

2. RIN Revolt- History

The 1946 Royal Navy revolt- solidarity amid sharpening polarisation

The 1946 RIN Revolt was a militant anti-colonial uprising that effectively dismantled the British claim over the Indian armed forces. Though brief, it forced the colonial government to realize that their time in India was over, acting as a massive catalyst for the final transition to freedom.

1. Overview of the RIN Revolt

Timeline- February 18–23, 1946 (A five-day armed uprising).

Participants- Primarily Naval Ratings (junior enlisted sailors below the rank of warrant officer).

Geographic Scope- Commenced in Bombay (at HMIS Talwar) and rapidly spread across the coast to Karachi, Calcutta, and Cochin.

Scale- Involved nearly 20,000 ratings, 78 ships, and 20 shore establishments.

2. Causes of the Revolt

The mutiny was not a sudden accident but the result of deep-seated systemic grievances-

Category	Primary Factors
Service Conditions	Indian ratings were subjected to inferior quality food, significantly lower wages than British counterparts, and severe overcrowding in barracks.
Racial Discrimination	Continuous discriminatory treatment and racial slurs used by British officers against Indian recruits.
Immediate Trigger	The appointment of Commander Arthur Frederick King at HMIS Talwar. His abusive and insulting remarks toward the sailors served as the final spark for a hunger strike.
Nationalist Context	The spirit of the Quit India Movement (1942) and the high-profile INA (Indian National Army) Trials at Red Fort (1945) had radicalized the political consciousness of the sailors.
Economic Distress	Post-World War II inflation, rising unemployment, and the lack of compensation for wartime service created a volatile economic environment.

3. Key Events and Timeline

February 18 (The Spark)- Ratings at HMIS Talwar went on a hunger strike under the slogan "No Food, No Work."

February 19 (Organization)- A Naval Central Strike Committee was formed to coordinate demands and actions across ships. Key leaders included M. S. Khan, B. C. Dutt, and Madan Singh.

Spread of Support-

1. The revolt garnered massive popular support from the Indian public.
2. In Bombay, workers and students joined the sailors, leading to a total shutdown of the city.

Armed Confrontation- The British responded with heavy force. Intense street battles took place in Bombay's mill districts; the British military used heavy firepower, resulting in approximately 200 civilian deaths.

Political Response- Mahatma Gandhi criticized the mutiny, viewing it as ill-timed and undisciplined.

1. Leaders from both the Congress and the Muslim League (including Vallabhbhai Patel and Mohammad Ali Jinnah) eventually urged the ratings to surrender to prevent further bloodshed and protect ongoing constitutional negotiations for independence.

February 23 (The Surrender)- Faced with a lack of political backing and the threat of total military annihilation, the ratings surrendered.

4. Impact and Significance

Erosion of British Control- The revolt was the "final nail in the coffin" for British military confidence. It proved that the British could no longer rely on the Indian military to suppress the Indian people.

Communal Harmony- It was a rare and powerful moment of Hindu-Muslim unity, where flags of the Congress, Muslim League, and the Communist Party were tied together on the masts of the ships.

Accelerated Independence- Along with the INA trials and the 1946 Cabinet Mission, the RIN revolt convinced the British that their exit from India must be expedited, leading directly to the transfer of power in August 1947.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/education/the-1946-royal-navy-revolt-solidarity-amid-sharpening-polarisation/article70642960.ece>

