

# Biju Patnaik

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## In news

Recently, Indonesia named an embassy room in Biju Patnaik's honour and recognizes his role in Indonesia's freedom struggle in 1947

## His role

- The former Chief Minister of Odisha (1990-1995), who was a skilled pilot, flew several missions in 1947 to transport Indonesian leaders including the nation's tallest leader, President Sukarno, Vice-President Hatta and Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir out of Indonesia, at grave risk to himself.
- His missions involved flying in undetected to Yogyakarta where the "resistance" Republican leadership led by Sukarno was based when Dutch forces launched "Operation Product" on July 20, 1947 to capture the capital Jakarta.
- At Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's request, Patnaik, who had earlier served in the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and then joined the freedom movement, agreed to fly one of his Dakota planes into Indonesia, eluding Dutch air surveillance.
- A newspaper clipping in the Embassy room recounts his heroic actions: how Mr. Patnaik had a narrow escape when Dutch Mustang planes bombed an airfield where his plane had landed, but he was saved by an engineer who hid the plane.
  - On the next day, he was caught in another air-raid at an oil dump and "had to run 300 yards for cover as the Dutch [planes] strafed it," the report published by a journalist in Singapore said.
  - His most salient mission was to fly out Prime

Minister Sjahrir from Indonesia to India, where he was able to address the world about Indonesia's plight as the Dutch sought to recolonise the country they had granted independence to in 1945.

- Subsequently, with the help of India, and other countries Indonesia won back its freedom. In 1950, President Sukarno was the chief guest at India's first Republic Day, and India-Indonesia ties remained strong for the next decade.

### **More about Biju Patnaik**

- Bijayananda Patnaik, popularly known as Biju Patnaik, was an Indian politician, aviator and businessman.
- As a politician, he served twice as the Chief Minister of the State of Odisha.
- Biju Patnaik was born on 5 March 1916 to Lakshminarayan and Ashalata Patanayak at Cuttack.
- His famous ancestral house Anand bhawan has been gifted to State Government which has been converted to Anand Bhawan Museum and Learning centre where the people of Odisha can turn the pages of history to walk through the life of their most beloved "son of the soil".
- He studied Aeronautics at the Aeronautical Training Institute of India. Patnaik flew with private airlines but at the start of the Second World War he joined the Royal Indian Air Force eventually becoming head of air transport command.
- While in service he began an interest in nationalist politics and used air force transports to deliver what was seen as subversive literature to Indian troops. But he remained committed to fighting the Axis Powers.
- He was jailed by the British for dropping political leaflets to Indian soldiers fighting under British command in Burma and flying clandestine missions that carried Congress Party leaders from hideouts across India to secret meetings that charted the independence

struggle.

### **His role in saving Kashmir**

Biju Patnaik flew many sorties on his Dakota DC-3 from Delhi Safdarjung Airport on 27 October 1947, after the first Dakota DC-3 (Reg. No: VP 905) flown by Wg. Cdr. KL Bhatia landed in Srinagar Airport early morning. He brought 17 soldiers of 1-Sikh regiment commanded by Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai.

### **His political role**

Patnaik's political ideals were centred in socialism and federalism. His strong advocacy for equal resources to all Indian states who needed such, made him a champion of his Odia constituents.

Following **timline** represents his role in Indian politics:

- In 1946 Patnaik was elected uncontested to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack constituency.
- In 1952 and 1957 he won from Jagannath Prasad and Surada, respectively. In 1960 he assumed the presidency of the state Congress.
- He was the Chief Minister of Odisha at the age of 45
- Patnaik was close to Indira Gandhi who took over the Congress Party in 1967.
- However, they clashed in 1969 over the Presidential election. He left the Congress and formed a regional party—the Utkal Congress.
- Patnaik then re-established contact with his old friend Jayaprakash Narayan and plunged into the JP movement as it picked up momentum in 1974.
- When the Emergency was declared in 1975, Biju Patnaik was one of the first to be arrested along with other opposition leaders.
- 1977: He was elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time from Kendrapara and became Union minister for steel and mines in both the Morarji Desai and the Charan Singh

governments until 1979.

- He was re-elected to the Lok Sabha again in 1980 and 1984 from Kendrapara as Janata Party candidate
- He returned to state politics in 1989 and in the 1990 state assembly election, the Janata Dal received a thumping majority (two-thirds of the assembly seats) which saw Biju Patnaik being the Chief Minister of Odisha for the second time until 1995.
- Patnaik was re-elected to the Lok Sabha in 1996 from Cuttack and Aska constituencies as a Janata Dal candidate. He retained the latter until his death on 17 April 1997 of cardio-respiratory failure