

DC-3 'Dakota' aircraft of Biju Patnaik

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In news— Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik unveiled former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik's renovated Douglas DC-3 'Dakota' aircraft for public viewing at the Bhubaneswar airport on his 107th birth anniversary.

DC-3 'Dakota' aircraft & Biju Patnaik-

- **The Douglas DC-3 is a propeller-driven airliner manufactured by Douglas Aircraft Company**, which had a lasting effect on the airline industry in the 1930s to 1940s and World War II. It was developed as a larger, improved 14-bed sleeper version of the Douglas DC-2.
- **It is said that Biju Patnaik had flown this aircraft to rescue former Indonesian vice-president Mohammad Hatta and former Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir** in one of his most famous feats as a pilot.
- Right from his childhood, Patnaik was attracted towards aeroplanes and dreamt of being a pilot one day.
- **Biju Patnaik joined the Royal Indian Air Force in 1936**, mostly flying supply and transport planes such as the 'Dakota'.
- In the early 1940s, as Imperial Japan started moving eastwards and annexing Western colonies in southeast Asia, Biju flew many sorties rescuing British officials and families from the Japanese advance.
- **He was integral in the evacuation of British officials from Rangoon. Patnaik also flew supply missions to assist China's Chiang Kai-Shek** and during the Battle of Stalingrad (1942-43), he would undertake a risky supply run to the besieged city – an effort for which he was **honoured by the Russians on the 50th anniversary of the war's end.**

- But while Patnaik remained a committed RIAF pilot and an excellent one at that (as mentioned in a 1945 Intelligence Bureau communique), he was also a nationalist at heart, committed to India's independence and inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.
- While flying British planes over Indian troops, he would sometimes **drop 'seditious' pamphlets, supporting the Quit India Movement.**
- Even as the Head of RIAF's Air Transport Command, he would secretly ferry freedom fighters like Ram Manohar Lohia to meetings across the country.
- **Patnaik's nationalist exploits brought him to the attention of Jawaharlal Nehru, who would rely on his flying prowess multiple times in the future.**
- However, in 1943, Biju Patnaik's surreptitious activities were discovered and he was imprisoned for two years for his role in the Quit India Movement.
- **A year after being released from prison in 1945, Patnaik got elected to the Orissa Assembly** and began his long career in politics. But aviation did not leave him.
- **In 1947, he started the Kalinga Airlines with a fleet of old Dakotas.** He would carry out important missions for the Indian government in Kashmir and the Northeast.
- But, arguably **his most famous flying feat came not in the service of his own country but of Indonesia.**
- Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a firm believer in solidarity among colonised nations. Thus, when the Dutch began military action to retake control over their former colony, Nehru felt strongly about it.
- He asked Patnaik to fly Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir and then vice-president Mohammad Hatta out of Java so they could address the world about the ongoing crisis in Indonesia in the Inaugural Asian Relations Conference.
- At the time, the Dutch controlled Indonesia's seas as well as its air routes, effectively trapping nationalist

statesmen like Sjahrir in Java.

- On July 21, 1947, Patnaik flew to Jakarta in his old and faithful Dakota. Dodging Dutch air defence systems, he landed at an improvised airstrip near Jakarta.
- He picked up Sjahrir and Hatta, refuelled using fuel left-over by the Japanese during their occupation, and flew back to India via Singapore.
- **In 1950, after Indonesia gained independence, once and for all, Biju Patnaik was heavily felicitated by the new government.**
- **He was offered honorary Indonesian citizenship as well as a property,** both of which he refused.
- **He was also given the title of Bhoomi Putra (“son of the souk”), an honour seldom given to non-natives.**
- **In 1996, when Indonesia celebrated its 50th Independence Day, Biju Patnaik was awarded its highest national award, the ‘Bintang Jasa Utama’.**

The Indonesian National Movement-

- The Dutch began colonising what we today know as Indonesia as far back as the 17th century.
- By the 20th century, the Dutch East Indies was the Netherlands’ most important colony with abundant resources from cash crops like rubber and tobacco to massive reserves of oil.
- For these reasons, Indonesia was seen as vital for Japanese imperial interests during the War. Japan, which was notoriously resource poor, saw Indonesia as an important colony to sustain its war economy.
- From the beginning of 1942 till 1945, Japan occupied much of Indonesia. But as the tide of war turned against the Japanese, the occupation became more and more unwieldy, with nationalist fervour rising among the people.
- Finally, in 1945, after the Japanese surrender, popular

leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta declared independence, forming the Republic of Indonesia.

- However, the Dutch were far from done with their beloved colony, and expected to reassert their control once the Japanese left.
- After two years of negotiations, in 1947, the Dutch decided to settle matters by force.