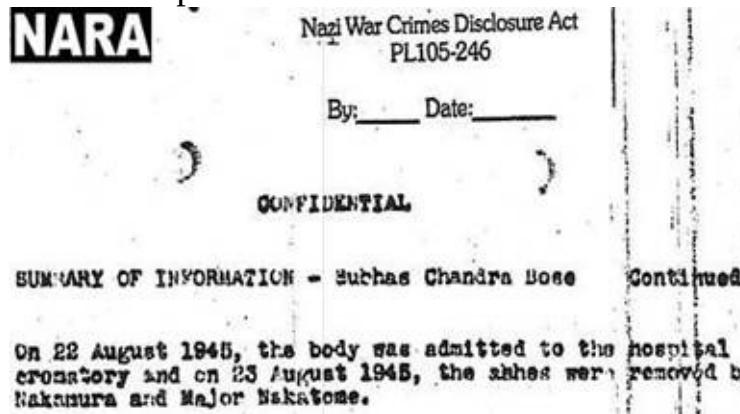
On August 23 Mudie responded to Jenkins in this way:

I have examined your suggestion that Bose be treated as a “war criminal”. He is clearly not one in the ordinary sense of that word. Nor does he appear to come within the extended definition which has now been adopted by the United Nations. [8]

But the view in London matched Wavell’s thinking. Evidencing this is a minute of a meeting of India and Burma Committee of the British Cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Attlee on 25 October 1945. In the meeting

it was generally agreed that the only civilian renegade of importance was Subhas Chandra Bose. On the question whether Indian renegades rounded up outside India should be brought to India for trial, it was part of the general arrangements for dealing with war criminals that they should be taken back for trial to their country. [9]

The foregoing tells us that the British considered Bose to be a “war criminal” during that period. The same can be deduced about the American view because a chunk of Bose’s related records released by the US in 1997 were in compliance to the Nazi War Crimes Disclosures Act.



This goes with the rider that in a notice issued more recently, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Maryland, clarified that records released under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act and the Japanese Imperial Government Disclosure Act may “include mention of, or information about, persons having no connection to these activities”.

The question, therefore, now is whether or not Bose’s name was officially put in a list of war criminals, and whether the Government of free India had any knowledge about it. Through the years this question was raised by general people as well as the lawmakers in Parliament. Every time the ministers responded that to the best of their knowledge Bose’s name was not borne on any list of war criminals. According to a statement made in the Rajya Sabha, “the United Kingdom High Commission in New Delhi issued a statement early in 1961 to the effect that his name does not appear and has never appeared in such list”. [10]

The “list of war criminals” of common parlance is actually the cumulative 80 lists of thousands of mostly German and Italian names. These were prepared by the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) between December 1944 and March 1948. For example, the UNWCC list No 7 dated April 1945 had the names of Adolf Hitler and Martin Bormann. The UNWCC was created prior to the present United Nation’s birth and was assisted by a corpus called the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects (CROWCASS).

The UNWCC also had a sub-commission at Chungking in China to investigate the war crimes allegedly committed by the Japanese. This sub-commission prepared 26 lists of its own. The records of the UNWCC, CROWCASS and Chungking sub-commission were in storage as classified material in different countries, especially the US, the UK and Australia, until fairly recently. British India as a

member of the UNWCC received some of the lists when they were secret. Some of the UNWCC lists containing foreigners' names can be seen among the declassified INA files kept at the National Archives.

<u>Serial Number⁽¹⁾</u>	<u>Name⁽¹⁾</u>	<u>Rank, Unit, Post⁽²⁾</u>	<u>Date of Crime⁽³⁾</u>	<u>War Crime⁽²⁾</u>
1	BLASOLO, Arthur	Interpreter, feldgendarme at Charleroi (Belgium)	1943-1944	Torture of civilians & other crimes
2	BRUSHEWITZ, Franz	Oberfeldwebel, D.C.A. (Flak) operating at Arsimont	July 1942	Illtreatment of civilians
3	DRISCHER	Major, German. Commandant of Munitions Depot at Bousse, Province de Hainaut. Unit L.37,419.E.	2.9.1944	Systematic destruction of property
4	EICKNER	Feldwebel, attached to prison of Charleroi, Belgium	1943-1944	Torture of civilians, & other crimes

NAI

Moving on chronologically, Prof Atul Sen accidentally met Bhagwanji in 1962 and took him to be Subhas Chandra Bose. In August that year, the former MLA, who knew Bose and Nehru well, wrote a letter to the PM which is still on the file. Prof Sen stated that Bose was "yet regarded as Enemy No 1 of the Allied Powers and that there is a secret protocol that binds the Government of India to deliver him to Allied 'justice' if found alive". Nehru in his response on 31 August 1962 stated that he had "never heard of any secret protocol" and Bose wouldn't be handed over "even if any country asks the Government of India to". [11]

Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri stated in a September 1962 letter to Shaulmari sadhu acolyte Uttam Chand Malhotra that "Bose's name was not included in the list of war criminals, drawn up by the United Nations War Crimes Commission".[12] Malhotra, or for that matter most people in India in those days, hardly knew what the UNWCC was.

During a parliamentary debate on 22 August 1963, lawmaker BD Khobragade remarked that "it is generally believed that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is still alive but that he is not coming out of hiding because if he comes out, perhaps he may be treated as a war criminal". This made another member AM Tariq query whether a "confirmation has been taken from the American government and the German government that he is not in the American government's list of war criminals". Dinesh Singh, Deputy Minister for External Affairs, replied, "No." "So far as ascertaining it from the American government is concerned, this question has never arisen because they have never said that there is any list in which he figures," he told the MPs, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Lal Bahadur Shastri as Prime Minister repeatedly faced the same question and his answer was always on the same lines. SM Banerjee put this to him in the Lok Sabha on 29 March 1965: "There is a fear in the minds of many people, who still believe that Netaji is alive, that he is regarded as a war criminal by the Britishers. They want a clear declaration from the Government regarding this." Shastri's reply to this was: "So far as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is concerned, of course, there is absolutely no doubt in the mind of anyone in this country that he would be welcome here as one of our greatest heroes." [13]

In 1964 Sunil Das, who had been associated with Subhas Bose, gave Bhagwanji an input to the effect that the Government took the war criminal angle rather seriously, irrespective of the public statements. Das wrote on the basis of his talks with MP Surendra Mohan Ghose, who had enquired into the Shaulmari episode on Prime Minister Nehru's directive. Ghose told Das that the Government's understanding was that the Allied Powers had struck off Bose's name from the list of war criminals because they thought that he was dead. Das rejected Ghose's version, and so did Bhagwanji.

The holy man was said to have been greatly angered in January 1971 when the news of India's

accession to a UN treaty on the war criminals came. The “convention on the non-applicability of statutory limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity” ensured that persons responsible for war crimes during the World War II would “not escape prosecution merely because no legal case is brought against them within a specified period after the commission of the crime”. The parties to the convention undertook “to adopt domestic measure for the extradition of persons responsible for these crimes”. [14]

The report about India ratifying the convention was brought to the notice of GD Khosla by lawyer Niharendu Dutt-Majumdar representing the Bose family. The record of Khosla Commission proceedings show Dutt-Majumdar arguing...

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limitations for prosecution of War Criminals. I am wondering what was the special urgency or occasion for India at this time to make such a ratification and what was India's special interest in this matter, unless India has somebody in view or may be for reasons not known to me. Now the question therefore arises that whether in the fitness of things, this Hon'ble Commission should not have a copy of such a Convention placed before it by the Government of India.

So I submit that this is raising grave forebodings in many minds and therefore Your Lordship may also be pleased to consider requesting or summoning the Foreign Minister, Shri Swaran Singh, to come as a witness to clarify and place the necessary facts before this commission. [15]

It appears from the subsequent proceeding that Justice Khosla took the UN convention issue lightly. “I shall pursue the matter—may be it is a routine matter—we shall find out about it,” he told Dutt-Majumdar.

Dutt-Majumdar had even suggested that to clear up the whole issue about Bose having allegedly been termed a war criminal, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi should be asked to give evidence in person. Khosla did not summon the Prime Minister or the External Affairs Minister and was criticized for it later.

To be fair to him, I don't think he could have done that. But then, it would have been better if Prime Minister Gandhi had issued some statement to put the controversy at rest. After all, apart from being a front-ranking leader, Subhas was also a friend of her father. As a poignant illustration of the days of Nehru-Bose bonhomie, it can be recalled that when young Indira accompanied her gravely-ill mother Kamla Nehru to Vienna for treatment, Bose received them on their arrival, accompanied them to the hotel “and continued to visit Kamla daily during their stay in Vienna”. [16]

GD Khosla devoted considerable space to the war criminal issue in his report, but without mentioning anything about the UN convention. He put on Dutt-Majumdar the onus of proving his case, which the eminent lawyer apparently wasn't able to. Supporting the official view that Bose's name never figured on any list of war criminals, he set aside the charge of Dutt-Majumdar that the “Government of India has deliberately suppressed or destroyed evidence which would have proved that Bose's name was included in the list of war criminals”.

There has been no international agreement or subsequent charter which would bring Netaji (were he alive today) within the mischief of any war crimes tribunal. The Government of India has given no undertaking to any international body to hand Bose over to it, nor has there been any bar on his movements or his entry into India. The argument relating to Bose being accused of war crimes is, therefore, nothing but the purest conjecture, put forward not as an argument but as a piece of rhetoric and casuistry to cloud the issue and to distract attention from the real points for determination. [17]

The reason that led Khosla to conclude this was that the Government had convinced him that Bose was never a war criminal. Not to put too fine a point on it, Khosla's assertion was not completely

honest. All that the records shown to him had said that "without access to the records and files of the United Nations War Crimes Commission" it could not be confirmed whether or not Bose's name figured there. Yet, Khosla somehow deduced all that he did.

The controversy received a new lease of life in 1998. Responding to a PIL filed by former MP Shyam Sunder Mohapatra, Chief Justice Phukan of Orissa High Court directed the Centre to take up the matter with the UK government so as "to remove the name of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose from the list of war criminals". In February 1999 then Home Minister LK Advani informed Lok Sabha members Ram Gopal Yadav and Ish Dutt Yadav that as per the information furnished by the UK government, Bose's name was "not included in any list of war criminals drawn up by them".

Before the Mukherjee Commission was set up, two individuals in their personal capacities tried to ascertain facts from the Indian and British governments. Lawyer Bijan Ghosh's query actually prompted an enquiry in the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York. The mission told New Delhi that

the UN does not maintain lists of war criminals. In its archival functions, it simply maintains the records of the UN War Crimes Commission. It is not known whether Netaji's name in fact figures on any of the voluminous records of the Commission.

And

If we want to establish whether Netaji's name figures on the lists, we have to make a formal request from PR to Secretary General for access to the archives to establish this fact. This by itself would be an indication that we suspect he is on the list of war criminals. Since, according to the UN Secretariat, it is not possible to remove names from these lists, it is a moot point whether any purpose would be served by making this request.

Oslo-based late Amalendu Guha on 9 December 1998 requested Prime Minister Tony Blair to let him know whether "(i) Subhas Chandra Bose's name had been recorded as war criminal, (ii) if so, by which Government, (iii) since when". The answer sent to him by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on December 22 was that

the question of how to treat Subhas Chandra Bose and other members of the Indian National Army was considered in 1945 by the Government of India in consultation with the HMG [His Majesty's Government]. All relevant official papers relating to this process are in the public domain. Some of the most pertinent are to be found in Vol VI of the Transfer of Power series. All others are available at the Public Records Office or the British Library.

This is essentially the Wavell-era correspondence, the crux of which has been referred to earlier.

My own efforts came in 2003. I requested the NARA for any information in the UNWCC records concerning lists of individuals accused of war crimes against Indians during the Second World War. RE Cookson, Archivist for Captured German Records, informed me that "an examination of the minutes of the Far Eastern and Pacific Sub-Commission of the United Nations War Crimes Commission does not reveal any list of that description".

In October 2003, Phillip Stonehouse, Director, India and South Asia Section in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia was good enough to tell me that "Australia does retain records from the Far Eastern and Pacific Sub-Commission of the United Nations War Crimes Commission. However, the information you have requested is held by the National Archive...."

Loreta Tabellione of the National Archive in Melbourne was remarkably considerate in handling my request that the records be searched for Subhas Chandra Bose or Kata Kana, as Japanese called him. She undertook a basic search in consolidated name index to Australian and Allied lists of war criminal suspects sought or in custody, 1945-1950 and found no reference. The part of the list where Kata Kana could have figured but did not was sent to me. It was item no 4 of the series MP13952\2.

KASUYA Takeyo	Lt.-Col.	SEAC CAT 1 SEAC CAT 2. SEAC held	
KASYUA			Afpac 2
"KAT KILLER THE"	NAA		AMF CON S1
KATA	Guard		Afpac 2
KATA FUJIZO	COMMDR.		UNWCC 15
KATAKWA, KOSAKU	UNIT COMD		CHG.1
KATADA Toshio	Cpl		SEAC WSH 1
KATAGIRA, Eikichi	Vice Admiral		Afpac 2

The archive did, however, mention that the topic is “such that would require extensive research”.

As I learnt later, the finding that Bose’s name did not figure on the UNWCC lists was conveyed to the Mukherjee Commission by the Ministry of External Affairs. The commission had ensured that the lists were checked. On 11 April 2002, Deputy Permanent Representative of Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York wrote to the Joint Secretary (Americas) in New Delhi that a First Secretary (Legal Adviser) from the mission “had gone through the lists of war criminals in the records of the UN War Crimes Commission”.

“There is absolutely no indication whatsoever that Netaji’s name was ever included in any lists and was deleted subsequently. Therefore, it would be same to conclude that the name of Netaji was not included in the lists at any time,” Deputy Permanent Representative A Gopinathan said in what was perhaps the last word on the controversy.



राष्ट्रीय अधिकारी

17/7
A. Gopinathan
Deputy Permanent
Representative

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संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ भारत का राष्ट्रीय प्रिशन
न्यूयार्क

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No. NY/PM/443/8/98

April 11, 2002

My dear Jayant.

S No. 103/c

This is with reference to your letter D.O. No. 25/4/NGO-Vol.VII of March 31, 2002 on the question of the name of Netaji's appearing in the list of War Criminals maintained at UN archives.

2. We have looked at papers on the subject in the Mission. As mentioned in the letter of April 7, 1999, First Secretary (Legal Adviser), Shri Narinder Singh had gone through the lists of war criminals in the records of the UN War Crimes Commission. I am attaching herewith a copy of page 26 of the Archives Group which lists the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects of the Allied Control Authority, including the Supplementary Wanted Lists.

3. It was also seen by Shri Singh during his physical examination that there was no entry regarding charges filed by any State against any Indian national in the lists of charge files consisting of formal charges submitted by States to the Commission.

4. In view of the above, we would like to confirm that the lists mentioned in the enclosure to Missions letter of April 7, 1999 are exhaustive. There is absolutely no indication whatsoever that Netaji's name was ever included in any of the lists and was deleted subsequently. Therefore, it would be safe to conclude that the name of Netaji was not included in the lists at any time.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,

A. Gopinathan
(A. Gopinathan)

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copy received

At the end of it all, the genie is still not back in the bottle because of one last hitch. Despite the Mukherjee Commission's repeated requests, the Government gave no answer on "whether any treaty was signed/ratified by the Government of India in 1971 by which the limitation of time bar regarding arrest and trial of war criminals was withdrawn and, if so, who were the war criminals of India or of Indian origin or of British India for whose arrest and trial India signed the treaty in 1971". [18]

V. The land of conspiracy theories

Mark Fenster's *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture* is perhaps the most outstanding book of its genre. Fenster dwelt deep into the phenomenon in the 1990s and found out that much of it represented a futile "open-ended political struggle for equality, solidarity, and a transparent, participatory democracy". [1]

Should Fenster ever decide to turn his attention to India, he will find the Indian scene different in one major way. Here to be a conspiracy theorist not only pays, the theories unleashed on the gullible masses can be successfully used as tool to further political and other interests, and that too at the highest level.

The examples that spring to my mind do not relate to the mystery surrounding Subhas Bose's fate.

The detractors of Bose mystery, quite a few of them associated with or sympathetic to India's grand old party in one way or the other, have almost succeeded in convincing nearly the entire Indian intelligentsia that crackpots and conspiracy theorists alone have contributed to its build-up. Fenster writes that in a political or social discourse there can be no greater insult than this that someone's position be dismissed as a conspiracy theory. So this is the tag the Bose mystery researchers like me have invited over the years. Inversely speaking, those who smear us with such charges think of themselves as the representatives of the lot that stands for sanity.

The Bose mystery may have been inundated with whacko conspiracy theories but it has no monopoly over them. Conspiracy theories permeate everywhere in India; it is just that some people cannot see them, or are too weak-kneed to point them out or call them as such. The Bose mystery gets picked out as an easy target. Anyone can say or write that those wanting to know the truth about Bose's fate are conspiracy theorists, but dare you hold a mirror to the others.

Some six years before the term, "conspiracy theory" was included in the Oxford English Dictionary, a most atrocious of its kind was propounded in the Parliament of India. Even though it related to a most shattering tragedy of our history, it was nonetheless one of the most absurd statements ever made by a top official. On 26 July 1991 when the Rajya Sabha was discussing the scope of commission of inquiry into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Home Minister SB Chavan stated that while LTTE connection was a clear possibility, the hand of "any other international forces behind this conspiracy" could not be ruled out.

In fact the Home Minister said that he felt "confident that some of the agencies are known". Chavan then went on to outline his theory based on a highly-exaggerated notion about Rajiv Gandhi's standing in the comity of nations.

The leadership of the third world happens to be, whether we like it or not, with India and when we meant India, it was Rajiv Gandhi and none else. Therefore it is an irritant to some of the countries who are now left almost unchallenged as a super power....

Now a point which we have to consider is, if he was going to emerge as the leader of the third world, whether he should be allowed to remain or he was to be finished so that India would not have any leader of his stature who can possibly take up the issue and fight with the super powers. So this is the kind of suspicion that I have, and it becomes all the more necessary that we have to go deep into the matter and try to find out who are the conspirators against whom we can say that, these are the conspirators who are at the root of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. [2]

It is abundantly clear from this passage that the Home Minister saw an American hand in Rajiv's assassination, even though it was clear from the start that it was either an inside job or it involved a terrorist group operating from India's tiny neighbour.

This utterly preposterous allegation about a world power hand in Rajiv assassination became a

reason to set up Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) in 1998 with top officers drawn from the Research and Analysis Wing, Intelligence Bureau, Directorate of Military Intelligence, Central Bureau of Investigation, Directorate of Enforcement etc. For the next decade or so this high powered group searched world over for the mirage of “international conspiracy”. Since such a “conspiracy” existed in the minds of certain people only, no evidence of any sort has till date been found. And having spoken to one or two people associated with the investigation into the assassination, I can assure you nothing ever will. The MDMA probably still exists, years after the LTTE owned up its crime and chief plotters and executers died or were killed.

It causes me considerable consternation to think that conspiracy theorist Chavan as Home Minister handled the Bose mystery case and his ministry helped outline a plan to stifle it in the 1990s. If ever the Government undertook comprehensive declassification, it would be fascinating to see what sort of view he had offered on the Bose case and then match those with the ideas he came up with while fantasizing which world powers were plotting to kill Rajiv Gandhi. And for what reason or gain, in the name of heaven!

But Chavan was not the first, nor the last conspiracy theorist from the Congress ranks. The 1970s were the golden era for Indian conspiracy theorists and the Congress leaders were better than the best. In 1972 Congress president Shankar Dayal Sharma—later the President of India—told media that the CIA was disrupting the “socio-economic life of country”. On October 20 in Bhopal the same year, he accused the agency of “colluding with opposition parties to ‘create chaos and frustrate our efforts to banish poverty’”. [3] On 29 November 1974, twenty one Congress members of Parliament charged the US and the CIA of subverting India’s internal situation. “Though they did not name the present JP-led movement in Bihar and other parts of the country, they implied that the movement was getting help from the USA and its agency to upset the process of democracy in the country.” [4]

On 1 July 1975, just after the Emergency was imposed, Congress president Dev Kant Baruah told Youth Congress workers “that the Opposition in India with the support of reactionaries at home and abroad were determined to destroy democracy in India”. He “accused the RSS and Anand Marg of murdering Railway Minister LN Mishra and attempting to assassinate the Chief Justice of India”. [5] Led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, these paranoid people whipped up such passions in the country that the American hand was seen behind small demonstrations in remote corners of the country. It is not my case that the CIA was or is a humanitarian organisation engaged in the welfare of mankind; but those who blamed the Americans for something which was not in their national interest did certainly possess a bent of mind ideal for breeding conspiracy theories.

The tradition continues and the undisputed king of the conspiracists in India is Osama Bin Laden sympathiser Digvijay Singh. Popularly called “Diggy Raja”, this senior Congress leader and a former Chief Minister has helped spread theories as wild and anti-national as the one alleging that 26/11 was carried out by the Intelligence Bureau in cahoots with the CIA and Mossad. On the scale of one to ten of most absurd conspiracy theories ever, this one probably ranks with the ones that claim that Bush administration itself plotted 9/11 or that it was result of a Jewish conspiracy. Digvijay Singh and a newage ideologue under his flank, Amreesh Mishra, who thinks that the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) was created by Dr Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi because the IB had turned saffron, continue to flourish in the grand old party. So, we can hope to hear more conspiracy theories in near future.

In fact, we are. The world media noted the Congress party calling the Anna Hazare-led people’s movement against corruption as conceived by the United States to weaken Dr Manmohan Singh’s government. Most observers just laughed it away, not realizing that it was symptomatic of a deep-seated malaise.

For an overview of conspiracy theories in India, this is enough for a start. Yes indeed the Bose

mystery also spawns many of them. Of these, the following I find worth detailing. It would be seen that not all of them are completely devoid of substance.

Conspiracy theory # 1: Gandhi had something to do with sealing Bose's fate

This one is probably the most outrageous of all, for it levels a most horrendous allegation on the Father of the Nation and other top leaders of India. The following quotation from *Hindustan Times* report "Gandhi, others had agreed to hand over Netaji" dated 23 January 1971 is based on a tearful testimony of a witness before the Khosla Commission.

Mr Usman Patel, who claimed to be a bodyguard of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, said...that Mahatma Gandhi, Mr Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Maulana Azad had come to an agreement with the British judge that if Netaji were to enter India, he would be handed over and charged.

My simple and straight response to this is that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to back this mindless charge. The only reason it has remained in circulation in different variants is that we have failed to resolve the mystery. If Gandhiji had lived on, he would have seen to it that the Bose "death" issue was settled.

2: Nehru betrayed Bose

All Indians with some interest in recent history and politics have heard of this one, unless of course they chose to pretend not to know anything, just as BN Mullik did before the Khosla Commission.

Nehru's friend and Bose's junior at Cambridge, GD Khosla made an attempt to show in his report that the relations between the two giants were cordial in spite of political frictions, stamping out the very basis of this particular conspiracy theory. Justice Mukherjee remained religiously struck to the terms of reference assigned to him, as you would expect a judge to. His main report contained just one reference to Nehru as appearing in an intelligence report.

This report, rather a para from a report, is the only pre-Independence official allusion to the theory to have survived in our time. However, the report was considered unreliable by the British.

There is, however, a secret report which says that Nehru received a letter from Bose saying he was in Russia and that he wanted to escape to India. He would come via Chitral, where one of Sarat Bose's son should meet him. The information alleges that Gandhi and Sarat Bose are among those who are aware of this. The story is unlikely.... [6]

And yet here we are in this age of the internet, where this theory has gone viral as a result of deep-rooted suspicions. "Netaji died in Russian jail as Nehru never pressed for his return," wrote former IB Joint Director Maloy Krishna Dhar during a recent discussion on the Facebook. It created no furore because the Indians are quite used to hearing such things in open forums. Parliament has been no exception either. The following has been excerpted from a speech made in the Lok Sabha by Sasankasekhar Sanyal on 3 August 1977:

[In 1946] Jawaharlal Nehru was given certain questions by Lord Mountbatten [in Singapore]. He said: Look here; Scotland Yard has not yet written off Subhas as dead or gone disappeared never to come. If that is so, if Subhas comes back to India, will you be the Prime Minister or Subhas will be? That was Question No 1. Question No 2 was, supposing the country is not partitioned, will Bengal contribute the Prime Ministership or will UP contribute the Prime Ministership? The hint was very clear and the vacillating great leader agreed to Partition.

An appalling allegation was made by one Shyam Lal Jain before the Khosla Commission. Having gone through every word of it as it appears on the record of the oral proceedings of Khosla Commission, I do not think it is worthy of credence. Jain fumbles on many points and he also rattles out an uncorroborated account of meeting "Subhas Bose" in 1967 in a most unusual way. Still I cannot skip detailing Jain's charge because so many people and media outlets have projected it as truthful over the years.

Jain's story was that in 1946 he was serving as a steno to Asaf Ali, secretary of the INA Defence

Committee fighting to secure the release of the INA prisoners. He claimed that in December that year he was summoned to Ali's residence by Pandit Nehru. The rest of the account, as reported in *Hindustan Times* in 2000, is:

Jain alleged that Pandit Nehru had asked him [to] make typed copies of a handwritten note that said Bose had reached Russia via Diren [in Manchuria]. He also alleged that Pandit Nehru asked him to type a letter to British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, that "Bose, your war criminal, has been allowed to enter Russian territory by Stalin. This is a clear treachery and betrayal of faith by the Russians, as Russia has been an ally of the British-Americas. Please take note of it and do what you consider proper and fit". [7]

The HT story further read that "though this information was not challenged before the commission, Justice Khosla chose not to attach any importance to it. One wonders why". [8] If a newspaper of the repute and standing of *Hindustan Times* could have gone to the extent of publishing this by a journalist who later served the *Indian Express* and is now with the *NDTV*, you can well imagine what must have been commented elsewhere.

There is another similar account which I personally rate worthy of more attention that has been given to Jain's story. In 1985 a retired intelligence field operative named Dharmendra Gaur claimed that in October 1956 Clement Attlee, the man who had cleared independence for India, was subjected to surveillance by the IB during his private visit to Lucknow. According to Gaur, the former British PM told an inquisitive Chief Minister Dr Sampurnanand that Bose had escaped to the USSR via Manchuria. Gaur said the talk was bugged and the tape sent to the head office.

Two circumstances make this theory more intriguing. Dr Sampurnanand was said to have been in touch with Bhagwanji, who was in Lucknow at that time. Two, when he arrived in Calcutta during the same trip, Attlee told the acting Governor and Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court in an informal talk that his setting India free had more to do with Bose's activities than Gandhi's peaceful persuasion. The reason this latter account cannot be ignored is that Justice PB Chakrabarty reported it to reputed historian Dr RC Majumdar and later himself recounted it in a letter which is widely quoted in several stories on the internet. So, it stands established that Attlee displayed some extraordinary candour during his 1956 India visit.

One may dismiss Gaur's account because he was a cog in the wheel—but neither Chakrabarty nor Majumdar were publicity-seeking politicians. And by the way, what would you say to Maloy Dhar's comment? The former intelligence officer, who came close to becoming the DIB, was not linked to any organisation or political party.

Then there is the account released by Janata Party president Dr Subramanian Swamy in 2006 in the form of a press statement. What makes it very serious is the fact that Dr Swamy cites Cabinet papers in support of his contention backing Shyam Lal Jain's story:

When Chandrasekhar's Janata government was in office, the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs [of which I was member as Minister], had considered the Japanese request to send the ashes back to India but after reviewing the files we decided to reject it. This was because the Cabinet papers contained a record of a deposition by a stenographer of Prime Minister Nehru stating that in December 1946 long after the alleged crash of Netaji's plane, he had taken down a letter dictated by Nehru addressed to Britain's Prime Minister Attlee complaining that Joseph Stalin was keeping Netaji in a camp in eastern USSR, and that Britain had to do something since Netaji 'is your war criminal'. This stenographer had deposed before the Khosla Commission but Justice Khosla ignored the evidence. [9]

3: There is a link between the “deaths” of Bose and Shastri

The controversy surrounding the death of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri is an issue by itself. At the end of a week-long, hectic India-Pakistan summit at Tashkent on 10 January 1966, Shastri looked agile and healthy despite the two heart attacks he had suffered in 1959 and 1964. Following the signing of the agreement at 4pm and a public reception at 8pm on 10 January 1966, he reached the villa where he was staying.

There, Shastri had a light meal prepared by Mohammed Jan, personal cook of TN Kaul, the Indian

Ambassador in Moscow. A Russian butler, Akhmed Sattarov, was also present. At about 11.30pm, Shastri had a glass of milk. When his personal staff took leave of him, he was all fine. At 1:25am, the Prime Minister was awakened by a severe coughing. He himself walked out to tell his personal staff to summon his personal doctor RN Chugh from another room in the villa. Dr Chugh arrived to find Shastri to be in death throes as a result of the symptoms of a heart attack. Despite Chugh's frantic efforts Shastriji passed away.

On 16 February 1966 several MPs led by HV Kamath, JB Kriplani, Prakash Vir Shastri and Madhu Limaye raised the issue in Parliament. A surgical cut and bluish patches on the PM's body had led to speculation of poisoning. The government response did not satisfy the lawmakers. It was in 1970 that the issue could be discussed at length. Inspired by the success of the Opposition MPs in compelling the Government to probe Bose's death afresh, Shastri's well wishers and family members demanded an inquiry. In April 1970 Rajya Sabha MP and Shastri's childhood friend TN Singh claimed that a relative's demand for an autopsy to rule out poisoning charges was rejected by acting Prime Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda.

On 18 December 1970 the Ministry of Home Affairs laid a statement of facts before the Lok Sabha. It satisfactorily tackled many of the charges and included copies of the medical reports issued in 1966 and 1970. The 11 January 1966 medical report signed by Dr Chugh and many Soviet doctors stated that in view of Shastri's medical history and the symptoms that manifested before he passed away, "it can be considered that death occurred because of an acute attack of infarktmiocarda". [10] A November 1970 statement issued by Soviet doctors detailed the process of embalming which had led to the body turning bluish. The Government, however, rejected TN Singh's claim that any of the family members had sought a post mortem because "there is no record of any suggestion having been made" and Nanda had "no recollection of anyone having spoken to him about a post mortem examination".

Some MPs accused the Government of giving a "one-sided" version on the last day of the session to ward off any serious discussion. Prakash Vir Shastri wanted the Government to clarify whether a security officer named GC Dutt had disapproved of the arrangements made by Ambassador Kaul and if he was taken off the duty a day before the PM died.

In 1996, one of Shastri's former aides CP Srivastava discussed the outcome of his personal enquiry in his book *Lal Bahadur Shastri: A life of truth in politics*. Because he was not present at the moment of the Prime Minister's death, Srivastava detailed the accounts of the staff members. He also consulted a leading British doctor, who opined that while without a postmortem it could not be said with cent per cent accuracy that there were no chances of poisoning, all available details indicated that the death was natural and followed a heart attack. Finally, Srivastava recalled having a word with the Home Secretary in around 1966. LP Singh told him that the issue of post mortem had come up during his discussion with Ambassador Kaul but was ruled out in view of the report of Dr Chugh and the Soviet doctors.

I also played a little role recently by making some enquiries from the PMO and MEA under the RTI. The PMO told me that it possessed only one classified document relating to the former PM's death and that there was no record of any destruction or loss of any document related to the tragedy.

The MEA informed me on 1 July 2009 that the concerned division had no information on the subject matter. It was quite strange because the sudden death of the Prime Minister must have thrown the Indian Embassy in Moscow in a tizzy. Ambassador Kaul must have scrambled to inform Delhi of the tragedy. A flurry of telephone calls and telegrams over the tragic development would have ensued for sure. The ministry would have gone on an overdrive to find out the circumstances leading to the PM's death. The ambassador must have been asked to send blow-by-blow reports, and he must have done that. The Soviets too would have felt obliged to tell Indians about their handling of the matter.

And as the charges of foul play emerged, the Government through the Ministry of External of Affairs (and also IB, which was then responsible for foreign intelligence) must have tried to get to the bottom of the story. So how could the concerned division in the ministry have no records I wondered?

The MEA further stated that the only main record available with the Indian Embassy in Moscow was the report of joint medical investigation conducted by Dr Chugh and the Soviet doctors. The ministry confirmed that no post-mortem was carried out in Moscow. I also got to know from the Delhi Police through another RTI reply that no post-mortem was conducted in India as well.

On July 21, I filed another application seeking copies of the entire correspondence between the MEA and the embassy and between the embassy and the Soviet foreign ministry over the issue. I requested the ministry to clearly state in case no such records were extant. In its belated response, the MEA refused to release the information for doing so would harm national interest. I was even denied a copy of Dr Chugh's report even though it was a public document.

It was only after the intervention of Chief Information Commissioner Sadananad Mishra that the MEA in August 2011 supplied me copies of Dr Chugh's medical report and a copy of the statement made by the External Affairs Minister in the Rajya Sabha. The issue about the sole secret record held by the PMO was also fairly settled by Commissioner Mishra in June 2011. After hearing the PMO's and my views, he summoned the classified record to decide whether or not it could be made public. The record was shown to him and he ruled that the PMO was right in keeping it classified for its disclosure would indeed harm India's relations with a friendly nation.

Later I learnt that this record cited an intelligence report blaming the United States, probably the CIA, for spreading a "canard" that Shastri's death was not natural. To me this version looked more like a conspiracy theory, because available information did not indicate any such thing. On the other hand, I came across a declassified memorandum written to US President Richard Nixon by his National Security Adviser Dr Henry Kissinger, proving that America sensed no foul play and saw no Russian hand. The following quote from this 1972 record must be read keeping in mind the abominable aversion Nixon and even Kissinger had for India and Indira Gandhi at that time. And still, in this Top Secret backgrounder about Russian premier A Kosygin, Dr Kissinger wrote that "the sudden fatal heart attack of Indian Prime Minister Shastri at Tashkent has never been traced, by any one, to the effect of his personal encounters with Kosygin". [11]

I don't know what's with some people in India that they see an American hand in everything: Shastri's death, Rajiv's assassination, 26/11, JP's movement, Anna Hazre's fast. Even the Bose mystery was not spared if you believe what Dr Satyanarain Sinha told the Khosla Commission. He said that when he tried to sensitise Prime Minister Nehru about Bose's presence in the USSR, the PM told him that "this is American propaganda". [12] Sinha further claimed that the PM called him an "American agent".

Dr. S.N. Sinha: There was an open debate in Parliament after that
and then he asked me in a private letter, "How many times I
had been to the American Embassy and whether I was their
agent or not?

Commission: Was it in connection with Netaji Bose ?

Dr. S. N. Sinha: Netaji Subhas Bose's case.



The "canard" about Shastri's death did not require CIA's manipulations because the rumours that he was poisoned started doing rounds in Moscow from the word go. Akhmed Sattarov, the Russian

butler attached to Shastri, told the *Telegraph* of London on 18 February 1998 that he “was arrested at 4am on suspicion of poisoning him and thrown into jail” and freed only when “it emerged that Shastri had died of a heart attack”. [13]

Further, Shastriji’s son Sunil Shastri and grandson Siddharth Nath Singh told me that the suspicions of poisoning started soon after the body arrived in Delhi. Shastri’s aged mother spotted what she thought were signs of poisoning, got them “verified” using a traditional method and cried out, *mere bitwa ko jahar de diya!* “My son has been poisoned!” The family members said that a demand for the post mortem was indeed made by them. They also had suspicions about the fate that befell Dr Chugh and another attendant of Shastri. Dr Chugh, his wife and two sons were overrun by a truck in 1977. Only his daughter survived but was crippled.

The best person who I can quote over the conspiracy theory linking Shastri’s death to something about Bose was Jagdish Kodesia, a former Delhi Congress chief who appeared before GD Khosla on 1 March 1971 as a witness. Several times during his on-oath deposition, Kodesia stated that “Shastriji was one person” who did not believe in Netaji’s death in the plane crash. “When he became Home Minister...he wanted to know the truth whether Subhas Bose was alive or not.” His next claim was spine-chilling. Kodesia felt that “after he became the Prime Minister...[Shastri] was emphatically working that there should be a fresh probe into Netaji’s disappearance”.

One thing is there that Shastri definitely wanted that there should be another inquiry commission. If he would have lived longer, he must have seen to that.... [14]

Kodesia’s version on this point is unreliable because a record left by Amiya Nath Bose, supported by the records released under the RTI Act, show Shastri continuing with the official line on Bose’s death.

On 7 August 1964, Amiya Nath Bose sent Prime Minister Shastri a letter with copies of his correspondence with Nehru. It pointed up the late Prime Minister’s remark that something should be done to “finalise the question of Netaji’s death”. Amiya asked Shastri to take appropriate steps. On August 12 Shastri wrote back that he would look into the matter. “Unfortunately Shri Shastri did not take any further steps in this matter,” Amiya noted when he heard nothing from the PM. But at the official level, Shastri had actually taken up the matter with Bengal Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen through a Top Secret letter dated 2 September 1964.

Forwarding copy of the letter Nehru had written to Amiya, the Prime Minister commented: “I am afraid Shri Bose’s conclusion that Panditji had agreed to his suggestion for a judicial inquiry is not borne by this letter.” He added: “I really do not know what further can be done about this matter.” [15] Do nothing, Sen advised Shastri in his reply:

CHIEF MINISTER

WEST BENGAL

CALCUTTA

September 8, 1964

~~TOP SECRET~~
secret
to consume
the wrt front
visico.

My dear Shastri,

I have received your letter No. 1217-PMO/64 dated the 2nd September, 1964, along with a copy of letter from Panditjee to Shri Amiya Bose. In view of the categorical reply of Panditjee to Shri Suresh Bose in August, 1962, I do not think there is anything further that can be done.

Yours sincerely
Prafulla Chandra Sen

(Prafulla Chandra Sen)

Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri
Prime Minister
NEW DELHI



Amiya's personal notes reveal that he again wrote to Shastri on 7 May, 1965 drawing his attention to newspaper stories reporting Dr Satyanarayan Sinha's claim that there was no air crash in Taipei on the day of Bose's supposed fatal disaster.

On the 31st of May, 1965 I sent him a telegram requesting him to reply to my letter. On the 6th of July, 1965 I sent him a further reminder and demanded an immediate appointment of a commission of inquiry. Unfortunately I have not been favoured with any reply. [16]

4: Dr Radhakrishnan, Vijya Lakshmi Pandit knew about Netaji but kept mum

The allegation that both Vijya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's talented younger sister and free India's first representative to the USSR and her successor Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan knew about Bose's existence in that country has continued unabated right up to our times.

Regarding Vijya Lakshmi, the theory goes that after her return from Moscow she made a statement that she had "some information which if disclosed would electrify India and the resultant happiness would be greater than what the people had experienced on 15 August 1947". Rai Singh Yadav, a former Director of the erstwhile Information Service of India under the MEA, told me that

he had once asked Ambassador Pandit about this “important statement” but she sidestepped the issue.

Yadav had more details about the allegation pertaining to Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. His friend Ram Rahul had heard from Babajan Gouffrav, a member of the Soviet Politburo during Stalin’s time that “Netaji had crossed over to the Soviet Union somewhere on the Soviet-Manchurian border, where he was taken into custody by the Soviet Frontier Guards”. Rai Singh’s account was deemed important enough to be splashed across a page by *Hindustan Times* in January 2000.

According to Babajan Gouffrav, India’s Ambassador in Moscow Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was allowed to see Netaji somewhere in the Soviet Union on the condition that the ambassador would not talk and mutely converse in any manner with Netaji. After this strange meeting, Ambassador Radhakrishnan informed Prime Minister Nehru about Netaji’s presence in the Soviet Union. This fact came to be known and speculations were rife in New Delhi about the ways and means of securing the release of Netaji from Soviet custody, but nothing was done at the official level to secure Netaji’s release. [17]

In talks with me, late Rai Singh added that when Dr Radhakrishnan returned to India, Prime Minister Nehru proposed his name as India’s first Vice-President in a Cabinet meeting. This, according to Rai Singh, was not approved by Abul Kalam Azad and others because Radhakrishnan had no credentials as a freedom fighter, though he was an internationally-renowned philosopher. He had been knighted by the British for his excellence in this field but “was not even bracketed with such colourless leaders of little influence as Tej Bahdur Sapru & MR Jayakar”. He had watched the freedom struggle “from far beyond India’s shores, and if, it roused any feeling of nationalism in him he did not exhibit them openly”. [18]

“Nehru went out of the way to promote Radhakrishnan and Azad did not approve of it,” Singh continued. He related a jibe attributed to the Maulana by a Congressman: *Kya hum sab mar gaye hain? Ye Sir Sarvepalli kahan se aa gaye hamare vice-president banne ke liye?!* “Are we all dead? From where does this Sir Sarvepalli come to be our Vice-President?!”

A few witnesses appearing before the Khosla Commission revived the allegations against Vijya Lakshmi Pandit and Dr Radhakrishnan. Both the former President and Ambassador Pandit were made aware of them. “The last time I met Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was in Darjeeling in the summer of 1940,” [19] Radhakrishnan affirmed in his affidavit. Vijya Lakshmi stated in hers that she never met Bose after he left India in 1941. There was some argument before the commission whether the circumstances warranted personal appearance of the two and their cross-examination. The commission’s counsel TR Bhasin himself on 6 July 1972 “reiterated his demand to summon former President S Radhakrishnan, Mrs Vijya Lakshmi Pandit and others as witnesses before the commission”. “Radhakrishnan to be examined,” the *Times of India* reported on 24 December 1972.

In his final report Khosla justified not summoning and examining the two personally because “Dr Radhakrishnan was too ill to be examined orally”. He said there was “no reason whatsoever for disbelieving” Vijya Lakshmi Pandit’s affidavit.

It is far more reliable and acceptable than the evidence of a host of witnesses who have made incredible statements about encounters with Bose at different times and at different places. [20]

The explanation sounds fine to me but somehow it doesn’t square with “chairman” Khosla’s own announcement on the record of the proceeding dated 24 July 1973 showing his verbatim discussion with the commission secretary:

SECRETARY: The Other Witnesses fixed for 25th, summons have been issued, but we have not heard anything to the contrary, whether they are coming or not. We have made efforts to get them to appear before the Commission.

CHAIRMAN:: Mrs Pandit will come on 26th.

Mr. Mullick will come, he is out of Delhi now. He will come on the 7th.



Despite Khosla's assertion on the record that "Mrs Pandit will come on the 26 th", she never did and he never complained.

5: INA treasure was appropriated by Nehru

In a dark damp corner of the basement of New Delhi's National Museum lies "safe No 48". Official secrecy could lead you into believing that it is the proverbial mystery wrapped inside an enigma. The "mystery" is a locked grey steel box wrapped in an enigmatic Diplomatic Bag carrying a seal of the NGO Section of the External Affairs Ministry at two places. What lies inside this box is unknowable, for it is still a state secret. All one knows is that this is the "INA treasure". No more details are available officially. According to a classified note, the "contents of this box have been entered in the General Accession Register of the National Museum on two pages, but these have also been sealed". And if by chance one gets clearance to flip through this register, one would see this written right on the top on the two pages classified as "Top Secret":

The contents of this page are to be treated under the Official Secrets Act and any person divulging them would be punishable under the same act.

National Museum of India					
Extracts from the General Accession Register, Volume I					
Accession No.	Source	Short Description	Date or period	Locality	Remarks and references
17/DG/83	Shri D.O. Bhattacharya D.S. E&A Ministry (A.O.I.)	Gold and other objects taken from Shri Ramamurti on 24.9.51 by the Indian Embassy at Tokyo	1945	These I.N.A. Treasure are kept in a grey steel box, locked and covered by a diplomatic Bag, sealed	Iron safe No.48 Location Room Class Shelf
<i>The contents of this page are to be treated under the Official Secrets Act and any person divulging them would be punishable under the same Act, for reasons stated below:-</i>					
<i>Shri D.O. Bhattacharya D.S. E&A Ministry (A.O.I.)</i>					

In the early 1980s, a journalist from Kolkata tried to know the contents of the box and the result was File No 17/DG/83—opened by the Intelligence Bureau on him. Such is the secrecy that even the Director General of the museum in the past did not know about the contents of the box and how it landed in the museum basement. In 1994, following a demand, the then DG Ashok Vajpayee was constrained to request Vivek Katju, Joint Secretary (Administration) at the MEA, to throw some light about the box kept in Vajpayee's custody.

I think our Government needs to get a life! There is no big secret about this box and consequently no need for dangling the threat of punishment under an archaic Raj-era legislation. All that the box contains is some burnt metal and jewellery which M Ramamurti had handed over to the Indian Mission in Tokyo on 24 September 1951.

Well, is that all there is to the INA treasure issue, or is there something else which makes the

Government so secretive and jittery about a boxful of burnt metals, jewellery and residual ash?

Responding to Kamath and others in the Lok Sabha on 2 August 1955, Nehru had dismissed rumours that “a large quantity of gold, jewellery and precious gems were handed over to one Mr Ramamurti in Tokyo by SA Ayer after the reportedly fatal air crash”.

I do not know about the large quantity, but something was handed over to us and that was presumably the lot to which the honourable member refers. It is not of any great intrinsic value. They were a few gold ornaments and a few odd things rather burnt and twisted up and we have kept them as a matter of sentiment and history, to be kept in a museum perhaps.

The PM also informed the House that in 1945 he had enquired in Singapore about INA properties. “With great difficulty” he could lay his hands on about one and a half lakhs of rupees and “formed a trust with this money to help Indian students there”.

The troubling part is that as per a note kept in Secret file No F 23(150)/51-PM, the papers which contained the information the Prime Minister used to furnish the above answers were unceremoniously destroyed just before the Khosla Commission was formed. The knowledge vacuum created as a result of this has been filled by several charges attempting to explain the “true” story about the missing INA treasure.

The first one sounds genuine for it comes from Dr Subramanian Swamy. I don’t quite understand it; when I speak to some people about the Netaji mystery they somehow bring out the “waste of money” aspect. Talk to the same lot about Dr Swamy’s unparalleled service to the nation in exposing of the billion-rupee fraud in the telecom sector, and they hardly sound appreciative and start finding fault in him for one thing or another. To those who admire the Janata Party leader, if you think Swamy was marvellous as he exposed the telecom scam, here’s a blast from the past. In February 1978, Swamy told mediapersons that:

* Some time in August 1952, the Japanese government communicated to Prime Minister Nehru that it was in possession of some trunks containing gold and diamond ornaments belonging to the INA and wanted to return it. RK Nehru carried the message to the PM.

* Prime Minister then ordered an ICS officer, who was on tour in the US to study agricultural extension programmes, to proceed to Tokyo “for further studies”. The officer reached Tokyo. After a lapse of two months, in November 1952, the PM sent him a coded cipher-cable. Decoded, it read: “You should depart from Tokyo direct to Delhi with two trunks sealed and handed over to you by the Indian ambassador at the airport. Upon arrival in Delhi please bring direct to my residence and hand it to me personally, repeat, to me personally.”

* The ICS officer left by BOAC flight to Delhi with the trunks but the plane developed engine trouble in Hong Kong. At the airport there, the officer contacted the Governor-General who then made special security arrangements for the trunks. Later, the Governor-General sent a cable to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London about “two mysterious sealed trunks” on the way to India.

* When the BOAC flight finally landed in Delhi airport, RK Nehru was waiting there in the tarmac in his official car. As this officer alighted from the plane, RK Nehru demanded the custody of the trunks. The officer refused, showing him the copy of the cipher telegram in which the PM had said, “hand it to me personally”.

* The officer was made to sit in the official car, and without going through customs formality, he was brought to the Teen Murti House. He was then ushered into the Prime Minister’s private study where he was waiting. Nehru ordered the seal of the trunks to be broken and trunks opened.

Hindustan Times quoted Dr Swamy further charging that

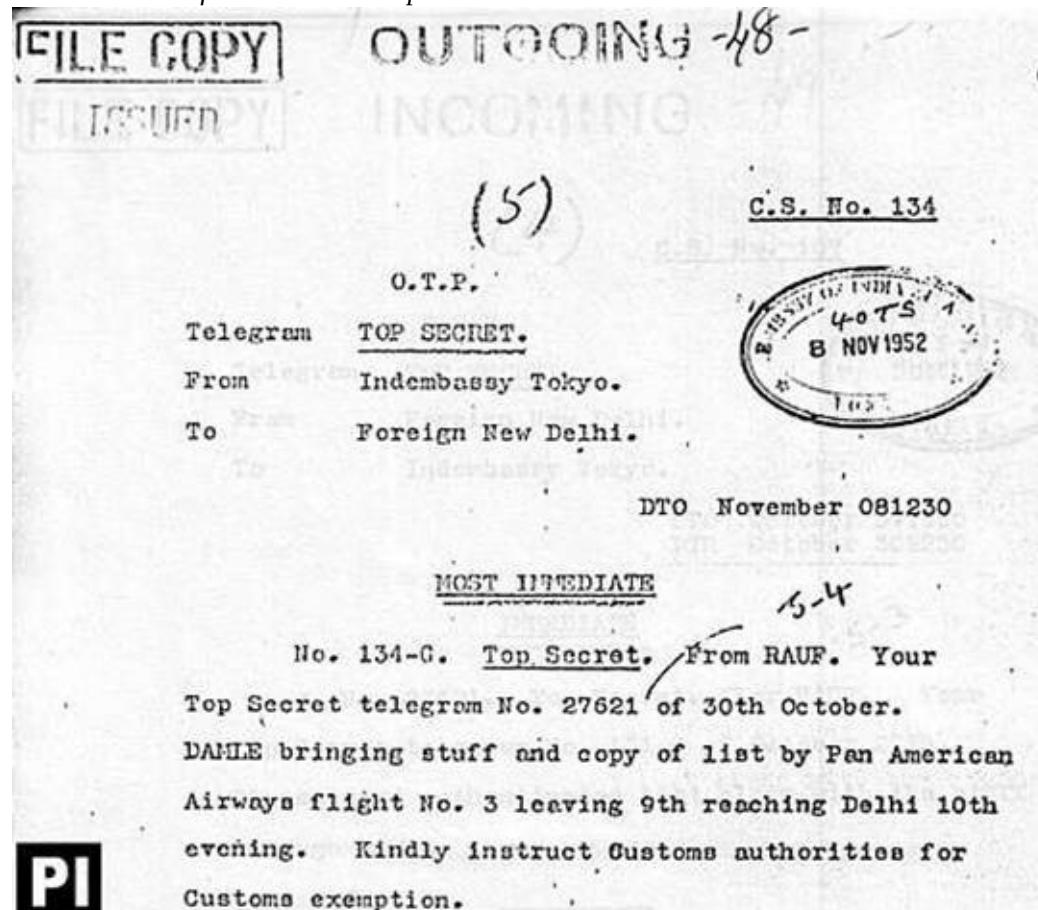
it was then, for the first time, the officer saw what the trunks contained—gold and diamond ornaments. The worth of those at that time was approximately Rs 2 crore and Rs 20 crore at the current [1978] prices. All these ornaments were subsequently melted in Allahabad and credited to Mr Jawaharlal Nehru’s personal account. Not a word of Mr Bose’s treasure was ever heard of again.

Swamy went on to demand a suggestive course of action to unravel the truth: “Seal all files of cipher telegrams maintained in the Indian Embassy at Tokyo and the External Affairs Ministry”, “forthwith record the statement of Mr RK Nehru” and the ICS officer. He also told media that “there was widespread suspicion in the country that Mr Nehru was intensely jealous of Netaji and had tried to stall a proper inquiry into his death”.

Swamy’s extraordinary 1978 charge gets some backing from the Government. Because to an extent it tallies with the official narrative in records that are classified till date. The person who brought the treasure to India was KR Damle and as Swamy claimed, he indeed passed through the

customs without any check. On 8 November 1952, Ambassador Rauf sent two Top Secret/Most immediate telegrams to New Delhi. The first said:

*Damle bringing stuff and copy of list by Pan American Airways flight No 3 leaving 9th reaching Delhi 10th evening.
Kindly instruct customs authorities for customs exemption.*



The second made the request that "if necessary please insure stuff worth Rs 90,000 carried in steel attaché case weighing approximately 35 lbs as insurance not possible this end".

Two days later, Deputy Secretary Leilamani Naidu left a Top Secret note, recording that she had "sent a note yesterday to Mr Rajaram Rao, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance (RD), asking whether the INA treasure, which Mr Damle is bringing with him could be exempted from the customs examination and duty". Who says that the wheels of bureaucracy don't move fast? On November 10 a Top Secret/Most immediate letter from AK Mukarji of Revenue Control Board landed on the table of NC Mehta, the Collector of Central Excise:

A steel attaché case containing gold ornaments and dust and broken pieces is being brought by Mr Damle, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture from Tokyo. ...The steel attaché case in question and the contents thereof may be released without customs examination under the note and pass procedure.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF FINANCE (REVENUE DIVISION)

No. 159-DS(Cus.)/52 New Delhi, the 21st January 1953.

To : The Collector of Central Excise
 (Shri N.L.Mehta),
 Delhi.

Sub:- Gold ornaments etc. brought
 in in one steel attache case
 from Japan by Mr. Damle of the
 Ministry of Food & Agriculture -
 Exemption from Customs duty
 thereon.

PI

Please refer to the correspondence resting
 with your Collectorate letter C.No.VIII(1)/2(78)/
 52/85 dated the 17th January 1953 on the above-
 mentioned subject.

2. The Government of India have decided,
 as a special case, that the gold ornaments etc.
 contained in the above-mentioned steel attache
 case be exempted from payment of Customs duty.

Sd./— (A. K. Mukarji)
 Deputy Secretary to the Govt.
 of India.

In the meanwhile, Ambassador Rauf himself continued to send frantic Top Secret grams—all for something as expensive as Rs 90,000/- only and something the PM would say made “poor show”!

“Damle arriving Delhi Pan American Airways flight No 3 Tuesday 0005 hours,” New Delhi was told on November 10.

And, proving Swamy right was a cable sent by the man of the moment. Damle got stuck in Hong Kong and made use of Government of India Overseas Communication Service.

Plane delayed. Arriving eleventh night same time. Arrange customs facilities—Damle.

Hong Kong was the place where, according to Dr Swamy's claim, Damle was spotted with "two" trunks. The government records, however, speak of only one. After the "goods" reached New Delhi, the Embassy in Tokyo was notified on November 13.

No 27627. Top Secret. For RAUF. Your telegram No 137 November 10th. Goods arrived November 12th.

On November 15 Naidu wrote to anxious Rauf vide a Top Secret letter that “Damle's arrival was delayed and we therefore received the case of valuables only on the 12th”. She reassured him again on November 20. This time saying that “the gold sent through Mr Damle has been safely received”.

~~TOP SECRET~~

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

NEW DELHI.

-41-
20th November, 1952.
(12)

D.O.No. F.25/11/10.c.



Subject: I.N.A. PROPERTIES

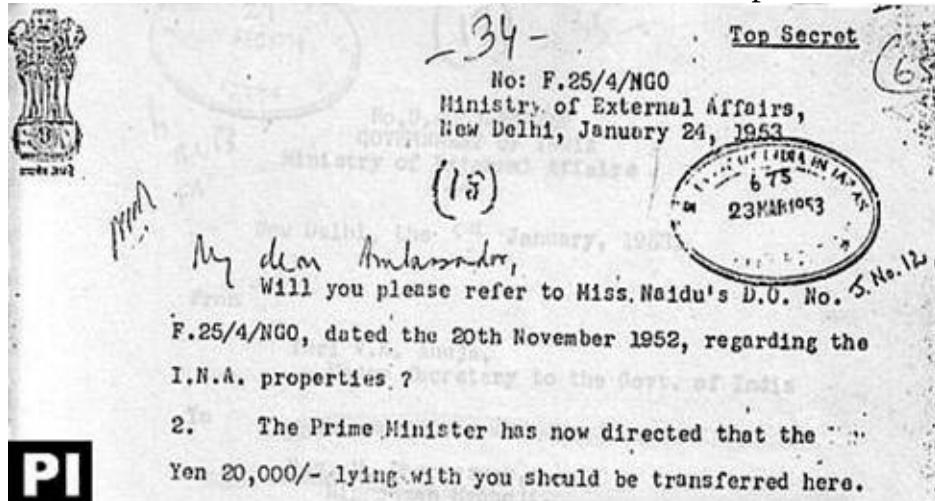
PI

My dear Rauf,

Will you please refer to your / 5-10
Top Secret letter D.O.No.F.5(1)N.G.O-1 of the
14th November, on the above subject? The gold
sent through Mr.Damle has been safely received.
The question of its final disposal is still
under consideration. The Prime Minister desires

So it boils down to this: How many trunks were actually brought in? Swamy claimed there were two and government records, one. It better be one, because if there were two, then there is already a suspicious detail on the file backing Swamy's account that the "treasure" was handed over to the Prime Minister. According to the Ministry of External Affairs version, "under the instructions of the then Prime Minister the treasure box was 'brought to India and delivered to the Ministry of External Affairs' and remained there temporarily". But the take of the Prime Minister's Office, as per a noting made by a Secretary to PM Morarji Desai, was that "the box was bought to India under instructions of the then Prime Minister 'and handed over to him immediately on arrival, and was retained by the Ministry of External Affairs temporarily'". Take your pick.

Some two months after Damle's arrival, the Indian Embassy in Tokyo was told to transfer to India the cash portion of the INA treasure—the 20,000 yen which had survived the loot of Ramamurti and Ayer. The strange thing about it was that despite the sum being equivalent to just Rs 265 or so, the matter was initiated at the level of the Prime Minister and treated as Top Secret.



When there was no response from the ambassador, he was sent another Top Secret reminder:

B
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
NEW DELHI.the 17th March, 1953.

(17)

Will you please Subject: I.N.A. Treasure.

NGO, dated the 20th November 1952, regarding the properties?

My dear Ambassador,

1. Will you please refer to my D.O. letter No.F.25/4/NGO, dated the 24th January 1953, regarding the transfer of Yen 20,000 now held by the Embassy ?

2. We shall be grateful for an early reply.

Yours sincerely,

H Dayal

(H. Dayal)



The ambassador finally replied in May 1953 that the amount was "credited to Government and entered in our Cash Account under the head 'Tokyo-Suspense-Miscellaneous receipts from India (Adjustable in India)'".

~~TOP SECRET~~EMBASSY OF INDIA IN JAPAN
TOKYO

D.O. No. F.5(1)NGO-I

15th May 1953

My dear Sir Dayalji

1. Will you please refer to your demiofficial letter No. F.25/4/NGO of the 5th May 1953?

2. The 20,000 Yen (Rs 265/11/-) in question has been credited to Government and entered in our Cash Account under the head "Tokyo-Suspense-Miscellaneous receipts from India (Adjustable in India)".

Yours sincerely
M.A. Rauf



With such intriguing details on record, the controversy regarding the INA treasure requires

further clarity so that Nehru's name can be cleared from the charges. Because, Dr Swamy's account is not the only one sullying it in this connection.

Bhagwanji levelled charges against Ramamurti, SA Ayer and Nehru. According to a noting made by Pabitra Mohan Roy during his talks with the holy man some time in the early 1960s,

Minister Ayer was to follow the bomber with treasure. But he went to Tokyo handed over the treasure to Ramamurti. Disposed of some, encashed part of jewels with help of Br military of Tokyo and Jap foreign officials. JN knows it. Murti gave 'J' only small fraction of fabulous wealth. No treasure was burnt. It is a fabrication. Imperial Jap Army, British men, India Govt and party men all involved. That is why no action was taken.

This would of course be dismissed by all "right thinking people" who won't brook any talk of Bose in the guise of a holy man. But I wonder what would they say to something deemed intelligent by *Hindustan Times*, something far more horrendous in its implication. Under the sub-head "Find the money," and citing Dr Purabi Roy's research and the paper's own insight, the HT reported in 2001 that huge money "seized from the INA by the British army was handed over to Mountbatten and a Congress leader".

Researchers are increasingly convinced that the whole Bose mystery would be solved once and for all if the INA funds, believed to be running into crores, are traced. [21]

One of the researchers, Subharnshu Roy claimed before the Mukherjee Commission that his correspondence with former CSDIC officer Hugh Toye "proved the INA treasure were handed over to Nehru in November 1945". [22] A similar charge was made by INA's Lakshmi Seghal in Amritsar in 2002.

#6: Netaji was seen next to Pandit ji's bier in 1964



No other snippet of the Bose mystery has traversed generational gaps like the theory that "Subhas Bose" had turned up to pay respects to departed Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi's Teen Murti Bhavan in May 1964. Its proof lies in the picture you have just seen.

But the Bose lookalike monk was not him for simple reason that he was Vira Dhammavara—a venerable Cambodian Buddhist monk who lived in south Delhi for decades before passing away in the US only a couple of years back at the grand old age of 110. Dhammavara's inadvertent doppelganger act lasted barely for a second or two on camera, but it triggered a sensation so strong that it caused commotion in India for several years. The monk was quite amused about it and he actually deposed before the Khosla Commission in person to clear the air. [23]

Q: When did you go there?

A: I went there eversince the death of Shri Nehru was known. I stayed by the side of the dead body, performed some religious ceremony or rites by reciting some verses from the scriptures.

Q: Will you kindly see this photograph. You find yourself in this photograph.

A: Yes, it is my photograph.

I have seen photograph Ex. W-16/MN. The Buddhist monk by the side of the dead body of Shri Jawaharlal Nehruji, is myself..



Dr Lokesh Chandra, an eminent art historian of our times, also appeared before the commission to testify that he had known Dhammavara ever since he was a child and the Buddhist monk was indeed "present by the side of the dead body of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru". [24]

His likeness to Bose from a certain angle notwithstanding, Dhammavara was actually a short man. Bose, as per his family members, was close to 5ft 10in tall. Take a closer look at another still:



And if you are still not convinced, check out this montage. The two pictures on right were taken at different times from the first three and yet we can see it is Dhammavara in all.



#7: Netaji was behind an abortive coup attempt

This is the least known but perhaps the most explosive of all the conspiracy theories relating to the Bose mystery. But what would you say to such an obnoxious idea when the very word "coup" has been unthinkable in India? "Anyone who harbours it should get his head checked." Precisely for this reason, I dismissed the theory with a derisive laughter when I first heard it.

But today as I see some pieces of scattered information, I am not sure if this is a laughing matter.

As former Intelligence Bureau Director BN Mullik was being examined before the Khosla

Commission in 1972, Forward Bloc counsel Amar Prasad Chakravarty suddenly changed tack and asked him: “Can you tell me one thing? At any stage were you afraid that there would be a coup in India?”

Mullik should have given an emphatic “no” for an answer, but instead he responded strangely.

“I do not think this concerns here,” he told GD Khosla. “For this information I would claim privilege and I would like to get a clearance from the Government.”

~~Q: Can you tell me one thing? At any stage were you afraid
that there would be coup in India?~~

~~A: I do not think this concerns here. For this information
I would claim privilege and I would like to get a clearance
from the Government.~~



“But it is already out. This is published in *India-China war* by Maxwell,” Chakravarty said. He was referring to a book written by former London *Times* correspondent Neville Maxwell. The book had become controversial for its “anti-India” stance and the claim that it was based on classified Henderson Brookes inquiry report into the 1962 war.

“What Maxwell had told is a pack of lies,” Mullik said.

“But do you remember and did this Government suspect behind this coup any person or persons and regarding that is there any report?”

“No inquiry was ever referred to me about any alleged coup in India.”

“But you were trying places for Panditji for his hide-out.”

“What Maxwell has said in his book is a pack of lies.”

“You say it is incorrect?”

“It is incorrect.”

“And General Chaudhury was chastised, do you remember?”

“He was not chastised in my presence.”

“And on your report, you and Biju Patnaik were entrusted...”

“That is all false. What Maxwell has mentioned in his book is absolutely false from A to Z.”

“Why are you not proceeding against Maxwell then?”

At this point, Justice Khosla interrupted. What he said would take your breath away.

“Let us confine to Netaji, and not go beyond that. If Netaji was behind this coup, you can ask him.”

“I am asking him whether he made an inquiry?” said Chakravarty.

“He said that no inquiry was entrusted to him. You can ask him whether he knew Netaji was behind that coup,” Khosla emphasised.

“Let him say,” Chakravarty replied.

“Supposing hypothetically it is true, so far as Netaji is concerned, it throws no light,” Khosla reasoned.

Chakravarty was not giving it up. He further asked Mullik:

“And if I say you were specially instructed to see whether there is any link in the military with the Netaji and also with the other top officials in the Government?”

“Never.”

“And that is why Pandit Nehru entrusted you for a hide-out for his safety?”

“No.”

"And you also entrusted Biju Patnaik to set up some organisation for a counter-coup. Is it not so?"

"How can I ask Biju Patnaik to do it?"

"True, because you were the only man of confidence of Pandit Nehru, at that time."

"This is completely incorrect."

"And would it be correct, what you have written in your book that you were also the man who changed decisions with Pandit Nehru?"

"I have never said this."

"What is the relevance it has with regard to Netaji?" Khosla asked Chakravarty.

"Well, my Lord, there is the whole background behind it." [25]

There are no further elaborations in the Khosla proceeding records, but when I met Amar Prasad Chakravarty's assistant Sunil Krishna Gupta, he told me that there were rumours of an abortive coup bid after the 1962 war. Since Gupta was also the person feeding information relating to Khosla's sham inquiry to Bhagwanji, I asked him whether the holy man also talked anything like that. Gupta did not give me a clear answer. Several of the questions that Chakravarty, died in 1985, put to several witnesses were evidently inspired by what the holy man said. For example, he asked BN Mullik if the IB had ever tried to find out who was General Siva referred in Lowell Thomas's book *The Dalai Lama*.

Around the same time I met Gupta, an anonymous person made a most astonishing claim to me, linking a most devastating tragedy in the Indian armed forces to this conspiracy theory. "Some people wanted Netaji back and they paid the price". I dwelt a little into it and found nothing which could have helped in making any such deduction. All I learnt that the mishap referred to had some lose ends.

On 22 November 1963 a small Alouette helicopter went down in Gulpur, Jammu and Kashmir. With it was lost virtually the entire top brass of Western Command, the biggest command of the Indian Army, and also the chief of Western Air Command. In all, two lieutenant-generals, one air vice marshal, one major general, one brigadier and one bright young flight lieutenant were lost. "This was no ordinary list of casualties. Not even in an action on the battlefield have so many officers of such high rank been killed at one stroke in recent history." [26] The highest ranking officer to be martyred in the 1971 war would be a brigadier.

Lt Gen Daulet Singh, GOC-in-C, Western Command, the third senior officer of the Indian Army, was tipped to be next Deputy Chief of Army Staff. His immensely popular corps commander, Lt Gen Bikram Singh, whose statue in Jammu is a landmark of the city, was also due for promotion. Their brilliant service record was matched by that of another victim and hero of 1961 Goa operation Air Vice Marshal Eric William Pinto. Maj Gen NKD Nanavati, formerly the Military Attaché in the Embassy of India in Moscow, had just been promoted and so was Brig SR Uberoi. Both had been decorated with Mahavir Chakras. Pilot Fl Lt SS Sodhi was recently awarded the Vayu Sena Medal for his meritorious services in the sector. [Daulet, Bikram, Nanavati and Uberoi seen in the combo image]



The tragedy obviously left New Delhi numbed. The blow at home was followed by another from abroad. Pro-India John F Kennedy was assassinated the same day. On 23 November 1963 the

newspapers covered both the stories prominently.

THE NEW BANK
INDIA LIMITED
Announcing extra
Morning Service
from 8:30 A.M. to 10:00 A.M.
at Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir
Branches throughout India
on November, 1962.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Largest Combined Net Sales Among All Daily Newspapers in India
Published from New Delhi by The Madras Times & Co.
NEW DELHI: SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1962.
REGD. NO. D 62
PRICE 12 PATAKA PAISE

5 top Defence officers killed in air crash Noon tragedy near Poonch

Express News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov 22.—A major tragedy overtook the nation today when five top Army and Air Force officers were killed in an IAF helicopter crash near Poonch, about 2½ miles from the cease-fire line in Kashmir.

The officers killed were: Lt-Gen Basdeo Singh, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command; Major-General A. Vajpeyi, Major-General in Charge of Air Operations, Commanding, Western Command; Lt-Gen Bikram Singh, Corps Commander, Western Command; Maj-Gen N. K. D. Naikavati; and Brigadier S. R. Ushod.

The pilot of the Alouette helicopter, Fl-Lt S. S. Sondhi, was only recently awarded the Virya Sena Medal for his meritorious services in Ladakh last year.

There were no survivors.

Never before have so many officers been killed in the history of India's defence forces.

There were no survivors.

ADCO of the Defence Services, Major P. H. Rao, on behalf of the Defence Secretary, said that the air crash, "Air Marshal A. M. Vajpeyi, Major-General in Charge of Air Operations, Commanding, Western Command, and Air Marshal of the Indian Air Force, Major-General N. K. D. Naikavati, Major-General in Charge of Air Operations, Commanding, Western Command, were among those who lost their lives in the accident."

Members of the armed forces carry the bodies of the officers who died in the helicopter crash from an aircraft on their arrival at Palam airport on Friday evening.



Kennedy is shot dead; Johnson takes over

IAC flight intercept

The *Times of India* mentioned in bold on page one that the “Government circles in Delhi were naturally puzzled tonight how the five top officers happened to travel together in one helicopter on an inspection tour of a sensitive frontier area”. [27] The rumours of “sabotage” began doing rounds as soon as the mishap occurred. It was reported in a *Hindu* story that “something inside the helicopter exploded”. [28] On November 24, Prime Minister Nehru tried to scotch them. “There is no reason to think that it has been an act of sabotage...I cannot say definitely, but we should not make charges without some justification,” he told Congress MPs in Delhi. “It appears that the helicopter got tied up with some telegraph wires—I do not know the details. There is no reason why it should get tied up when it is flying low or fast. But there it was.” [29]

The PM’s statement led to an uproar in Parliament. “On what basis did the Prime Minister say that he thought it was not a case of sabotage? Did he get any report from any quarter because all the occupants of this helicopter were killed,” asked Bupesh Gupta in the Rajya Sabha. “Don’t you think it is serious? Can you show a precedent where within a matter of hours since the accident took place, without relying on anything, but merely on a surmise a statement of this nature is made?” Gupta was joined by Atal Bihari Vajpayee:

When the statement was made by the Defence Minister, he should have given the information that there was no possibility of sabotage. But the statement was silent and then the Prime Minister went to the Congress parliamentary party’s meeting and said it as if the party had a higher status than this august House. ...When an inquiry is being conducted, how can he (Nehru) say with certainty that there was no sabotage...? [30]

In the Lok Sabha, where the PM was present, NG Ranga asked, “When Government do not know all facts, how is it that the Prime Minister ventured to suggest that there could be no sabotage?” “This is for the House to decide,” Nehru went on the defensive. “Where was the need to offer an opinion?” Ranga wondered. He was joined by Krishnpal Singh. “I would like to know on what evidence he bases his observation. Since there were no survivors how does he come to know that the helicopter met with an accident on account of the telegraph wires?” [31]

As the official version went, the chopper had rammed into a wire suspended across a small gorge. It appeared to be a case of pilot error. But newspaper reports suggested that Sondhi knew the terrain well. Defence Minister YB Chavan himself admitted in the Lok Sabha that he “had taken the ‘recce’ only two days before the accident took place”. [32]

I happened to meet the grandchildren of two of the deceased officers and found them to be living with the family view that there was more to the mishap than what had been given out by the Government. One made clear that his grandfather was annoyed with the Government over its handling

of the 1962 war.

I personally think that it is something of a smoking gun that just before he got into the helicopter, Gen Bikram Singh should have signed the local battalion visitor's register "again with a sigh and the ominous words: 'I hope this is not my last signature'". [33] I came across this in a book authored by a former army officer who termed the general's remark as a "premonition" of his death. People endowed with scientific temperament should not explain things with such superstitious analogies. A logical explanation would be that General Singh had some reason to fear for his life.

The Gulpar crash has also been detailed by former Home Secretary RD Pradhan in his book, but since he has not quoted official records, especially the report of inquiry constituted after the crash, not all questions have been answered. I am sure the release of records—including those with the Intelligence Bureau—will rest the doubts. Such as, how the bodies of the victims were sliced and badly mutilated even though the chopper had come down from a height of 150 feet.

The core argument in favour of declassifying the official records is that their release sets the record straight.

VI. The men who kept the secrets

Except for a small portrait in his study, there was nothing in the old man's house in one affluent part of New Delhi to suggest that he had anything to do with Subhas Chandra Bose. From his aquiline features, Pradip Bose did not remind one of his uncle. Actually he wouldn't even talk about him unless he was asked to. Pradip and his British wife spent their summers in London and winters in India. This unassuming son of Suresh Bose spoke softly but thought strongly about the issue of his uncle's fate, just as most of his kin still do.

Pradip was in flashback mode while talking to me years back: "For 47 years I kept asking my late brother Aurobindo—'please tell me of your part in his escape from Calcutta in 1941?'—but he wouldn't say anything more than what was known publicly." Then he commented: "Isn't that strange? Even governments declassify secrets after 30 years?!"

It took me a long time to grasp the true import of Pradip's parable.

Before he escaped from India, Subhas had placed his nephews Aurobindo and Dwijendranath Bose "under oath of secrecy" to not to reveal under any circumstance anything more than what they were instructed to. Aurobindo's part—as reported in the *Indian Express* of 28 January 1941—was to provide a false lead that Bose was in Kolkata on 25 January 1941, when he had actually left days earlier.

Statement By Nephew Of Subhas

The United Press adds:—

Mr. Aurabindo Bose, Mr. Subhas Bose's nephew, who was the only person allowed to look after Mr. Subhas Bose, said that since January 16, Mr. Bose had taken a vow of silence and shut himself in his room partitioned with a screen behind which he used to sit on a tiger's skin reading the Gita and other religious books and meditating.

Fruits, milk and water were kept outside the screen once daily and the utensils removed only the next morning. If Mr. Bose wanted anything to be done in the meanwhile, he would place a slip outside the screen or ring the bell but would not allow anybody to talk or disturb him.

On the 26th morning, Mr. Aurabindo Bose having found that the fruits and milk kept for Mr. Bose remained untouched since the previous evening, grew anxious and after consultation

This pattern of escape, Pradip Bose said, was also evident in the Bose's "planned escape" to the Soviet Union in 1945.

At least seven members of the Bose family knew about some aspects of his escape from India. But Subhas came to the conclusion that if all of them pretended they did not know anything about his escape then at least some of them would be arrested, interrogated and even tortured to get at the truth. To avoid such a possibility he constructed a story of his withdrawal from worldly affairs in order to meditate in an undisturbed environment. He withdrew behind a curtain and only one person, his nephew Aurobindo, was allowed to enter into the 'prohibited area' late in the evening to know about his requirements.

While Aurobindo knew that Subhas had left Calcutta on 17th January, 1941, he told the police that he had seen Netaji on

25th January, as Subhas had asked him to do. On the 26th January an announcement was made that he was no longer in his room. Aurobindo was a 'viable witness' swearing that he saw Subhas Bose on the 25th night, while actually he had already crossed the Indo-Afghan border. [1]

The British tortured Aurobindo's cousin Dwijendra in the Lahore Fort and got nothing out of him. More than thirty years later, Aurobindo and Dwijendra appeared before the Khosla Commission with nothing changed. Aurobindo admitted that he and Dwijendra "were confidants of Netaji and both of them were under oath of secrecy" to him and spoke of his disbelief in their uncle's death in Taiwan. Dwijendra was more forthcoming of the two. He admitted that the oath had bound him to secrecy. But repeated queries failed to get anything more out of him.

"From what period to what period you were in jail?"

"From April 1941 to September 1945."

"May I take it that you were taken into confidence along with other two cousins, that is Aurobindo Bose, Sisir Bose and sister Ila in the matter of his disappearance from India?"

"Yes."

"In 1941?"

"Yes."

"Could you tell us briefly about Netaji's early life? One aspect is about his secretive nature."

"I cannot give you the entire story of his departure because I am under an oath to Netaji. Unless I am asked by Netaji, I cannot do that."

"I am not on that at all. In order to supplement the view that you have taken about Netaji's secretive nature...."

"He did not consult anybody. He went to Jaipur, served the cholera patients and came back. When he was studying in the Presidency College, he left home in quest of a guru. At home also he did not consult his own mother who was living in the next room. My father was alive, he was eldest to him. He used to meet Netaji daily. He was not informed also."

"When he had completely made up his mind, you were taken into confidence!?"

"That I do not know. But I was taken into confidence when he needed."

"And that was the penultimate stage?"

"That I cannot say because I am not in a position to say. I am under oath." [2]

Pradip Bose told me that he saw a pattern in his brother's behaviour and that of Habibur Rahman's.

At least five or six persons in the provisional Government of Azad Hind knew that Netaji was planning to escape to the Soviet Union after the end of the war but only one person Habibur Rahman was chosen to fly with him. He was the sole Indian witness to the event of his death. Or, was it yet another non-event, as vouched for by Aurobindo on an earlier occasion? [3]

Pradip's elder sister agreed. Shiela Sengupta actually took me back to a dramatic happening in the year 1946 when Habibur Rahman had come over to Calcutta. Bose's maternal uncle Satyen Dutt broached up the issue of his death and Rahman recounted for the umpteenth time what had happened in Taipei.

"See!" he stretched out his hands. "I got these burns trying to save him." Satyen Dutt, a doctor, took a closer look. Hideous burn marks on the dorsal and upper arms. "Habib!" he queried, "How did your palms escape severe burning?" "You just said you tore off burning clothes with your bare hands!"

"You know, Colonel Habib was wearing the same uniform that day, and there's no signs it's been through fire," interjected Col BS Raturi of the INA.

"Sit down!" Rahman got up on his feet, visibly annoyed. Raturi stared back to him and left the room.

Bose's uncle was now curious. "What is Raturi talking about? Is this the same uniform you were wearing when the crash took place? Call Raturi back and clear the matter right away!"

"This is all I have to say," Rahman mumbled and left.

Years later, Dr Dutt appeared before the Khosla Commission and opined that Rahman's burns could have been caused by acid. Col Raturi's memory failed him because at the time of his examination on 1 March 1971 he was with the R&AW. Aurobindo recalled during his deposition how he would "compliment" Rahman for creating realistic burn marks with acid. "Habib either used to keep mum or smile at this suggestion." [4] Dwijen recollected Rahman telling him that "I tried to put out the fire with the palms of my hand," and his finding the burn marks on the dorsal side of Rahman's hands.

As a businessman dealing in garments, Dwijendra knew a little about warps and woofs. He saw the cut marks on Rahman's body but failed to locate the corresponding damage on the dress Rahman said he was wearing at the time of the alleged air crash. "The sewing was intact...not a mark of any burning or any repairing. When he lifted the trousers to show me the cut mark on his right knee, I marked his trousers and there was no mark of any stitching there."

Dwijen also believed that the watch furnished by Rahman as the one which Bose was wearing at the time of air crash did not belong to his uncle. Rahman stealthily passed this burnt square watch to Shah Nawaz Khan, saying it came to him from Dr Yoshimi who had removed it from the person of Bose. But Dr Yoshimi denied that he had ever given any watch to Rahman. Dwijen noticed that the mark left by fastener on leather strap indicated that the watch was worn by someone whose wrist was bulkier than his uncle's. He asked Rahman about his own watch. Rahman said it was stolen when he was imprisoned in the Red Fort.

"So, I asked Habib *sahib*," Dwijendra resumed, "'Tell me confidentially that the plane crash had not taken place.... I am not going to let it out before the public, because, I think as we were tutored, when Netaji left India, not to give out the story of his going. So you might have been tutored by him also. Unless your palms are burnt, unless you had a cut mark in your trousers also, I am not going to believe the story that you say.' Then he told me. 'You are a nephew of Netaji. You were a collaborator of his plans of going out of India; you were in politics with him. I never expected such silly questions from you!'"

"What did you conclude?" a lawyer asked Dwijendra.

"I concluded that he gave me an idea in a roundabout fashion that you should not have asked me this question: You should have surmised yourself, that there was no plane crash; that he did not die...."

"Because he was under an oath, he could not say it himself? It was for you to have guessed it?"

"Yes!" Thereafter, I remember one thing—I do not know whether I have told it before the Shah Nawaz Committee. I asked him: Habib *sahib*, tell me, frankly tell me, what is the position? He said: 'I can't tell you anything. You are not the person who can order me...I can take orders from Netaji; I cannot take your orders'." [5]

For every man convinced by Rahman that Bose had died in Taipei there was one who thought that Rahman was taking him for a ride. Businessman Hem Raj Batai testified before the Khosla Commission that Gandhiji took "the cue" after talking to Rahman. "I know *guru* (leader) was not telling the truth," Batai heard him say tongue-in-cheek, alluding to his some experience with Bose. "And the *chela* (follower) was also not telling the truth." [6]

Not just Satyen Dutt, most of the Bose's immediate family members, Sarat Bose above all, lived and died with the feeling that Rahman just carried out an "order".

The list of INA men who thought that Rahman had been ordered to give out a certain story was impressive. Abid Hasan Safrani, who was present at Saigon airport on 17 August 1945 evening when Bose and Rahman left, told the Khosla Commission that "for finding out whether that accident took place or not, that one person could not be Habibur Rahman". [7] An explanation was given by Col Pritam Singh, who was there along with Safrani. Singh told the Khosla Commission that in his view

Habib was under an oath of secrecy to Bose and the air crash theory was only a cover. He elaborated before the Mukherjee Commission that Rahman "would not divulge anything even on pain of death". [8] Maj Bhaskaran Menon testified before the same commission that his "firm conviction and belief" that Bose never died in the alleged plane crash was formed after his talks with Rahman.

The commission also took the evidence of Capt Bipul Kumar Sarkar of INA secret service. Sarkar recalled the time when Rahman staying with him at his house. He said that he heard the whole story but found no burn or scratch mark on his shirt and on his palm. "Thank you colonel *sahib*. I got the message," he interposed. Rahman extracted a promise from Sarkar that he would not "disclose this to anybody for thirty years". "I honoured the promise," Sarkar told Justice Mukherjee during his brief appearance on 4 April 2001. Col Mahboob Ahmed, Bose's military secretary and then chief protocol officer in the MEA, was examined on the secrecy aspect before the Khosla Commission to the same outcome.

Shri PK Bose: If a secret was entrusted to Col. Habibur Rahman,
in your estimation, his character is such that he will
keep it a secret all his life, unless countermanded by
Netaji himself?



Col Ahmed: That is my assessment of Habibur Rahman.

"Supposing Netaji had selected you to go with him in the last journey to a place of safety, and if he had asked you to carry some news regarding Netaji, would you at any stage disclose it if Netaji had asked you not to disclose it?"

"No. My loyalty to him was so great that I would have done anything for him." [9]

Many of Bose's less-known, die-hard followers swore fealty to him and observed it throughout their lives. Justice Khosla in his report described Sunil Das as "a political worker and a close associate of Bose for some years (1939-1941)". But Das wasn't an average revolutionary. He published a paper in the *American journal of physical chemistry* and yet chose to be a freedom fighter like his siblings, all three of whom died for the nation. So long as he lived, Das never told even his best friends of his contact with Bhagwanji, the holy man he regarded as Subhas Bose.

Ailing Das was examined at his residence on 6 September 1972 in the presence of a district judge representing Justice Khosla. [He is sitting on the extreme right in the picture you see now. Also visible from left are ND Mazumdar, Amar Prasad Chakrovarty, in suit, and Sunil Krishna Gupta]



Sunil Das was asked by the lawyers present to reflect on the rumours of Bose being alive and

Leela Roy's thoughts about it. And guess how he tackled the posers? He took the oath of secrecy cover.

The point that I want to ask from you [Das] is that you knew Netaji well intimately so as not to mistake his identity? His identity? So far as I am concerned, good heavens, never. How can I mistake his identity?

Do you think that if Netaji is really alive there is something really insurmountable which would prevent him or would actually prevent him from coming into the arena when the country is in utter confusion and chaos?

Your question has two parts. Regarding the first part of the question my reply is, I believe that Netaji is alive. Regarding the second part I have no competence to go into it.

How many times do you think Mrs Leela Roy met Sarat Babu?

I think almost everyday.

Was there any discussion regarding Netaji's alleged plane crash?

As far as I remember, Sarat Babu never believed it....

Did didi ever write regarding the disappearance of Netaji... in Jayasree?

There were occasions when this subject cropped up in editorials after 1963. I should say, we noticed a change in her—within herself. Although I happened to be her closest colleague and in many matters she shared counsel with me—[but] as you know, we had been trained in the crucibles of secret revolutionary politics and we have developed a code and we maintain the code in this way. Unless I am specifically told, if somebody in the hierarchy wants to keep something within himself or herself, we do not try to get it. That has been our training. Up till now I carry that thing with me....

Sunil Das told the commission that Leela Roy forcefully questioned the air crash theory after 1963, the year she met Bhagwanji.

Would you agree if I say that she had close connection with Netaji even after the alleged plane crash and didi narrated those things to you?

We had discussions about these matters. We do not believe that Netaji is dead and she has pointedly put in certain editorials and she has increasingly become affirmative—more and more affirmative as days passed—and she has categorically stated that India will some day enjoy the benefit of his leadership.

And so she was emphatic that Netaji did not die in the plane crash?

Yes, there is no doubt about it. [10]

“But I have mine,” you’d say. “How is it possible for people to keep mum over such a big issue for so many years?” “I can’t even for a day!”

Well, don’t the government officials world over go to their graves with their secrets?

“That’s government work! People outside a government can’t keep sitting over secrets for that long. At least they will tell their families.”

Oh dear! Forget government officials, even the journalists—whose basic instinct is go to town with whatever they know—hold back secrets! An average journalist working in New Delhi knows far, far more than what gets reported in her or his name.

In 2005 Mark Felt, former associate director of the FBI, a known figure of the Watergate scandal-era, revealed himself to be the man who had given the *Washington Post* the crucial leads that helped bring Richard Nixon down in 1974. “I’m the guy they used to call Deep Throat,” he said and in one go falsified all of his previous protestations that he was not. Actually Felt had sworn to the co-author of his memoir that he was not Deep Throat and that he never leaked anything to Bob Woodward or Carl Bernstein. The *Post* journalists too never ever told anyone about the identity of Deep Throat—not even to their wives and children—until the 91-year-old Felt decided to reveal himself as their long-anonymous source.

Who knows Habibur Rahman could have also come out with the truth about 18 August 1945—but if only he was in India. In 1947, he went to Pakistan. Rahman fought against India in J&K in 1948, then served in Pakistan’s foreign ministry and retired as the country’s additional defence secretary—even though his “past association with the INA and reverence for Bose had not gone very well with the vast majority of the Pakistani elite and army officers”. [11] At any point of time if Rahman were to say that he had not been truthful all the while, he would have started a major diplomatic row between the two neighbours. He died in 1978 at age 65. During his last visit to India in 1956, he remarked in private to Bose [and later Bhagwanji] follower Sunil Krishna Gupta, “Let them declare that Netaji is dead. It will be our double gain when he returns!”



[*Raja Habibur Rahman Khan in his latter days in a picture uploaded on Wikipedia by his grandson*]

But Bose never came back. Bhagwanji, whoever he was, never came out in the open. There was never a real chance for Habibur Rahman to do a Mark Felt.

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About the author



Anuj Dhar is a New Delhi-based independent researcher. Visit www.subhaschandrabose.org/ibc.php for more information.

Notes on public domain information, including declassified records and information accessed under transparency laws

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1. Bose mystery begins

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- [9] Record of proceedings of Khosla Commission obtained under RTI, Volume V, p. 1922.
- [10] Excerpted from the record of Sunil Das's examination before Khosla Commission on 6 September 1972.
- [11] M Azizul Jalil, The story of Subhas Chandra Bose-Part II, New Age (Dhaka), 31 August 2005. Jalil worked with Rahman in Pakistan President's Secretariat in the late 1960s.

Correct and present-day spellings for the names of important persons and places have been used throughout the book, even while reproducing quotes from records. For instance, "Subhash" has been dropped in favour of "Subhas", which is the proper spelling of Bose's first name.