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### **Fazlul Huq and the Coalition Ministry in Operation: The First Phase**

The installation of the Praja-League Coalition Ministry under the leadership of Fazlul Huq on 1 April 1937 ushered in a new phase in the history of the Muslims of Bengal vis-à-vis India as ‘the eyes of entire Muslim India are riveted on them’. After a long period extending over a century of frustration, disappointment and degradation, the Muslims of Bengal saw in the new ministry the chance of a Muslim ascendancy and supremacy in the province and showed the highest admiration towards the Huq Ministry. But its installation did not satisfy the Hindu middle and upper classes people who generally were exasperated at finding a government in power which they could not control.<sup>1</sup> Both Fazlul Huq and H.S. Suhrawardy established their ‘domination’ over the Hindu members of the Legislative Assembly by dint of their intelligence, diplomatic skill and superb oratory power. The Bengal Congress, from the very beginning, was very critical and suspicious of the Ministry as they believed that the ‘Khwaja-Praja coalition’ (as termed by the Congress Press)<sup>2</sup> was designed ‘to complete Muslim hegemony in Bengal’.<sup>3</sup> Its virulent opposition to the Ministry, the desertion of a considerable number of the KPP members against Huq’s leadership and his dependence on the Muslim League to protect his Ministry – all these currents and cross-currents ultimately led Fazlul Huq to join the Muslim League on 15 October 1937 at its Lucknow session (hoping to turn ‘personal loss into political gain’)<sup>3a</sup> where he was greeted with the popular title “Sher-e-Bangla” (Tiger of Bengal).<sup>3b</sup> He then began to carry out “propaganda in favour of the Muslim League” and tried his best to make it a stronger political organization.<sup>3c</sup>

According to the decision taken in the Lucknow session, Jinnah appointed an influential 20-member<sup>4</sup> Organization Committee on 26 October 1937 to set up a Muslim League branch in Bengal which was ultimately formed with Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy as its President and Secretary respectively. Huq hosted the special session of the AIML held in Calcutta in April 1938 and afterwards went on tours to different provinces and began to deliver his lectures in several public meetings and Muslim

League conferences and in that process he raised the morale of the Muslims of the minority provinces and gave a fillip to the League organization. Fazlul Huq gave a warning at the Lucknow session of the AIML that 'if the Muslim minorities were ill-treated in other provinces, the Bengal Ministry would retaliate'.<sup>5</sup> At the same time he offered challenges to the Congress leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru regarding the genuineness of the grounds for the Muslim disfavour and dissatisfaction and raised charges of atrocities committed on them by the Congress Ministries in different Muslim minority provinces.<sup>6</sup> A pamphlet called *Muslim Sufferings Under Congress Rule* was published in his name highlighting the injustices, exploitations and cruelties meted out to the Muslims in the Congress-ruled provinces.<sup>7</sup> So the Muslims of the minority provinces considered Fazlul Huq as the protector of their interests which was evidenced at the time when the motion of no confidence against his Ministry was brought in August 1938 by the deserters from the government party and backed by the Congress. At that point of time, the Muslim members of the Central Legislature came forward and made an appeal to the members of the same community in the Bengal Assembly to discard and disown all their differences and rally round the new Ministry of Fazlul Huq. They also urged: "It is their (i.e. Muslim members of the Bengal Assembly) duty in the interests not only of the Muslims of Bengal but of the Muslims of India, and especially of the Muslims in the minority provinces, to support the stable Muslim ministry in Bengal..... Mr. Fazlul Huq enjoys the confidence of the overwhelming majority of Muslim all over India".<sup>8</sup> Thus communal outlook and consideration to a great extent began to dominate the course of Bengal politics where Jinnah and the Muslim League were taking the upper hand and gradually strengthening its ground and consolidating its power and influence in Bengal at the expense of the Krishak Praja Party, its former potential rival which ultimately helped to accelerate the 'process of polarization' in Bengal politics.

The Praja-League Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq which was sworn in on April Fool's Day 1937, adopted in the Assembly a series of beneficial measures for ameliorating the sufferings of the peasantry and in advancing the cause of education and employment of the Muslims 'at the cost of bhadrak privilege'.<sup>9</sup> As Mr. Huq incorporated so many pro-peasant and pro-tenant issues in his Election *Manifesto* (for which he and his KPP gained their support and achieved success in the elections of

1937), he was bound to put forward tenancy legislation. He was forced by his Party members (although his partner in the Coalition Ministry, i.e. the Muslim League was indifferent and reluctant in introducing the tenancy legislation),<sup>10</sup> to instruct his Revenue Minister Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy to introduce the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill on 10 September 1937. The main provisions of the Bill were as follows:

- (1) “Abolition of Landlords’ transfer fees (*salami*) and the right of pre-emption;
- (2) Repeal of Chapter XIII A which allowed landlords the use, on certain conditions, of the certificate procedure for realizing their rents;
- (3) Giving under-raiyats the right to surrender their holdings;
- (4) Immediate summary penalty for the extinction of abwabs (cess);
- (5) Empowering the Government to suspend any or all of the provisions of the Act relating to the enhancement of rent;
- (6) Giving powers of surrender to tenure holders;
- (7) Allowing landlords to use for a portion of their arrears of rent, instead of for the whole amount;
- (8) Allowing structures solely for religious purposes to be erected on holdings on certain conditions;
- (9) Giving increased facilities for the sub-division of tenures and holdings;
- (10) Providing for the suspension or abatement from rent when a tenure or holding is lost for diluvial reasons;
- (11) Reducing the rate of interest on arrears of rent from 12½% to 6¼%;
- (12) Giving the under-raiyats the same rights of transfer fee as occupancy raiyats, and
- (13) Giving facilities to occupancy raiyats to regain possession under certain conditions of mortgaged holdings”.<sup>11</sup>

After a prolonged and critical discussion, the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly by 80 votes to 72 (in that voting, the Congress bloc remained neutral)<sup>12</sup> on 30 September 1937 and by the Legislative Council on 1 April 1938 with certain amendments (which were finally passed by the

Assembly on 7 April 1938) and sent to the Governor for his consent. Although the Governor took some time to give his assent to it, the Bill finally came into force as an Act on 18 August 1938 and on that day it was first published in the *Calcutta Gazettee*.<sup>13</sup> It is to be mentioned here that as the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 1937 threatened the very basis of the power and prosperity of the zamindars in the rural areas and strengthened the hands of the rich peasants, the Hindu *bhadralok* zamindars went against this Bill. They considered it as ‘utterly revolutionary in character’ and predicted that it would ‘bring in its train confusion and disaster to the country’.<sup>14</sup> In spite of their stiff resistance and unwillingness, the Bill was accepted by both the Houses and finally got the assent of the Governor.

Under Fazlul Huq’s dynamic and energetic leadership, the Ministry initiated and carried through a series of important administrative and legislative measures which included the immediate implementation of the Bengal Agricultural Debtors’ Act of 1935 (it was passed to remove the defects of the Bengal Money-lenders’ Act of 1933 and gave some relief to the agriculturists from the chronic indebtedness) and setting up ‘Debt Settlement Boards’ in all the districts. In Bengal, there were two types of Debt Settlement Boards – ordinary and special and the main function of these Boards was ‘to persuade the creditors to agree to a liquidation of the outstanding debt on the basis of cash or installment payments’ and also to persuade the creditor to accept a sum which the debtor was in a position to pay.<sup>15</sup> According to the Government report, in 1937 there were 1,752 Boards operating in 20 districts and by the end of 1938 the number had almost doubled with the establishment of 3,228 ordinary Boards and 116 Special Boards in all the 25 plain districts. The same progress was continued in the first three months of the year 1939 as there were 3291 ordinary and 125 Special Boards throughout Bengal.<sup>16</sup> By 1938 about 3,000 Boards had been set up in different parts of Bengal and the ordinary Boards settled claims amounting to Rs.36,716,202 by the end of December 1938 and the amount which was ultimately awarded on these claims was Rs.17,872,818 while the pending claims amounted to Rs.260,954,030.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the Special Boards compulsorily settled claims amounting to Rs.585,246 and against these claims the award was given for Rs.329,121 and the claims pending before the Special Boards for compulsory adjustment were less than Rs.,2 crores.<sup>18</sup> The district wise figures of these claims and awards are shown in the Table given below:

**Table IV.1: Volume of Claims and Awards in different Districts of Bengal**

	No. of cases	Claims settled Rs	Amount awarded Rs	Pending cases	Claims in pending cases Rs	Average claim in cash application settled Rs	Average percentage of award to amount claimed	Average claim in each pending application Rs
Burdwan	721	254,494	165,298	2,706	1,688,305	353	65	623
Birbhum	163	44,131	35,016	3,886	2,549,232	271	79	456
Bankura	394	131,681	98,212	696	605,607	334	75	624
Midnapore	6,303	1,339,305	684,360	2,539	1,079,967	182	60	425
Hooghly	1,847	337,222	201,430	17,140	7,016,056	212	51	409
Howrah	775	257,921	164,994	3,723	1,528,604	332	64	410
24-Parganas	1,407	342,380	208,358	5,280	2,881,535	243	61	545
Nadia	29	1,502	698	513	135,257	52	46	263
Murshidabad	1,672	202,453	133,482	9,183	2,766,531	121	66	301
Jessore	3,377	449,339	228,992	12,697	2,081,103	133	51	164
Khulna	1,495	460,878	312,212	9,446	4,608,962	308	68	489
Dacca	3,838	1,604,675	735,500	28,573	22,271,026	416	46	779
Mymensingh	19,995	6,788,632	3,592,618	128,786	66,599,512	340	52	517
Faridpur	4,758	1,837,203	1,326,708	20,118	10,731,183	384	72	533
Bakarganj	14,278	5,333,995	2,472,143	65,851	21,827,801	373	46	330
Chittagong	3,760	1,276,936	627,627	12,934	6,453,995	340	49	499
Tippera	5,285	1,691,422	724,180	68,003	38,836,378	320	43	571
Noakhali	9,238	3,123,922	1,227,577	52,432	30,437,321	338	39	580
Rajshahi	4,129	987,493	475,981	12,923	4,466,476	239	48	345
Dinajpur	14,417	3,181,343	1,615,308	25,462	16,351,470	220	51	406
Jalpaiguri	1,903	795,467	407,321	1,390	830,650	418	51	602
Rangpur	6,117	1,990,233	763,202	23,384	5,148,165	325	38	220
Pabna	4,615	1,044,338	564,013	17,271	3,759,323	226	54	214
Bogra	7,234	2,257,419	866,265	32,115	9,364,526	326	38	288
Malda	3,420	981,818	441,270	8,583	2,899,145	289	45	337
Total	121,175	36,716,202	17,872,818	565,797	260,954,030			

Source: M. Azizul Huque, *The Man Behind the Plough*, p. 136.

In order to remove the defects and meet up the deficiencies of the Agricultural Debtors' Act, 1935, the Bengal Agricultural Debtors' (Amendment) Bill was moved by the Minister of Cooperation, Credit and Rural Indebtedness, Mr. Mukunda Behari Mullick on 31 March 1939. The primary object of the Bill was to 'secure a more rapid disposal of cases' and 'to give proper relief with regard to that class of debt known as usufructuary mortgage'.<sup>19</sup> With a few amendments, the Bill was accepted by both the Houses and finally came into force from March 1940. Along with these, the Ministry of Fazlul Huq also took administrative measures and introduced legislations like the Co-operative Societies Act, 1939 and the Bengal Money-lenders Act, 1940 in order to deal with the issues like agricultural credit and cooperative movement. The Bengal Cooperative Societies Bill was presented by the Minister-in-charge, Mukunda Behari Mullick on 3 August 1938 to give wider powers to the Registrar of the Cooperative Societies for strictly governing the Societies. The Bill contained certain provisions for compelling the members of the Societies to report on sales, mortgages or transfer of any kind of land. It also proposed to fix up a maximum limit of loans of each member and a penalty for the issuance of loans in excess of the stipulated amount. The proposed Bill also empowered the Land Mortgage Banks to take effective and necessary steps such as the sale of crops, if any installment of loan was not paid for more than one month. It also made it compulsory on behalf of the Societies to get their accounts properly audited. After much discussion for almost two years, the Bill was finally passed by 81 - 50 votes.<sup>20</sup>

As the Bengal Money-lenders' Act of 1933 failed to afford the desired relief to the borrowers particularly to the poorer sections of the society, the Money-lenders Bill was first introduced in the Assembly in 1938 and later it was placed before the House by Nawab Musharraf Hossain, Minister-in-charge of Judicial and Legislative Department. The Bill was placed in order to give relief to the borrowers from the heavy burden of debt and was designed to counteract the existing economic and social evils. It contained provisions for mandatory registration and licensing of the money-lenders ('dominated by Hindu professional mahajans, banias, shopkeepers and landowners for whom usury had long been a lucrative trade')<sup>21</sup> under the pain of penalties in order to prevent unscrupulous persons from applying unfair means on the people who borrowed money. It also proposed to fix the maximum rate of interest for secured and unsecured loans at 6% and 8% respectively. The Bengal Premier Fazlul

Huq made an appeal to the members of the House to support the Bill and expressed his opinion before them in the following words: “There are those who think that if this Bill is passed into law, it will choke all the resources of rural credit.... There are others who hope that if this Bill is passed into law, the millennium will come for the agriculturists and that the peasantry of Bengal will not be the miserable lot of wretched humanity which they are at the present moment..... For a happier, healthier and a larger Bengal, the co-operation of all sections of the people is needed and no legislation can achieve its object which is based on the transitory triumph of those who command the majority of votes by riding roughshod over the feelings and sentiments of those whom circumstances may have placed in a minority in this House”.<sup>22</sup> The Congress members of the House, came forward to support the Bill but they raised certain points regarding its implementation. Ultimately the Bill was passed by both the Houses and was sent to the Governor for his consent. It finally got the assent of the Governor and became an Act in July 1940 and came to be known as the Bengal Act X of 1940 which was ‘a landmark in the history of agrarian Bengal’.<sup>22a</sup>

But all these measures not only affected the Hindu zamindars and money-lenders but also posed serious threats to the interests of Muslim elites, Nawabs and zamindars who dominated the Praja-League Coalition Ministry and both the Houses of the Bengal Legislature as members and representatives of the Muslim League. This group of Muslim zamindars under the leadership of Nawab Nazimuddin, tried their best to uproot the teeth out of those legislation by proposing some amendments and they also felt the necessity of ‘keeping the masses behind them, at the cost, no doubt, of legislative and administrative concessions’<sup>23</sup> and to ‘curry popularity with the agriculturists by promises which they knew are incapable of fulfilment, but which they feel they must make or fall behind in the race for votes’.<sup>24</sup> The Muslim League members extended their support towards Fazlul Huq and his K.P.P. on the common understanding that they for the greater interest of the society, would not oppose the measures to disturb and hamper the zamindari system provided the zamindars were given compensations for the losses incurred by them.<sup>25</sup> In spite of their limitations (as the tenants, ryots and under-ryots were not given the proprietary rights of their holdings and no effective step was taken by the Ministry to restrict jute production and fix up minimum price of jute), all these Acts saved a large section of the peasantry ‘from the crushing burden of debt and illegal exaction by zamindars,

intermediaries and *Mahajans*<sup>26</sup> and made the Ministry of Fazlul Huq popular among the masses who began to consider the League as the protector and as a result, the Ministry and the League 'became synonymous to them'.<sup>27</sup>

It is very interesting to note that although Fazlul Huq and his K.P.P. in the election *Manifesto* insisted on the abolition of the zamindari system (Permanent Settlement) without compensation, the Praja-League Ministry remained completely silent on the abolition of landlordism and did not initiate any step for this purpose for quite some time. But there was constant pressure coming out from the Congress, the Krishak Praja Party (dissident group), Independent Praja Party and they were very vocal on this issue. Along with them, in different parts of Bengal, the peasants came forward and raised their voice in favour of the demand and organized movements. All these forced the Bengal Cabinet to revise its policy. On 5 November 1938 the Ministry appointed the Land Revenue Commission, (Govt. Resolution No.22716-L.R. of 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1938) under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud, to "examine the existing land revenue system of Bengal in its various aspects, with special reference to the Permanent Settlement". The other members of the Commission were Sir Bijoy Chand Mahtab (the Maharajahdiraj of Burdwan), Khan Bahadur Saiyed Muazzamuddin Hossain (M.L.C.), Mr. S.M. Masih (Bar-at-Law), Khan Bahadur Hashim Ali Khan (M.L.A.), Khan Bahadur M.A. Momin (M.L.A.), Sir Manmotha Nath Mookerjee (M.L.A.), Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee (M.L.A.), Mr. Brajendra Kishore Raychowdhury and Sir F.A. Sachse. Among these members of the Bengal Land Revenue Commission, Mr. S.M. Masih from the very beginning did not join the Commission and Sir Manmotha Nath Mookerjee later resigned from it in January 1939. Later in their places, Abul Kasem, Nuruddin Ahmed and Anukul Chandra Das (M.L.A.) were included into that Commission. The Secretary of the Commission was Mr. M.O. Carter.<sup>28</sup> The members of the Commission met on 19 November 1938 and its first meeting was also attended by the Revenue Minister Bijoy Prasad Sinha Roy. The majority members of the Commission came to the conclusion that "whatever may have been the justification for the Permanent Settlement in 1793, it is no longer suited to the conditions of the present time..... The zamindari system has developed so many defects that it has ceased to serve any national interest ..... No half measures will satisfactorily remedy its defects. Provided that a practicable scheme can be devised to acquire the interests of all classes of rent-receivers on reasonable terms, the

policy should be to aim at bringing the actual cultivators into the position of tenants holding directly under government....”<sup>29</sup> But a large section of the Bengali elites and middle class people, different associations like the Bar Associations, the Landholders’ Associations, Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, Bangiya Brahman Sabha, Middle Class Peoples’ Association (Mymensingh), the Peoples’ Association (Dacca), the Peoples’ Association (Khulna) and some veteran revenue experts like Sir Nalini Ranjan Chatterjee (ex-High Court Judge, Calcutta), Rai Bahadur M.N. Gupta, Rai Bahadur K.P. Maitra and Rai Bahadur J.N. Sircar “were not in favour of the abolition of the Permanent Settlement”. Nawab Musharraf Hossain of Jalpaiguri (Minister-in-charge of Judicial and Legislative Department) not only openly opposed to this proposal in the Legislature but also declared his objective that if any such measure was pursued by Fazlul Huq to abolish the Permanent Settlement, he would spend his all, if necessary, to oust Fazlul Huq from the Ministry.<sup>30</sup> They were also joined by some members of the Floud Commission like Sir Bijoy Chand Mahtab, Brajendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury, Khan Bahadur Saiyed Muazzamuddin Hossain, Dr. R.K. Mookerjee, Sir. F.A. Sachse and the Member Secretary, Mr. M.O. Carter. Both Sir B.C. Mahtab and Mr. B.K. Roy Chowdhury put their notes of dissent: “To make extinct the great landholders in the province may not be difficult, although they might deserve greater consideration as they and their ancestors contributed in no small measure in the past to the establishment of many of the charitable and educational institutions to be found in the province today. But with the disappearance of all intermediary landlords, who have formed the backbone of the province and the intelligentsia, and are the creators of modern social and political Bengal, we shall be running the definite risk of a social upheaval of a magnitude which requires very careful thought, for with an undeveloped Proja Party and Raiyats’ Associations we might easily usher in Communism which would become a menace to the state itself. The province is not ready for such a revolutionary step and that is why we consider the proposal of state purchase as unsound in practice, premature and inopportune”.<sup>30a</sup> After a careful analysis of the then socio-economic condition, the Floud Commission finally submitted its report on 21 March 1940. The main recommendations of the Commission could be put under four heads, namely,

“(1) State acquisition of all Zamindaries and rent-receiving interest above the lowest grade of cash paying under-raiyats; (2) imposition of agricultural income tax;

(3) tenancy reforms; and (4) measure for improving the economic conditions of the cultivators”.<sup>31</sup> In order to avoid confrontation within the Cabinet members and opposition of the Hindu landed aristocracy, the Bengal Government decided not to give an immediate effect to these recommendations and bring drastic changes till the end of the Second World War. Towards the end of 1940, the Bengal Government appointed an officer C.W. Gurner to examine the recommendations of the Floud Commission, summarize its conclusion, and suggest means which could be adopted to implement these recommendations. The report of Gurner along with the recommendations of the Floud Commission were placed for members’ discussion on the table of the Assembly on 28-29 July 1941.<sup>32</sup> As there was no consensus among the members of the House, no action was taken to implement the Commission’s recommendations but the Report served as the basis for future land reforms in Bengal.

Apart from this land revenue policy, the education policy of Fazlul Huq’s Coalition Ministry was the next important subject to be addressed in the Bengal Legislature and needs a careful analysis. The introduction and spread of education (by uprooting the discriminations) among the Muslims of Bengal was the mission of Fazlul Huq and he in his Party’s (KPP) election *Manifesto*, put emphasis on the introduction of compulsory and free primary education. When he formed the Coalition Ministry in 1937 and headed the Cabinet as the Chief Minister, he kept the portfolio of education with himself and reiterated the same programme on behalf of the new Ministry. Fazlul Huq gave assurance to the people of Bengal that there would be immediate introduction of free compulsory primary education without taxation of the poor who were not in a position to bear the burden.<sup>33</sup> But this policy of introducing free primary education without taxation did not materialize mainly because of economic depression and paucity of funds.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq decided to put into operation the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 and at same time, appointed two committees under the Chairmanship of Dr. W.A. Jenkins and Mowla Box respectively to advise the Bengal Government on Adult and Primary Education. The District School Boards were empowered to impose the cess on both the cultivators and the landlords to meet up the educational expenses<sup>35</sup> which created great repercussions in the then Bengali society. Actually the tenants were not asked to pay a single pice more than their statutory share of the cess. “A rayat who is paying say Rs.10 as annual rent to the landlords,

will not have to pay more than nine annas per annum as his share of the cess. This will be much less than what he is paying now for the education of his children or even of one child'.<sup>36</sup> While the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes welcomed the decision of the Ministry, the Hindu *bhadraloks* became doubtful and expressed their resentment against this decision as they apprehended that the spread of primary education in rural areas might hamper the age-old relationship between the zamindars and the raiyats.<sup>37</sup> The cess was then collected in the districts of Mymensingh, Dacca and Tippera and during the year 1939-40, it was also imposed in the districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, Faridpur, Jalpaiguri and 24 Parganas. Interestingly, during 1939-40, an extra amount of Rs.57, 600 was sanctioned for grant-in-aid to girls' primary schools and makhtabs in rural areas under the supervision of District Boards<sup>38</sup> which boosted the growth of girls' primary education in rural areas where it had a great demand. But the imposition of cess did not solve the financial problem as there were heavier demands for the disbursement of more funds for the promotion of education.

The Ministry headed by Fazlul Huq, then turned its attention towards secondary education in Bengal which reached a stage at which no further satisfactory progress was possible without a complete reorganization of the existing administrative conditions.<sup>39</sup> So the Ministry decided to introduce the Secondary Education Bill based on the report of the Sadler Commission (1917-1919) which was appointed twenty years ago in order to take away the control of secondary education from the Calcutta University and to establish a Secondary Education Board to regulate it. While introducing the Bill in the Assembly on 21 August 1940, Fazlul Huq, the Chief Minister and at the same time the Education Minister asserted that this Bill was not a hurried piece of legislation undertaken in order to transfer from one body to another, or designed as a political measure from motives that had emerged during the political developments of the past few years. It was a measure designed to ensure educational reforms that had long been needed and the urgency of which had been stressed by educationists for over twenty years.<sup>40</sup> He also assured that in the Bill no demand had been made for giving undue advantage to the Muslims and their unjust representation. The Secondary Education Board would consist of 50 members out of which excluding the President, 22 would be Hindus, 20 Muslims and 7 Europeans. He told in the Assembly: "we might on a population basis have demanded more seats for the

Moslems but we have tried to be fair and have given weightage to the Hindus because of their past achievements in educational spheres.... I think, there can be no justified criticisms to our proposals. Criticisms can only come from those who are determined at all costs to retain the controlling influence in the hands of one community only".<sup>41</sup> Fazlul Huq also pointed out that out of a Board of 50 members only 5 would be necessary officials. But the draft Bill created all sorts of controversies and criticism came from different corners. *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* apprehended that the proposed measure would jeopardize secondary education rather than promoting it. The Syndicate (while appointed a committee to consider the draft Secondary Education Bill) and the Senate of the Calcutta University also opposed the draft Bill. As in the proposed Bill, the Muslims had a greater role in the decision making process than that of the Hindus, the Hindus protested against this Bill. One such meeting was held at Shradhananda Park, Calcutta and presided over by Syama Prasad Mookerjee which appealed for observing an 'All Bengal Protest Day' against this Bill. The draft Secondary Education Bill according to Mr. Mookerjee, was not properly devised and it would not be a sound measure. In his opinion, its aim was to tighten the grip of official control over secondary education and to make over the administration to bodies which would be 'constituted on communal lines'.<sup>42</sup> The Muslims on the other hand, felt that the creation of the Secondary Education Board would give them better chance and say in the control of the educational system of Bengal. Accordingly the pro-Muslim League Press like *The Star of India*, *The Azad* etc. came in favour of the proposed Bill. The opposition in the House led by the Congress severely criticized the Bill while the Scheduled Caste members (like Rasik Lal Biswas) and the European members supported the Government. In order to reach an over- all consensus and avoid confusion and confrontation, the Bill in a new form was reintroduced in the House in 1942 which was ultimately referred to a Select Committee for its consideration. Again there were discussions in the House and finally the Bill was not passed. It should be mentioned here that the Ministry led by Fazlul Huq from 1937 to 1940 sanctioned huge grants for the promotion of education particularly among the Muslims throughout Bengal and Mr. Huq was closely associated with the foundation of many educational institutions (including primary and secondary schools and colleges, madrasahs and makhtabs etc.). For the spread of female education, he laid the foundation of the Wajid Memorial Girls' High School, the Lady Brabourne College (1939) in Park Circus, Calcutta (which was primarily not

exclusively, for Muslim girls) and Eden Girls' College at Dacca. At the same time, Fazlul Huq sanctioned Rs.1,35,000/- for the Karteya Sadat College which was the only Muslim College in Bengal and persuaded the Government to take over the management of Rokeya Sakhwat Memorial Girls' School when the institution was going through a severe financial crisis. He was closely associated with the foundation of the Meher-un-nesa Memorial High School at his birth place and laid the foundation stone of the Tezgaun Agricultural Institute at Dacca on 16 December 1938.<sup>43</sup> He took the initiative to establish a college at his ancestral village Chakhar (near Barisal in the district of Bakarganj) which was named after him and finally inaugurated by His Excellency Sir John Arthur Herbert, the Governor of Bengal (1939-1943) when he along with his wife (Lady Mary Herbert), paid a visit to that place.<sup>44</sup> He also established the Harganga College at Munsiganj and also founded the Adina Fazlul Huq College in 1940 at the village of Adina. But surprisingly during the same time (1940), the Government aid to Sanskrit tols and Buddhist schools was discontinued and the budgetary allotment for the University of Calcutta was also curtailed.<sup>45</sup> Fazlul Huq not only established different educational institution but also took initiatives for the establishment of hostels for the students (including female) like the Eden Hostel for the students of the Eden school and a hostel at Dacca (which was named after him), etc. which proved his foresight and efficiency as an Education Minister and to a great extent, increased his popularity.

Along with these, the Government of Bengal paid its attention towards rural development and reconstruction and accordingly, a Rural Reconstruction Department was established in 1938. H.S. Suhrawardy, the Minister-in-charge of the department, in his speech on the floor of the Assembly on 16 March 1939 put forward his plan for a comprehensive rural reconstruction drive and proposed to appoint 27 district rural reconstruction officers, 26 propaganda officers and 250 organizers (for the year 1939-40, he wanted to raise the number of organizers upto 600) whose jurisdiction would extend to a Thana.<sup>46</sup> The Government also released funds for the expansion of water supply, clearance of Khals, re-excavation of rivers, improvement in medical facilities, sanitation, drainage, communication by land and water and the establishment of two model villages in the district of Noakhali etc. As the Minister for Commerce and Labour, Suhrawardy took certain measures which increased the popularity of the ministry. A series of industrial unrests, strikes in the mills and labour and trade union

movements in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal since 1932 and particularly after 1937 under the auspices of the Congress and the Communists were organized which became a source of trouble to the Ministry. The Government immediately decided to set up a Labour Department in charge of a Labour Commissioner to look after the interests of the labourers, undertook large number of welfare measures to restore industrial peace and encouraged the development of a 'sound trade union movement'. Suhrawardy got the support of the 'White Unions' to settle the industrial disputes and brought his people from his own community to join labour politics and form Muslim Labour Unions which increased his popularity not only within his Party (i.e. Muslim League) but also within the Ministry. In this process, Suhrawardy was not only successful 'in bringing stability to the ministry by quelling labour opposition but also deprived the Congress of the support of a section of the labour class of Calcutta and its industrial suburbs'.<sup>47</sup>

As the middle-class Muslims held less number of government jobs in comparison to the Hindus (who were in minority), the Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq took substantial steps for the appointment of the Muslims in Government services and giving them 'legislative and administrative concessions which, ironically enough, will often bear harder than ever on the Hindu middle class from which the more explosive elements in the revolutionary forces are most likely to emanate'.<sup>48</sup> In 1938, the Home Ministry changed the existing rules for recruitment of policemen and accordingly amended the Police Recruitment Rules (Rule 833 of Police Regulation) which prescribed that "while enlisting Bengali constables the Superintendent of Police must see that not less than fifty per cent of the recruits are Muhammedans".<sup>49</sup> On 25 August 1938, the Ministry also passed a resolution in the Legislative Assembly which recommended reservation of 60 per cent of all Government appointments for the Muslims.<sup>50</sup> In the next year (i.e. 1939), the Ministry approved that the basic percentage of reservation for the Muslims in direct recruitment would be 50 and in the case of posts filled up by promotion, the Ministry of Fazlul Huq took the decision 'that any excess over 50 per cent obtained by the non-Muslims in the matter of promotion' would be "counter-balanced by additional reservation for Muslims over and above fifty per cent in direct appointments.... until parity is reached".<sup>51</sup> Regarding the recruitment in the local bodies, the Government issued instructions to them on 19 April 1939 "not to propose for appointment to local bodies persons who

were known to be actively opposed to the policy of the Ministry”.<sup>52</sup> Not only that, the Government also made necessary amendments to Section 6(3) of the Village Self Government Act, 1919 by which it brought under its control the nomination of one-third members to the Union Boards.<sup>53</sup> The Bengal Government also decided that 15 per cent of appointments by direct recruitment would be reserved for the Scheduled Castes but such reservation should not exceed 30 per cent of non-Muslim appointments<sup>54</sup> and made provision for special consideration to appoint qualified Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and Buddhists in government services. A Communal Ratio Officer was appointed to ensure strict enforcement of ratio in services.<sup>55</sup> Not only that, the Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq also enacted the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Act (July 1939) curbing the great influence of the Hindus in the affairs of the Calcutta Corporation and proposing a reservation to the system of separate electorate for the Muslims in the elections to the Calcutta Corporation.<sup>56</sup> The Act provided more facilities for the recruitment of the Muslims in the Calcutta Corporation and gave them a share of responsibility in running the Corporation. So Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha raised his voice against this Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Act of 1939 and categorically mentioned in the Assembly that this Act was nothing but a reactionary step against Hindu rights and privileges and an instrument of ‘dividing the Hindus, of weakening them, of crushing them’.<sup>57</sup> The Muslims in general, welcomed this recruitment policy of the Ministry which is clearly reflected in the writings of Kamruddin Ahmed, a young Muslim League leader at that time who wrote: “..... the Muslim League ministry (i.e. Huq Ministry) for the first time opened avenues of employment (for) the educated middle class Muslim young men. Until 1937 Muslims could scarcely get any government job because selections were made by Hindu officers, who found the Muslim candidates always not up to the mark. As a matter of fact (the) Muslim League movement became strong due to this competition and rivalry between the Hindu and Muslim middle classes”.<sup>58</sup> The Congress tried its best to dislodge the pro-Muslim Ministry of Fazlul Huq by all sorts of political manoeuvring, but ultimately failed in that task (in the monsoon session of the Assembly in 1938, the Congress and the KPP dissident group moved ten no-confidence motions against individual ministers, but all of them were defeated).<sup>59</sup>

The Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq also made an ‘honest’ attempt to introduce and implement different socio-economic reforms and administrative measures during 1937-1941 for the welfare of the masses. But it is absolutely true that what the Krishak Praja Party under the leadership of Fazlul Huq, had promised to the people of Bengal prior to the elections of 1937 (in its Election *Manifesto*), was not fully and properly put into action and the gap between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ always remained. It must be mentioned here that while the activities of Fazlul Huq’s Coalition Ministry resulted in considerable strengthening of the position of the Muslim League, Fazlul Huq’s own position in his Party (KPP) and the Ministry was steadily declining. Simultaneously, he was the President of both KPP (Huq) and the BPML until December 1941 and this political dualism – a League member as well as a Praja leader – was highly inconsistent with the logic of building and increasing his own parent party’s (KPP’s) organization and turning it into a large-scale political party. Within six months of taking over the charge of his office, Fazlul Huq realized the fact that the stability and durability of the Ministry and his position as Prime Minister depended on the support afforded by the League and European members in the Legislature. When a split within his own party members occurred on 1 September 1937, he disdainfully and helplessly remarked: “They have already deserted our camp and are persistently strengthening the hands of the opposition even at this juncture when all the forces are being mobilized to discredit the present cabinet”.<sup>60</sup> The situation forced Fazlul Huq to find out an alternative political organization (i.e. the Muslim League) where he could join in order to save his own political career and also his Cabinet. The Muslim League took the advantage of this situation, dominated and guided the ministerial work and there was practically no difference between the erstwhile rival political parties (i.e. the KPP and the Muslim League) which is clearly reflected in the Bengali speech given by Suhrawardy at a public meeting at Mollar Hut (Khulna) on 15 January 1938: “One year earlier, Mr. Huq and me belonged to different parties with distinct programmes. He had the Krishak Praja Party while we had the League ..... Those days are no more .... Now we have decided to work together .... Ours is a completely common aim and ideal. Mr. Huq is the President of the Krishak Praja Party as well as the League. So, for the greater interest of the community every Muslim should assemble under the banner of the Muslim League.”<sup>61</sup> This political dualism of Mr. Huq created ‘a good deal of confusion’ among his supporters of both the parties for which he failed to build up his “real” KPP (by virtue

of remaining in power) as a broad-based political organization with thousands and lakhs of people rallied behind him. As most of the leaders of the KPP (Huq) were at the same time leading members of the Muslim League, its followers and leaders in *mofussil* towns and rural areas also felt it their duty to join into the Muslim League – which ultimately reduced the support-base of the KPP and gradually led the party into an existential crisis. This political situation in Bengal was rightly pointed out by Raghieb Ahsan (who was the Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League from 1931 to 1941), in his report on 3 June 1941 to Jinnah where he wrote: ‘Mr. Huq’s Praja Party exists only on paper with no office, no organisation, no branch, no party fund and no paper’.<sup>62</sup> Though the other faction of the KPP under the leadership of Shamsuddin Ahmed and Abdullahel Baqui, had a number of dedicated and committed workers, was also ‘reduced to an Assembly group leaning towards Congress’.

Not only his Party got a setback but also Fazlul Huq’s own Cabinet faced a major crisis when differences cropped up between Fazlul Huq and Nausher Ali, who was a radical member of the Cabinet, the Minister-in-charge of Local Self-Government and a strong critic of Mr. Huq for joining the Muslim League (which Mr. Ali never did). Mr. Huq wrote a letter to Nausher Ali on 19 May 1938 in which he accused him for persuading secret negotiations with the Congress for an alternative coalition.<sup>63</sup> Nausher Ali was forced to tender his resignation on 22 June 1938 as all other members of the Cabinet submitted their resignations in order to avoid any constitutional crisis and within half an hour, the Premier reconstituted his Cabinet excluding Nausher Ali. In his defence Nausher Ali claimed that he was the victim of a conspiracy planned by his Muslim League Colleagues, as he explained: “My one great sin has been that I have not been able to give up my party (i.e. KPP) and pledge to my constituency to satisfy the Leaguers....”<sup>64</sup> In a Press-release, Fazlul Huq refused to accept the credentials of Nausher Ali as a peasant leader: “Nausher Ali has never been connected with *Praja* movement and, as far as my knowledge goes, he has never been a regular member of any Krishak Praja Samity”.<sup>65</sup> As a result of Nausher Ali’s resignation, Fazlul Huq remained the only KPP representative in the Cabinet which virtually turned it into a Muslim League ministry. It can be easily presumed that his power, position and control within the Cabinet and also within the government party called the Coalition Party, became weak and shaky and he was not in a position to do what he intended to do owing to the opposition from his colleagues

– which is clearly reflected in his letter written to Shamsuddin Ahmed: “It is now 18 months since I took office .... All this time we have worked at cross-purposes.... I feel very miserable that this should be so.... It is absurd to expect that we will be able to implement all the items in our programmes in the limited time.....”<sup>66</sup> Mr. Huq gave him the offer: “Please come and see for yourself how matters stand.... Let us unite our efforts to build up a better and happier Bengal”.<sup>67</sup> In order to ‘wean the Krishak Proja Party away from the Congress’, to maintain majority in the House and protect his Ministry from ‘natural death’ as well as to reconstitute it, Fazlul Huq started negotiations with Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan who earlier became disgruntled from the government party and left the party with 16 members to form the Independent Praja Party (in March 1938). Shamsuddin Ahmed ultimately decided to join the Ministry on the understanding with Fazlul Huq that his government within a specified time, would introduce three Bills in the House providing: 1) reduced salaries for the Ministers; 2) free and compulsory primary education without imposing any taxes on the cultivators i.e. amendment of the Primary Education Act; and 3) the abolition of the system of nomination to all local bodies.<sup>68</sup> Both of them (i.e. Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan) joined the Cabinet on 17 November 1938 and the number of ministers rose upto twelve. Shamsuddin got the portfolio of Agriculture and Veterinary whereas Tamizuddin took the charge of Public Health and Medical.<sup>69</sup> But within three months, Shamsuddin Ahmed, resigned from the Ministry ( as a result of which his portfolio went to Tamizuddin) because ‘not a single item of the agreement was implemented’.<sup>69a</sup> Brabourne, the then Governor of Bengal, accepted his resignation on 17 February 1939 and in his Fortnightly Report (No.4) to the then Viceroy Linlithgow, he wrote: “Shamsuddin had brought no actual strength in numbers, apart from himself, to the Government side and his original inclusion, ..... was resented by many of the Ministry’s supporters”.<sup>70</sup> But Tamizuddin Khan who joined the Cabinet at the same time and ‘brought support with him’, was remaining in office.<sup>70a</sup> Three days after Shamsuddin Ahmed’s resignation from the Cabinet (i.e. 20 February 1939), the last peasants’ and tenants’ conference was held in a village of Mymensingh. Thereafter even the Council meeting of the KPP was not convened<sup>71</sup> and the KPP was in the process of gradual decline. Fazlul Huq became more and more dependent on the vote of the European members (who numbered 25) in order to save his Ministry and sought the assistance of the Muslim League members at every step and thus he came under

the control, vigilance and supervision of the AIML and its President, *Quaid-i-Azam* Jinnah. The Working Committee of the AIML resolved in July 1939 that “no individual province should negotiate or come to any settlement with the Congress with regard to the Hindu-Muslim question in its area”<sup>72</sup> and within three months passed another resolution strengthening the control of the President (AIML) over the provincial parliamentary party: “The Working Committee hereby empower the President to advise, guide and issue instructions to Muslim League Parties in the various Provincial Legislatures in the event of some sudden emergency arising. The Muslim League Parties shall give effect to or carry on such instructions as may be given by the President”.<sup>73</sup> Thus Jinnah became an unquestionable and unassailable leader in all-India Muslim politics and Fazlul Huq (as he joined the League) was to abide by the decisions of the *Quaid-i-Azam*.

But within a short period, differences arose between these two stalwart leaders of provincial and national politics on the question of war effort when Britain declared war against Germany on Sunday, 3 September 1939 and made an appeal to all the members of the Common Wealth to respond in her favour. On the same day Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, proclaimed that war broke out ‘between His Majesty and Germany’ and that a state of ‘War Emergency’ existed in India. This Proclamation clearly meant India’s automatic involvement in the war without her consent. While Jinnah and other members of the Working Committee from the Muslim – minority provinces were in favour of extending the League support for the war effort conditional, the members of the Muslim – majority provinces like Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan wanted to give unconditional support to Great Britain which almost led to a split in the Working Committee between the minority and majority provinces on this issue.<sup>74</sup> But the danger was tactfully averted by adopting a resolution where it was categorically mentioned that for real and solid Muslim co-operation, the Viceroy should ensure to the Muslims ‘justice and fair play in the Congress-governed provinces’ and at the same time the British Government should ‘review and revise the entire problem of India’s future constitution de novo’ and that no constitution should be imposed ‘without the consent and approval of the All-India Muslim League’.<sup>75</sup> Here it can be said without any doubt that it was nothing but a ‘bargaining approach’ as it did not say anything explicitly to the effect that if all these demands were not accepted and fulfilled, henceforth the Muslim League would stop in rendering its

support towards Britain. In the meantime, the Ministers decided that the Bengal Government should move 'a war resolution of its own in order to prevent multifarious resolutions being sponsored by their supporters'<sup>76</sup> which was placed in the Bengal Assembly by Fazlul Huq in December 1939 declaring its 'complete sympathy with the British Government for taking up arms against Nazi Germany in the defence of democracy and of the right of self-determination of the smaller and weaker nations which are now at the mercy of a few powerful and aggressive dictator-ridden states and cannot, unaided, maintain their territorial integrity' and assured the Government of India 'full co-operation in the successful prosecution of this war'.<sup>77</sup> But Mr. Huq had to face stiff opposition from the AIML group headed by Siddiqui and Ispahani (as directed by Jinnah) who believed that any unconditional support before arriving at full settlement between Jinnah and the Viceroy would prejudice Jinnah's negotiations and hurt his prestige'.<sup>78</sup> Finally Fazlul Huq was able to carry on the official 'War Resolution' but he had to declare in the Assembly on 13 December 1939, as part of a compromise with the AIML group, that he would always comply with the decisions of the League and of its President on the issue of war effort.<sup>79</sup> Although he was able to manage the AIML group in passing the 'War Resolution' in the Assembly, Mr. Huq got a tremendous blow when he failed to get the support of one of the important members of his Cabinet Nalini Ranjan Sarker, Minister for Finance, who refused to vote for the 'War Resolution' in the Assembly on 19 December. Mr. Sarker was fully prepared 'to support that part of the resolution that dealt with war cooperation, but stuck at the phrase that would make the whole Constitution, as distinct from the safeguards, dependent on the consent of minorities; on this point he insisted on making his views clear and abstaining from voting'.<sup>80</sup> He resigned from the Ministry which put into effect from 20 December (evening) and Suhrawardy was then given the additional charge of finance.

In the meantime, the Bengal branch of the Congress (which posed stiff challenges and opposition to Fazlul Huq's Coalition Ministry), was facing a sharp division and it broke up into two groups. The left wing of the Bengal Congress was led by Subhas Chandra Bose and Sarat Chandra Bose who enjoyed large support from the younger generation. On the other hand, the conservative Gandhian faction was led by Kiran Shankar Roy, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Dr. Prafulla Ghosh. The gulf between these two blocks widened with Subhas Chandra Bose's decision to stand for

re-election as the President (at first he was selected the Congress President at Haripura, 1938) of the Indian National Congress in 1939. In order to resist Subhas, Gandhiji at first wanted Jawaharlal Nehru and in case of his refusal, he wanted Maulana Azad to be the Congress President. As both of them did not agree with his proposal, Gandhiji selected Pattabhi Sitaramayya as his candidate to contest the election. So for the first time in the history of the Indian National Congress, the election (for the President) became inevitable which was finally taken place on 29 January 1939. Subhas Chandra was elected the President of the Congress for the second time and defeated his opponent by a margin of 203 votes.<sup>81</sup> Gandhiji made the issue a matter of his own personal prestige and declared Sitaramayya's defeat to be 'more mine than his'. The situation became more complicated at the Tripuri Congress (7-12 March 1939) where the majority members of the Congress (followers of Gandhiji) declared their 'no confidence' on the newly elected President and pressurized Subhas Chandra to form the Working Committee of the Congress in consultation with Gandhiji and according to his will (known as 'Pant Proposal'). Disappointed and humiliated Subhas Chandra had no other alternative but to resign from the Congress presidentship which he did on 29 April 1939 and formed a new political party – the Forward Block on 3 May 1939. To tailor his influence on the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC), it was dissolved for the time being under the instruction of the High Command and accordingly an *ad hoc* committee was formed. Thus both the AICC and the BPCC were going through a leadership and organizational crisis which helped the AIML to capitalize the situation and strengthen its position in national as well as provincial politics.

As the Congress Working Committee declared (on 22 October 1939) the Viceroy's decision to be 'wholly unsatisfactory', the Congress ministries in all the seven provinces resigned in November 1939 in protest of the Viceroy's decision to join in the Second World War.<sup>82</sup> To celebrate the occasion, Jinnah (who raised the cry of "Islam in Danger" and accused Gandhiji of 'turning the Congress into an instrument for the revival of Hinduism') issued an appeal on 6 December 1939 urging the Muslims and League branches all over India to observe Friday, 22 December 1939 as the 'Day of Deliverance and Thanksgiving'. In Bengal, a section of Muslim League members put an open challenge to this appeal of Jinnah. Abdur Rahman Siddiqui who was one of the three members of the Working Committee of the All-India

Muslim League from Bengal (the two other members were Fazlul Huq and Nazimuddin), criticized this decision of Jinnah as “an insult to national prestige” and as “flattery of British Imperialism” and he resigned from the membership of the All-India Muslim League Working Committee. Because of his resignation, Akram Khan was nominated in his place. Jinnah’s opposition to the Congress and Congress Ministries since the introduction of the provincial autonomy appeared reactionary to many of the leaders of the Muslim League in Bengal<sup>83</sup> including Hasan Ispahani ‘who followed Jinnah blindly’. However, several meetings, processions, were held in different parts of the country for successful observation of the Day and in Bengal alone, over 2000 public meetings were taken place. The Day was observed with great enthusiasm in Bengal as well as India which contributed to the growth of separatism and the phenomenal increase of the Muslim League organizations not only in Bengal (particularly in Pabna, Noakhali, Chittagong, Dacca, Faridpur etc.) but also in India and tightened the control of the President (i.e. Jinnah) over the provincial parliamentary party. On the eve of the Viceregal talks with Jinnah and Gandhiji in the beginning of February 1940, Fazlul Huq in order to get rid of this situation, issued a statement in favour of the coalition ministries in the provinces during the Second World War, even including the Congress and other political parties. Herbert in his Confidential Report (No.3 of 7 February 1940) to Linlithgow wrote: “... Fazlul Huq is genuinely concerned at the present state of impasse and the possibility of further deterioration. It is also possible that having found his League colleagues, Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy, no less pliable than *Sarker*, his mind is again running on seeking alliances outside. If this be so, his expressed willingness to bring Congressmen into the Bengal Cabinet is double edged; on the one hand it furthers Jinnah’s claim for coalition Governments elsewhere and on the other hand it opens up opportunities for himself of dividing and ruling among his own colleagues”.<sup>84</sup> In spite of the standing resolution of the AIML Working Committee forbidding negotiation by individual province, Fazlul Huq summoned a conference of the Muslim and Hindu leaders (including the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha) in Calcutta on 24 February 1940. In that conference, he made an emotional appeal to the participants ‘to find out a lasting solution of all differences’.<sup>85</sup> But few days later (in the month of March), this man who for the time being was thinking of an alternative arrangement, was asked to move the Pakistan Resolution at the Lahore session of the Muslim League where almost 400 delegates and visitors from Bengal assembled with unlimited hope and enthusiasm.<sup>86</sup>

The province of Bengal and its Muslim support to the AIML was so important that Mr. Huq was given the honour of introducing the now-famous Lahore Resolution of 1940 which he did with great spirit and conviction.<sup>87</sup>

The 27<sup>th</sup> session of the All-India Muslim League was convened at Lahore on 22 March 1940 and continued upto 24 March to discuss and settle issues such as the future constitutional scheme and the League's course of action regarding the declaration of the British Government of India's belligerency in the Second World War. The League Conference was held in the midst of the Khaksar troubles (1935-1940) at Lahore on the Shahidganj Mosque affair as the police fired on the Khaksars on 19 March that resulted in the loss of 32 lives. When Fazlul Huq and his associates arrived at the Lahore station, the Khaksars (who were the tribal Muslims and started a social movement based in Lahore initiated by Allama Mashriqi in 1931 to make India free from the yoke of the British rule and in its place, wanted to establish a Hindu-Muslim government), raised the slogan – "Fazlul Huq, go back" and he was happened to be in a very embarrassing situation. But soon he was successful to tackle the situation and pacify them by showing his genuine feelings and sympathy for their cause. Then the Khaksars escorted him to the house of Mian Abdul Aziz, who was his host at Lahore.<sup>88</sup> On 22 March 1940 when Mr. Huq was proceeding towards the pandal of the Muslim League session, he was hailed with the slogans like "Sher-e-Bangla Zindabad" by the assemblage of the people. As the audience gave a standing ovation to Fazlul Huq with the slogan of "Sher-e-Bangla Zindabad", Jinnah had to stop his speech and resume his seat. Before resuming his seat, Jinnah humorously remarked, 'when the tiger appears, the lamb must give way'.<sup>89</sup> The audience eagerly wanted Mr. Huq on the dais and became impatient for hearing a speech from the 'Sher-e-Bangla'. Mr. Huq then made an appeal to the audience to be patient, keep silence and maintain discipline in the meeting. Thereafter the situation came under control and Jinnah then continued his unfinished speech.<sup>90</sup> In that speech Jinnah criticized the British Government for the introduction of the federal scheme in the Central Government and categorically mentioned that "we could never accept the dangerous scheme of the central federal Government embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935".<sup>91</sup> It has been argued by Prof. Ayesha Jalal that Jinnah supported the establishment of a loose federation, one that would give the Muslim-majority provinces a considerable degree of autonomy from the proposed centre.<sup>91a</sup> Keeping

this fact in her mind, Prof. Joya Chatterji wrote: “Jinnah is seen as deploying the idea of Pakistan as a ‘bargaining counter’; Jinnah, it is argued, assumed that the Congress would be so anxious to avoid partition that it would make any concessions necessary to keep the Muslim-majority provinces within the Indian Union’.<sup>91b</sup> On the same day, a meeting of the Muslim League Working Committee was also held at Memdotvilla which was attended by Jinnah, Liaqat, Sikandar Hayat, Nawab Ismail, Nazimuddin, Abdur Rahman Siddiqi and others (who were 15 in toto). In this meeting a draft resolution regarding the future constitution of India was prepared for submission to the Subject Committee. But in the meeting of the Subject Committee, the Muslim League leaders of the minority provinces had fundamental differences of opinion in their approach to the constitutional scheme and they favoured an all-India federation with maximum provincial autonomy and adequate safeguards for Muslims at the Centre and minority provinces.<sup>92</sup> According to them, the establishment of independent Muslim states in Muslim majority provinces was not a solution of their problems as they still remained minorities in their provinces and lived under the domination of the Hindus.<sup>92a</sup>

The politics in Bengal and other Muslim majority provinces had some fundamental dissimilarities and differences with the politics of the Muslim minority provinces. The Muslims in Bengal formed almost 55% of the total population. The Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq from 1937 onwards made sincere endeavour to establish and ensure the political domination of the Muslims in the province and provided adequate safeguards and sufficient facilities for their all-round development. While the Muslim leaders of the minority provinces whole-heartedly wanted an all-India federation with maximum provincial autonomy, Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and other prominent leaders of the Muslim League in Bengal, did not believe in the scheme of federation and unanimously wanted its abolition. In his speech Fazlul Huq said: “We have stated definitely and unequivocally that what we want is not merely a tinkering with the idea of federation but its thorough overhauling so that the federation may ultimately go. This idea of federation must not only be postponed but abandoned altogether. On many an occasion on the platform of the Muslim League and the other day on the floor of the House in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, I made an emphatic and definite assertion that the Mussalmans of India will not consent to any such scheme which is framed without our approval. We will make such a

constitution absolutely unworkable. I hope those who may have in their power to shape the future constitution of India will take the Muslim feelings into consideration and not take any step which may be regretted. We have made our position absolutely clear. The problem is very simple. At present the Muslims constitute 80 millions scattered all over India. It may sound a big number but, as a matter of fact, the Muslims are in a weak position numerically in almost every province of India. In the Punjab and Bengal we are in an effective majority and are hopelessly in minority elsewhere. The position is such that whatever may be constitution, Muslim interests are bound to suffer just as they have suffered during the last three years of the working of provincial autonomy”.<sup>93</sup> Not only that, he severely criticized the Congress and went on to say, ‘I am Muslim first and Bengali afterwards. I will take revenge on the Hindus of Bengal if Muslims are hurt in Congress-ruled provinces’.<sup>94</sup> Fazlul Huq and his colleagues were more concerned with the welfare of the Muslims of Bengal and according to them, it would be possible if Bengal was made free from the control of the Hindu-dominated centre in the affairs of the province.<sup>95</sup> H.S. Suhrawardy, the spokesman of the Bengal representatives in the Subject Committee, opposed to the scheme of federation by citing instances from the constitutions of U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and other countries and came to the conclusion that the federation had a natural tendency towards centralization. Instead of a federation, he pleaded that Bengal and other Muslim majority provinces should each constitute sovereign state and each of those provinces, should have the right to choose the future constitution or enter into a commonwealth with the neighbouring province or provinces. Suhrawardy further warned that if the Muslims of Bengal by supporting the Muslim League and under its leadership could not reach their target and achieve their objective of an independent state in the province, would ultimately lose their faith and confidence in this political organization (i.e. the Muslim League).<sup>96</sup>

In his Presidential address at the Lahore session, Jinnah propagated the ‘two-nation’ theory and accused his Hindu friends for not understanding the ‘real nature of Islam and Hinduism’. According to him, ‘they are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders; and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality; and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of more of our troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The

Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature[s]. They neither intermarry nor interdine together, and indeed they belong to two different civilisations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects [= perspectives?] on life, and of life, are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and different episode[s]. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent, and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state”<sup>97</sup>. In his speech, Jinnah claimed that “Mussalmans are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homelands, their territory, and their state. We wish to live in peace and harmony with our neighbours as a free and independent people. We wish our people to develop to the fullest our spiritual, cultural, economic, social, and political life, in a way that we think best and in consonance with our own ideals and according to the genius of our people ..... We must be prepared to face all difficulties and consequences, make all the sacrifices that may be required of us, to achieve the goal we have set in front of us”.<sup>98</sup> He thus set the tune of the historic Lahore session of the Muslim League and invited Fazlul Huq to be a part of it.

In his memorable speech Fazlul Huq unequivocally reiterated: “Eighty millions was not a small number and they need not be afraid. If a sufficient proportion of 80 millions had been congregated in one province, we would have nothing to fear. Situated as we are, our political enemy can take advantage of the situation. Our friends will remember that even in the Punjab and Bengal our position is not very safe. In the legislatures we are not in such large majority; we have to seek the help of other interests and minorities to form coalition governments which are the weakest form of Governments known to constitutionalists. As regards the other provinces, we are in a very weak position and are at the mercy of the majority. Until a satisfactory solution is found of this unequal distribution of Muslim population, it is useless to talk of constitutional advance or of safeguards”.<sup>99</sup> He further made an appeal to the audience: “I earnestly appeal to my Muslim friends throughout India to remain united and exercise calm and sober judgement and remember that we have to

stand on our own feet and cannot rely on anybody”.<sup>100</sup> It is to be mentioned here that the famous Lahore session of the Muslim League was convened just on the next day of the Ramgarh (Bihar) session (53<sup>rd</sup>, 21 March 1940) of the Indian National Congress where the newly elected Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad opposed to Jinnah’s ‘Two-Nation Theory’ and questioned the ‘minority’ concept: “They (the Muslims) number between eight and nine crores..... They are not confined to a particular area but spread out over different parts of the country. Of the eleven provinces of India, the Muslims are in a majority in four, where the other religious groups constitute the minorities. If we add British Baluchistan to it, there will be five provinces instead of four where Muslims are in a majority. Even if we are compelled to identify ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ purely in terms of religious groupings, the position of the Muslims is not that of a minority; if they constitute a minority in seven provinces, they form the majority in five. This being so, there is no reason why they should be disturbed by the thought of being a minority”.<sup>101</sup> In his Presidential address Azad also said: “I am a Muslim and profoundly conscious of the fact that I have inherited Islam’s glorious traditions of the last thirteen hundred years. I am not prepared to lose even a small part of that legacy. The history and teachings of Islam, its arts and letters, its civilization and culture, are part of my wealth and it is my duty to cherish and guard them. As a Muslim I have a special identity within the field of religion and culture and I cannot tolerate and undue interference with it. But, with all these feelings, I have another equally deep realization, born out of my life’s experience, which is strengthened and not hindered by the spirit of Islam. I am equally proud of the fact that I am an Indian, and essential part of the indivisible unity of Indian nationhood, a vital factor in its total make-up without which this noble edifice will remain incomplete. I can never give up this sincere claim. It was India’s historic destiny that its soil should become the destination of many different caravans of races, cultures and religions. Even before the dawn of history’s morning, they started their trek into India and the process has continued since. This vast and hospitable land welcomed them all and took them to her bosom. The last of these caravans was that of the followers of Islam, who came in the footsteps of their many predecessors and settled down here..... We handed over our wealth to her and she unlocked for us the door of her own riches. We presented her with something she needed urgently, the most precious gift in Islam’s treasury, its message of democracy, human equality and brotherhood. Eleven centuries have passed by since then, Islam

has now as valid a claim on this land as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of its people for several thousand years, Islam, too, has been its religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with legitimate pride that he is an Indian and a follower of Hinduism, so can a Muslim proudly claim being an Indian and a follower of Islam.....”<sup>102</sup> But this harmonious speech of Azad at Ramgarh failed to satisfy the leaders of the Muslim League at Lahore (1940) who considered themselves as ‘political minority’ and were only concerned with the protection of their separate religious and communal identities which paved the way for the adoption of the Lahore Resolution.

The famous resolution of 23 March 1940, drafted by Sikandar Hayat Khan, moved (after considerable modifications) by ‘Sher-e-Bangla’ Fazlul Huq, and seconded by Choudhuri Khaliqzaman and several others, was passed unanimously in the open session of the Muslim League. It resolved that “it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles: viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into Regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustment as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India should be grouped to constitute ‘Independent States’ in which the Constituent Units shall be autonomous and sovereign”.<sup>103</sup> By moving this momentous resolution, the Bengal Premier placed himself in a precarious position. On the one hand, Fazlul Huq had to represent the Muslims at the all-India level and abide by the Muslim League’s claims in order to show a united front to both the Congress and the British Government. On the other side, he was representing Bengal and the Bengali Muslims at the national level which required playing his provincial card very tactfully so that the Bengali voice heard within the League itself. Needless to say, Mr. Huq performed this dual representation on an all-India platform with supreme political elegance and rhetorical skill. Although in his speech at Lahore, Fazlul Huq declared himself as a ‘Muslim first’, he did not in fact address the audience in Urdu (rather in English), even though the crowd urged him to do so.<sup>104</sup> His explanation was that he was speaking on a vital subject and he wanted to avoid any kind of misinterpretation in its translation. Probably Fazlul Huq wanted to give his subtle message to the Muslim League leadership that although he

was a Muslim, he had no intention to give up his cultural inheritance (which was clearly reflected in his beautiful speech delivered on 12 August 1941 on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly on the sad demise of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and which in the later years, gave birth to linguistic nationalism and acted as a catalyst in a political crisis that culminated in the partition of East Bengal from Pakistan and finally in the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971).

But this Lahore Resolution, having ‘clumsy wording’ left ample scope for ‘vagueness, ambiguity and equivocation’.<sup>105</sup> Neither ‘Pakistan’ (coined as early as 1933 by the ‘Cambridge group’ of which the most prominent member was Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali) nor ‘Partition’ were explicitly mentioned in the Resolution and in the early 1940s, ‘some Muslim politicians even argued at times that the Hindu press and politicians had started the Pakistan bogey by misinterpreting the resolution in order to block legitimate but more modest Muslim demands.’<sup>106</sup> It was not at all clear in the Resolution whether the two ‘Independent (Muslim) States’ were to form ‘a permanent Federation or even a confederation’. Not only that, the actual areas to be included in these ‘States’, were not specifically defined by Jinnah till 1946. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his book entitled *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (which was published in 1940) also highlighted the ambiguities of the Lahore Resolution. He wrote: “What does this Resolution contemplate? A reference to para 3 of the Resolution will show that the Resolution contemplates that the areas in which Muslims predominate shall be incorporated into independent states. In concrete terms, it means that the Punjab, the North-Western Frontier Province, Baluchistan and Sind in the North-West and Bengal in the East instead of remaining as the provinces of British India shall be incorporated as independent states outside of British India”. He in his writings also raised the question: “Does the Resolution contemplate that these Muslim Provinces, after being incorporated into states, will remain each an independent sovereign state or will they be joined together into one constitution as members of a single state, federal or unitary?” “On this point”, Dr. Ambedkar clarified, “the Resolution is rather ambiguous, if not self-contradictory. It speaks of grouping the zones into ‘Independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign’. The use of the terms ‘constituent units’ indicates that what is contemplated is a Federation. If that is so, then, the use of the word ‘Sovereign’ as an attribute of the units is out of place. Federation of units and sovereignty of units are

contradictions. It may be that what is contemplated is a confederation. It is, however, not very material for the moment whether these independent states are to form into a federation or confederation. What is important is the basic demand, namely, that these areas are to be separated from India and formed into independent states".<sup>107</sup> Although Dr. Ambedkar categorically mentioned and exposed the ambiguities of the Lahore Resolution, Jinnah did not pay any heed and he did not consider it absolutely necessary to make any correction in it. However, by moving forward – the Lahore Resolution and the 'Pakistan' scheme, the Muslim League infused 'unlimited hope and enthusiasm' among its members and supporters and finally gave the Indian Muslims 'the identity they had been searching for'. And Jinnah, who had been highlighting the 'national' character of the Muslims as against their 'minority' character, finally emerged as the 'one and only leader', the supreme commander of the Muslims throughout India. In addition to it, at the same Lahore session, the constitution of the AIML was amended by which the Working Committee was empowered to "control, direct and regulate all the activities of the various provincial Leagues" and also to "take disciplinary action against individual members of the Council of the All-India Muslim League who will violate the decisions of the League". At the same time, the Working Committee of the AIML was entrusted with full authority "to suspend, dissolve or disaffiliate any Provincial League which fails in its duties, infringes or ignores the decisions or directions of the All-India Muslim League or hinders the progress of the League in any manner whatsoever".<sup>108</sup>

Having been strengthened with constitutional power, Jinnah moved forward to impose a ban on the participation by the Muslim League members in War Committees or in any war effort and accordingly a resolution was adopted by the Working Committee of the AIML at a meeting held in Bombay on 15-16 June 1940 which caused 'profound disappointment, and something like consternation'<sup>109</sup> not only to Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy but also to Jinnah's loyal Nazimuddin<sup>110</sup> who attended the said meeting from Bengal and returned empty-handed. Soon Sikander Hyat Khan, the Premier of Punjab, issued a statement against this resolution on 18 June 1940 that this provision would not be applicable to the Punjab and Bengal. Jinnah issued an immediate rejoinder to Sikander Hyat Khan on 19 June describing his statement as 'childish'.<sup>111</sup> The Bengal Premier Fazlul Huq also took 'a very strong view in this matter' and in his speech at the inaugural meeting of the Calcutta War Committee, he

pointed out that “although there might have been differences in the past, all differences must now be subordinated to the present war effort. He visualized Muslims and Britishers standing shoulder to shoulder in the defence of liberty and freedom of the oppressed – a line of approach which is likely to do far more in establishing the safeguards required by Muslims than Jinnah’s non-cooperative attitude”.<sup>112</sup> As the Calcutta and Provincial War Committees had wide general support from the Hindus (except the Congress and the Muslims), Fazlul Huq cautioned that, as a result of Jinnah’s ban, in Bengal ‘all Key positions’ in Civil Guards and other bodies set up during the war would be monopolized by the Hindus which was clearly reflected in Raghbir Ahasan’s letter written to Jinnah on 14 July 1940. Ahsan wrote: “Mr. Fazlul Huq .... is very very angry with me ... he is resenting my efforts to foil his work for the War Committees... Mr. Huq was today very bitterly complaining against you saying that you were blocking the way of co-operation with the result that all key positions were being monopolized by the Hindus”.<sup>113</sup> Same sort of opinion was also put forward by Suhrawardy who sent a telegram to Jinnah on 24 June 1940 requesting him to lift the ban ‘at least for Civic Guards immediately’.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, the ‘Calcutta trio- Siddiqui, Ispahani and Nooruddin’ were supporting Jinnah’s decision.<sup>115</sup> Ispahani asked Jinnah repeatedly to take disciplinary action against his ‘two spoilt children’ because “if a halt is not called even now, it is best that Sikander and his counterpart in Bengal are made the dictators of the Muslim”.<sup>116</sup> In reply Jinnah wrote on 24 June 1940: ‘I feel also that time is coming when the League must be purified at all costs’.<sup>117</sup> It must be mentioned here that while the BPML was in favour of allowing some more time before taking a decision at par with the central League, the Calcutta District Branch of the Muslim League in its meeting held on 26 June 1940, instantly passed the resolution calling upon all the Muslims to resign from the War Committees and ‘to abide by the mandate’ issued by the AIML. In spite of Jinnah’s formal warning (i.e. “no member of Working Committee of the Muslim League should enter into any negotiations or discussions with the Congress leaders regarding the question of Hindu-Muslim settlement or any other matters which require adjustment between the Muslim League and the Congress without the permission of the President”), both the Premiers of Punjab and Bengal went to Delhi and held informal talks with the Congress leaders on 9 July 1940 on the issue of solving the communal problem. Not only that, Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan wrote a joint letter to Jinnah requesting that ‘the ban on war

committees and civic guards be removed from the Muslim Leaguers in Bengal and in the Punjab'.<sup>118</sup> According to Herbert, "Fazlul Huq is set on the idea of a national all-Party Government with himself as supreme head, pledged to support the war effort".<sup>119</sup> But Jinnah immediately issued a statement reminding both the Premiers of Bengal and Punjab that he had 'not given permission to either of them to carry on negotiations for a Hindu-Moslem settlement' and explicitly pointed out that they had no authority to enter into such discussions or negotiations.<sup>120</sup> In October 1940, when Fazlul Huq wrote a letter to Jinnah for his views on a "Congress - Coalition Ministry" in Bengal (especially with the 'Bose group') and for 'considering the removal of Musharraf Hossain in order to make way for a Congress representative', the League Supremo turned down the proposals and replied that he was 'not in favour of any such coalition so long as the position of the present Ministry remains stable'.<sup>121</sup> Two more examples hampering Fazlul Huq's position may be cited 'as further proof of disregard of the special needs of Bengal and of the Bengali Muslims by the AIML High Command'. During the course of the 1941 Census, an atmosphere of mutual distrust had been created between the Hindus and Muslims as both the communities were 'striving their utmost to push up their figures' and statements and counter statements had been put forward by Fazlul Huq and the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha which culminated in communal tension in different parts of Bengal. Fazlul Huq accused the Hindu Mahasabha and the Caste Hindus of being involved in a "conspiracy" to 'deflate Muslim position and inflate Hindu position',<sup>122</sup> through the Hindu officers who were holding a large number of key posts relating to the Census work and Mr. Huq was pursuing the idea of 'a parallel census to be carried out by Provincial enumerators'.<sup>123</sup> In his letter to Jinnah (written on 9 March 1941), Fazlul Huq apprehended that if 'his idea did not put into force, the Muslims in Bengal will be reduced to minority and you will lose one of your so-called majority provinces in India'.<sup>124</sup> He also cautioned Jinnah to be 'be ready for an appeal from Bengal to launch an All India agitation' against the Hindu manoeuvres.<sup>125</sup> But Jinnah's reply completely disheartened Mr. Huq as he wrote: '... You as the Premier of Bengal are in a strong position to fight the matter out with the Government of India firmly and determinately'.<sup>126</sup> Another issue on which the controversy arose between Fazlul Huq and Jinnah was the observance of Pakistan Day on 23 March 1941. As there had been communal riots 'of a serious nature' in Khulna (between the Muslims and Namasudras and there were almost 200 casualties) and Dacca (where communal

clash, looting, arson and police firing were taken place) districts,<sup>127</sup> Mr. Huq being the President of the BPML and with the concurrence of Suhrawardy (i.e. Mr. Huq and Suhrawardy gave a joint statement which was published in the *Azad* on 25 March 1941), instructed the district and sub-divisional League Committees to postpone the Pakistan Day celebration throughout Bengal.<sup>128</sup> Jinnah, on the other hand, totally rejected this decision of Mr. Huq, strictly adhered to the earlier decision of the AIML regarding the celebration and accordingly directed the members of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (including the Calcutta District League), not to 'stop holding Pakistan Day' according to the instructions of the AIML unless the meetings were banned by the official orders issued by the Government of Bengal.<sup>129</sup> Instantaneously the Calcutta District Muslim League responded to this appeal of Jinnah and as a result, the celebration of Pakistan day took place in Calcutta and other places of Bengal. Although Fazlul Huq went against the decision of the AIML, Jinnah refrained himself from taking any disciplinary action against Mr. Huq probably because his (i.e. Mr. Huq's) action was approved of by the members of the Working Committee of the BPML (on 8 April), keeping in view 'of the grave and emergent situation' which existed at that time in Bengal.<sup>130</sup>

Fazlul Huq was totally disappointed with the stand taken by the AIML and the Calcutta District Muslim League and disdainfully he took the decision not to attend the Madras session of the AIML (held in April 1941). He intimated it to Abdul Hamid Khan, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, in his letter dated 30 March 1941 where he wrote: "..... The position of Bengal is in many respects a unique one.... When I find that Bengal receives some tangible proof of the sympathy of the Muslims of other parts of India for the special needs of Bengal Muslims, I will be in a position to take part in the deliberation of the Muslim League.... At the present moment I do not think that people assign much value to Bengal Muslims and I therefore feel very unhappy about the whole situation".<sup>131</sup> Disgruntled Fazlul Huq met the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow (April 1936 – October 1943) at Simla in the middle of May 1941 and subsequently urged the 'advisability of forming national cabinets both at the Centre and the Provinces'.<sup>132</sup> The Calcutta District Muslim League immediately reacted against this pronouncement and took 'an agitated resolution' which characterized the Chief Minister's proposal 'as detrimental to Muslim solidarity and an infringement on the authority of the All-India Muslim League'.<sup>133</sup> Hasan Ispahani, one of the members

of the 'Calcutta trio', went ahead and moved another resolution (seconded by Mohammad Mohsin), which expressed its 'complete faith in the leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam'.<sup>134</sup> At that point of time, it was alleged that Fazlul Huq was proceeding towards the 'parting of the ways' from both Jinnah and his members of the Cabinet and it was in the air that at any moment Jinnah would take a prompt action against Mr. Huq by leaving him out of the Working Committee of the AIML. In anticipation, Khwaja Nazimuddin wrote a letter to Jinnah on 10 June 1941 and made an 'earnest request' not to exclude Fazlul Huq's name at that point of time because '..... from the provincial point of view, it will be fatal and disastrous if, just now, any opportunity is given to Mr. Fazlul Huq to divide the Muslims in Bengal'.<sup>135</sup> Same kind of opinion was also expressed by Hasan Ispahani in his letter written to Jinnah just two days later (i.e. 12 June 1941) where he categorically pointed out that "Huq should not be thrown out from the Working Committee of the All India Muslim League just yet, because if we do so, it would be a tactical mistake.... we should ... wait for another opportunity".<sup>136</sup> And the 'opportunity' came on 21 July 1941, the day on which the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow announced the formation of a National Defence Council consisting of thirty members including three Muslim Premiers – Sikander Hyat Khan (Punjab), Fazlul Huq (Bengal) and Mohammad Saadullah (Assam) in order to have Muslim representation in the Council 'by persons of the highest prominence and capacity' and the Viceroy invited all these three Premiers to join in it and to serve as members of it. All the three Premiers made a quick response and all of them including Fazlul Huq immediately accepted the offer which completely went against the policy of the League. Jinnah strongly reacted against this step of Fazlul Huq and other members of the League as highly objectionable and he was thinking of taking disciplinary action against all of them unless they resigned from the Council. He immediately wrote a letter to R. Lumby, the Governor of Bombay expressing disapproval of the appointment of the Muslim Premiers or any other members of the League by the Viceroy in the Executive Council and in the National Defence Council without making any consultation with the President and Working Committee of the AIML and accused the Viceroy that he had 'canvassed Muslim League members over the heads of the leader and executive of the party'.<sup>137</sup> While the Premiers of the Punjab and Assam succumbed to Jinnah's directives, Fazul Huq made attempts to explore support from his colleagues, the Viceroy and the Governor of Bengal who made it clear to him that the ultimate decision must be his,

and that 'no persuasion either way' would be 'exercised by the Governor'.<sup>138</sup> But ultimately Mr. Huq accepted the offer because he felt that it was his 'duty' to 'serve on National Defence Council as Premier of Bengal representing this Province'. He further clarified that the Premiers were selected by virtue of their official capacity and so long they remained in their posts, they had no power to disobey the Viceroy. But this explanation of Fazlul Huq did not satisfy Jinnah and his followers who insisted on the resignation of the League members from the Defence Council. On 30 July 1941, Jinnah issued a statement from Hyderabad in which he clearly mentioned that disciplinary action would be taken against them and the whole matter was placed before the Working Committee of the AIML. Thereafter the meeting of the AIML Working Committee was held on 25 August 1941 in which Fazlul Huq was asked to resign within 10 days from the Defence Council. The Working Committee also empowered Jinnah to 'take such action as he deemed appropriate in case of his refusal'. This decision of the AIML Working Committee was communicated to Mr. Huq by Liaquat Ali Khan, the Secretary of the AIML, through a telegram on that day (i.e. 25 August) and subsequently through a letter on the next day (i.e. 26 August). He finally decided to resign from membership of the Working Committee and Council of the AIML and also from the National Defence Council, not because he agreed with the Muslim League High Command but because he considered this action of the President as 'unfair and unconstitutional' and he did nothing contrary to the interests of the Muslim community. According to Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, "... considerable pressure was put upon him by the League to resign, and there is no doubt that if he continues to resist alone, there will be a great upheaval throughout the Muslim world all over India".<sup>138a</sup> Mr. Huq maintained that his acceptance of membership of the Defence Council 'in no way involved breach of League's principle or policy'.<sup>139</sup> But he took this stand in order to 'avoid greater evil of domestic feud' and especially because his continuation of membership after the resignation of other Premiers would not serve any 'useful purpose' for the community.<sup>140</sup> He already made up his mind to come out of the Muslim League with his followers and wanted to publish a paper in order to communicate with his supporters and admirers about his plan of action. Accordingly he started a paper *Navayug* (edited by Mr. Huq) and its first issue came out in August 1941. In the next month, on 8 September 1941, Fazlul Huq wrote a long letter (which is a historic document) to Liaquat Ali Khan, the Secretary of the AIML, tendering his resignation 'as mark of protest against arbitrary

use of powers vested in President<sup>141</sup> who appointed Ispahani (not Suhrawardy) to Fazlul Huq's seat of the Working Committee of the AIML in order to keep a watchful eye on the movements of Mr. Huq and get him informed so that he could easily keep an eye on Bengal politics. In his letter, Mr. Huq severely criticized Jinnah as he wrote: "..... the principles of democracy and autonomy in All India Muslim League are being subordinated to arbitrary wishes of single individual who seeks to rule as omnipotent authority even over destiny of 33 millions in Bengal who occupy key position in Indian Muslim politics".<sup>142</sup> Mr. Huq realized the fact that Jinnah wanted to get rid of him and replace him with someone who could be a puppet in his hand. In order to hammer his popularity, Jinnah began a long campaign of propaganda against the Bengal Premier which was clearly mentioned in his letter to Liaquat Ali Khan. According to Fazlul Huq, "it was his clear duty to inform us by telegram or by telephone of his disapproval and that he would like us to resign from Defence Council; he might even have hinted that if we did not resign he would be obliged to take disciplinary action against us. But instead he waited till names were published and then announced decision to take disciplinary action, even ordinary courtesy required a warning before such announcement. His procedure placed us in extremely awkward position, he gave us no opportunity of explanation and took us unawares as if anxious to make public exhibition of his authority; he thus converted simple affair into complicated political problem".<sup>143</sup> Moreover, defending his position as the leader of the Muslim community in Bengal, Fazlul Huq wrote: "..... I do not find any indications that the Moslems of Bengal, as such, are in a mood to condemn my membership of the Defence Council".<sup>144</sup> It was quite clear that Mr. Huq was unwilling to accept Jinnah's authority outside the realm of party politics which made him so dangerous for Jinnah, for he was a provincial Premier representing a key section of the Muslim community and was in no way solely dependent on the AIML for his political existence as a Muslim leader. As the Working Committee, a key decision – making body of the League, was dominated by the leaders of the Muslim – minority provinces, Fazlul Huq accused them of neglecting the interests of the Muslim majority provinces such as, Bengal and Punjab. He wrote: "I protest emphatically against manner in which Bengal and Punjab Muslim interests are being imperilled by Muslim leaders of 'Minority Provinces'..... They neither realise responsibilities of Muslim Premiers of these Provinces nor care for repercussions on politics of Bengal and Punjab Muslims of their decisions for Muslim India as a whole.

They should not meddle too much with politics of majority provinces. At present I feel that Bengal does not count much in counsels of political leaders outside province, though we constitute more than one third of total Muslim population of India”.<sup>145</sup> He also brought an allegation that his position as a provincial Premier (who had ‘particular responsibilities and difficulties’), had not been taken into consideration by the leaders of the minority provinces who wanted to ‘drown my voice with meaningless slogans which may suit their own conditions of political helplessness, but which are utterly unsuited to the conditions prevailing in my province’.<sup>146</sup> Finally, Fazlul Huq combined regional and religious solidarity and clearly mentioned that he would always give utmost priority to the interests of the Bengali Muslims and would never allow their interests to be ‘put under the domination of any outside authority however eminent it may be’. He further advocated that ‘the genius of the Bengali race revolts against autocracy and I could not, therefore, help protesting against the autocracy of a single individual’.<sup>147</sup> This region-based identity politics of Fazlul Huq posed a serious threat to the plan of Jinnah because without a united front of all the Muslims, Jinnah would have no legitimate ground for demanding a united Pakistan which was conceptualized as a singular, independent state after 1940 and it was quite different from Fazlul Huq’s evocation of Pakistan in 1940 that involved several independent states, thus safeguarding the interests of the Bengali Muslims.

This letter (written on 8 September 1941) of Fazlul Huq created a great furor in the League circle and the followers of Jinnah organized protest meetings and demonstrations of Muslim League opinion in Bengal and other parts of India. This time not only the non-Bengali Muslims of Calcutta and the leaders of the Calcutta Muslim League raised their voice against Fazlul Huq but also Suhrawardy had been ‘up in arms’ organizing tremendous anti-Huq demonstrations in the city. The Muslim students of the Islamia College and other schools staged a strike; some students made demonstrations in front of Huq’s residence and a mass meeting of about five thousand Muslims was organized at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument. The supporters of Mr. Huq (numbering almost five thousand), on the other hand, arranged ‘a counter demonstration on the same day and on the same portion of the *maidan*’. Jinnah was well aware of these developments and according to Herbert, ‘Jinnah was in touch with Nazimuddin and Ispahani by telephone’.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, under the initiative of Suhrawardy, a meeting of the Working Committee of the BPML was convened

without the knowledge or consent of Fazlul Huq in which in his absence, a resolution was passed amounting to a vote of no-confidence in Mr. Huq.<sup>149</sup> In retaliation, the supporters of Fazlul Huq tabled as many as six no-confidence motions against Suhrawardy in the Bengal Assembly and as a result, both of them had very strained relationship<sup>150</sup> and they were never united before the partition of a India. This rift between these stalwarts of the BPML ultimately inspired Jinnah who expressed his satisfaction at the united stand taken by the members of the AIML group and the ministerial group, especially Suhrawardy against Fazlul Huq. He also considered Mr. Huq as a source of danger to the ‘vital interests of not only the Musalmans of Bengal but of the whole of India’.<sup>151</sup> Jinnah wrote to Ispahani: “I am very glad to learn from you .... that Bengal has risen to the occasion .... I shall ... remove the name of Mr. Fazlul Huq as soon as I can from the Working Committee”. Fazlul Huq got frustrated because of the Leaguers’ harassment and in order to get rid of them, he wrote a very curious letter in confidence to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 27 September 1941 asking for employment in the service of the Indian government, preferably “to represent the Government of India in Foreign Political Service in Arabia”. But the Viceroy disheartened him by giving an immediate reply, a polite ‘no’ to Mr. Huq.<sup>152</sup>

It is to be mentioned here that when all these political developments took place in Bengal, both the Viceroy and the Governor of Bengal pursued a very cautious, defensive and mixed approach. J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, was in a dilemma of which camp to support and he understood the fact that if the Muslim League, with its singular notion of Muslim solidarity, was to become the dominating factor in Bengal, there would definitely be a rise in what he termed ‘communalism’, which according to him, would ultimately lead to a split within the Muslim camp.<sup>152a</sup> Moreover, he was in favour of presenting a united front in the Bengal ministry in support of the war effort and was very much aware of Jinnah’s opposition to Fazlul Huq on this issue. In his words: “..... the Bengal Muslim League should not be split now, and I have urged upon the Chief Minister the desirability of establishing his position as President of a united League in Bengal. If the Cabinet were to split now, it is very doubtful whether Nazimuddin could command sufficient support, even with the European Group, to form a Ministry: on the other hand, if Huq were supported by the European Group, the *Krishak Praja* Party, the opposition Scheduled Castes and by the Hindus generally, (with the exception of Sarat Bose’s Group), he might, with his

own adherents in the Coalition Party, secure a majority: but the resulting Ministry would, without question, be so inferior in standing and in administrative ability to the present Cabinet, that it seems imperative to avoid such a contingency by bringing about a settlement of a present dispute".<sup>152b</sup> Sitting at the Centre, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, had understandably an all-India perspective and wanted to avoid any 'direct criticism of Jinnah' or of the Muslim League and also to avoid any split of the League which would rather strengthen Jinnah's hand. In his words: "..... While I do not regard Jinnah or the Muslim League as having behaved well or as having adopted a wise course.... we must ... avoid scrupulously any suggestion that we are concerned to see the League split... the League does represent a rallying point for the Muslim community as a whole, and the moment that any suspicion got abroad that we were taking sides against it or were trying to split it, I suspect that we should find a very marked rally to the League banner even on the part of people who were in complete disagreement with its handling of its policy and with Jinnah's general policy".<sup>153</sup> In compliance with the Governor's conciliatory formula, the Working Committee of the BPML convened a meeting on 20 October 1941 and re-affirmed its confidence in the Chief Minister.<sup>154</sup> Not only that, Fazlul Huq was also assigned the responsibility to lead the delegation from Bengal and to attend the meeting of the Working Committee of the AIML at Delhi on 25 October 1941. Two days later (i.e. 27 October), the Working Committee of the AIML adopted a resolution in which its members called upon Fazlul Huq to withdraw his allegations and 'to express regret for casting aspersions' within ten days of its receipt.<sup>155</sup> In order to pacify the members of the Working Committee, Fazlul Huq then wrote a letter of apology to Liaquat Ali Khan, the Secretary of the AIML on 14 November 1941 in which he stated: "I regret the delay in sending you my reply. It has been due entirely to the poor state of my health, and I did not feel justified in replying to a communication of such serious import without giving the matter most anxious consideration. No one knows better than the President himself that I have always been a loyal member of the League, have never hesitated to carry out its mandates, and once a decision was constitutionally adopted by it, have never hesitated to obey it, even though that decision might not personally commend itself to me. If there were any doubts in regard to this point, my resignation from the National Defence Council amply proves it. It is an irony of fate that, of all those who have given of their best to build up the only national organisation of Muslim India, I should have been the object of so much misunderstanding and so

much uninformed criticism. It appears that portions of my letter have hurt the feelings of the President and some of my other friends. I convey to them through you my assurance that nothing was further from my intention than to hurt the feelings of or to cast aspersions on anyone and I hope that my assurance will be accepted and the matter considered as closed".<sup>156</sup> Although in his letter, Fazlul Huq in effect, did not withdraw his earlier allegations and expressed only his regret, the Working Committee of the AIML in its meeting held on 16 November 1941, treated the matter as closed.<sup>157</sup>

Although for the time being a truce had been concluded between these two camps, both Fazlul Huq and Jinnah were still not happy. While Mr. Huq continued to assert that it was not possible for him to work together with the colleagues of his Cabinet who had been disloyal to him, Jinnah was not at all satisfied with Fazlul Huq's tendency 'to act like an independent satrap in Bengal'<sup>158</sup> and his projection of an unrivalled leader of Bengal politics. Jinnah rather was determined to exhibit his power and assert his authority on the affairs of Bengal as the President of the AIML which prompted him to initiate a plan to replace the Bengal Premier by one of his ardent followers. But this plan could not be executed unless Mr. Huq 'had either voluntarily vacated office as Chief Minister or had been removed from that office by a vote of no-confidence of the House or dismissed' by the Governor. As both these eventualities were not feasible at that point of time, the only course of action left to Jinnah and his followers was 'to force a dissolution of the Cabinet by tendering their (followers of Jinnah) resignations'. Towards the end of November 1941, there were rumours that Fazlul Huq was going to form a new party by dissolving the coalition party. Reference had been made to the political event in which "Huq, Sarat Chandra Bose, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and some other M.L.A.s, Hindu and Muslim, met at the home of J.C. Gupta, the Congress M.L.A. who had hosted the abortive 1937 – dinner. This time the parleys were fruitful".<sup>159</sup> On the very first day of the winter session (i.e. 27 November 1941), the supporters of Fazlul Huq seceded from the ministerial coalition party and formed the Progressive Assembly Party which was converted into the Progressive Coalition Party (on 28 November) at the Calcutta residence of J.C. Gupta. Fazlul Huq and Sarat Chandra Bose were elected its Leader and Deputy Leader respectively.<sup>160</sup> The formation of this Progressive Coalition Party was an important event in Bengal politics 'not so much because it was progressive,

nor because it was a lasting coalition – it was neither,<sup>160a</sup> rather it was significant in revealing the fact that the Muslim League was temporarily isolated in Bengal and it was not as strong as it would be. This fact was later revealed by M.A.H. Ispahani in his reminiscences: ‘Fazlul Huq betrayed the Muslim League .... It was then that we found that the hard core of the Muslim League in Bengal consisted of only 35 members’.<sup>160b</sup> On the next day (i.e. 29 November), they tabled two no-confidence motions against Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy, the two very prominent League Ministers. On the same day, the Governor convened a Cabinet meeting where the Bengal Premier declared that he had no personal grievance or animosity against Suhrawardy and assured him that he would not join in a no-confidence motion.<sup>161</sup> In a Press release dated 30 November 1941, Fazlul Huq pointed out: “Statements have been appeared in the press which indicate that as the outcome of disunity in the Cabinet I have accepted the leadership of a new party to be called the Progressive Coalition Party. I desire it to be known that there is no truth whatever in these reports. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that as Chief Minister and Leader of the Coalition Party in the Assembly, it would be unconstitutional for me to enter into negotiations with parties now in Opposition with the object of forming a new party. It is my desire to maintain the solidarity of the Coalition Party no less than that of the Ministry and to ensure that the decisions of the Coalition Party are accepted by every member of the Party”.<sup>161a</sup>

In spite of this explanation, the League Ministers (namely Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Habibullah and Tamizuddin) who were in a majority in the Cabinet, tendered their resignations on 1 December 1941 hoping that ‘if the dissolution of the cabinet followed their resignations the Governor would find himself free to call on one of them to constitute a cabinet which he could not have done had the legislature expressed its want of confidence in them by a majority of votes’.<sup>162</sup> In a Cabinet meeting held on that crucial day, the League members decided not to give Fazlul Huq any more time ‘to patch up the differences’ and consolidate his position any further which was clearly described by M.A.H. Ispahani in his letter (dated 1 December 1941) written to Jinnah : “A meeting of the Cabinet was held today. Huq got the ball rolling. He said he was doing everything in his power to patch up the differences and that he had partly succeeded in his efforts. He wanted more time to complete his job. Our representatives laughed. It was a joke that they heard all before. They replied,

“It is out of question”. He then threatened that there was just one alternative and that was resignation of the Cabinet. Our fellows jumped to it and said, “Yes, we agree – we cannot continue in this fashion”. All wrote out their resignations and handed them to the Governor. These have not been accepted so far but it is definite that they will be. The chances are that we will be called upon to constitute the new government. Let us see”.<sup>163</sup> Thus the Praja-League Coalition Ministry headed by Fazlul Huq from 1937 onwards ultimately broke down. But its dissolution raised high hopes among the leaders of the Muslim League whose main target was to oust Mr. Huq from power by making alliances with other political groups in the House and thereby forming another League led coalition ministry. On other hand, ‘Sher-e -Bangla’ A.K. Fazlul Huq was not sitting idle and he was also very active in finding out ‘new friends’ and was optimistic of forming another coalition ministry (led by him) which persuaded him to assume publicly the leadership of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party (including Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the President of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha), on 3 December 1941.<sup>164</sup> This Party claimed to have a strength of 119 members including 42 members of the Progressive Coalition Party, 19 members of the Krishak Praja Party, 28 of the Forward Bloc, 12 Independent Scheduled Caste members, 14 members of the Nationalist Hindus, 03 members of the Anglo-Indian Party and 01 member from the Christian Labour and other Elements in the Assembly.<sup>165</sup> 25 members of the Official Congress (under the leadership of Kiran Sankar Roy), also gave their assurance to extend their co-operation towards it.<sup>166</sup> It is to be mentioned here that although Syama Prasad Mookerjee had differences with Fazlul Huq on several issues, he along with the other Hindu leaders came forward to join in the Progressive Coalition Party and extended their support towards Mr. Huq in the formation of a new Cabinet and also to be a part of it. Syama Prasad tried to defend his alliance with Mr. Huq and his diary throws light on his thoughts and the time: “Bengal has suffered under the Communal Award... The only way to fight this is to organise the Hindus and to establish cooperation with those Muslims who feel that Bengal’s hope lies in joint work between the two communities ..... Huq had discovered towards the latter half of 1941 how dangerous his position had become.... as soon as he discovered that he was going to be stabbed in the back by his colleagues and some co-workers, he wanted to get out of the ministry, but in a way which would again reinstall him as chief minister.... There was immense relief in the public mind at the termination of the League ministry [that is, de facto League, but nominally

under Huq] which had caused immense injury to them between 1937 and 1941....”<sup>167</sup> Fazlul Huq described the objective behind “The Formation of this party” which was nothing but “bringing together as it does the diverse elements in India’s national life, is an event unprecedented in the history of India and should, I hope, be an augury not only for the cessation of communal strife, but also for the carrying out of a programme for the good of all sections of the people in this country”. On the next day (i.e. 4 December 1941), the members of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party organized a meeting under the leadership of Mr. Huq at his residence and he was elected the President and Leader of the Party.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, the Working Committee of the BPML at a meeting held on 2 December asked the Muslim League members of the House to dissociate them from the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party and accordingly a new Muslim League Legislature Party was formed. Nazimuddin was elected as the leader of this Party which completely went against Fazlul Huq’s Progressive Coalition Party. On 5 December 1941, the League Ministers issued a statement against Mr. Huq accusing the Premier of having been in secret consultation with Sarat Chandra Bose and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders with the aim of forming an alternative ministry and condemning him for betraying the Muslim League.: “.... Matters, however, came to a crisis when Huq wrote a letter to the Secretary of All India Muslim League, casting aspersions on Mr. Jinnah and attempting to create a serious division in Muslim ranks by raising the Bengali and non-Bengali question in relation to All India politics and threatening to dissociate the Muslims of Bengal from all India Muslim League”.<sup>168</sup> They requested Jinnah to intervene in this matter and immediately oust Fazlul Huq from the Muslim League as they thought that his expulsion from the Party would enable them to influence the Muslim M.L.A.s of the House to dissociate Mr. Huq and thereby he would not be in a position to form a new Cabinet. On 6 December 1941, Jinnah sent a telegram to Fazlul Huq seeking his explanation within forty-eight hours. In reply, Mr. Huq sent a telegram to Jinnah in which he requested Jinnah to come to Bengal to judge the real situation by himself and to decide his plan of action. But Jinnah did not pay any heed to it and sent another telegram to Mr. Huq on 8 December 1941 seeking ‘written explanation so as to reach him on the 10<sup>th</sup> December’. Fazlul Huq wired back and informed him that it would not be possible for him “to write out an explanation and send it to him within the time fixed because

papers would have to be posted by the evening of that very day, if they were to be available to him at Delhi on the 10<sup>th</sup>". But Jinnah was not at all satisfied with this reply of Mr. Huq and he passed an ex-parte on 10 December 1941, finally expelling Fazlul Huq from the League on charge of 'gross misconduct' amounting to 'treachery' which was approved by the Working Committee of the AIML in its meeting held at Nagpur on 26 December 1941.<sup>169</sup> Jinnah did so on the hope that the Bengal Governor J.A. Herbert would call upon his candidate, Nazimuddin, to form the government. Nazimuddin's position was weakened by the decision of the Official Congress (known as the 'Congress Assembly Party' led by Kiran Sankar Roy), to maintain neutrality towards a Ministry formed by Mr. Huq' but to oppose any Ministry formed by Nazimuddin. His position was further deteriorated as the 'defection of the Nawab of Dacca, with seven or eight of his adherents' went in favour of Fazlul Huq who was likely to get the support of eleven Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s who had earlier promised to extend their support to Nazimuddin.<sup>170</sup> Altogether 127 legislators (composed of different groups) notified their support in writing to the then Governor J.A. Herbert in favour of Mr. Huq. With the arrest of the leftist Sarat Chandra Bose in the afternoon of 11 December 1941 'on account of his Japanese connections', the Progressive Coalition Party did no longer pose so serious a threat to the British as initially it was imagined and on that day, Fazlul Huq was finally asked by the then Governor Herbert to form the ministry which in the words of Herbert 'certainly represents a variety of views and which commands a large majority..... On paper the Ministry is good: it has openly stated its support to the war effort and contains a number of capable men'.<sup>171</sup> Fazlul Huq immediately responded to the Governor's call and he formed a new Ministry which started its journey from 12 December 1941.<sup>172</sup> On the next day (i.e. 13 December), Jinnah appointed Hasan Ispahani a member of the Working Committee of the AIML in place of Mr. Huq.<sup>173</sup> But there was speculation whether this newly formed Ministry led by Mr. Huq would last long ('even over the Budget Session') which is clearly reflected in the Governor's Report (dated 20 December 1941) where he wrote: "It may be that with the two communal protagonists in the Cabinet, - Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee of the Mahasabha and Huq, who have done so much by their speeches to inflame communal feeling, - the differences between the two communities may be compromised within the Cabinet instead of being made the subject of discord without; but it remains to be seen whether the Cabinet will stand the test of difficult administrative problems such

as the question of music before mosques, the communal ratio in appointments, and the like”.<sup>174</sup> All these political developments are found expressions in the writings of Fazlul Huq: “ Towards the end of 1941, important political developments took place leading to the dissolution of the Cabinet which had been functioning in Bengal since the beginning of Provincial Autonomy..... On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1941, without any previous indication whatsoever, six of my colleagues tendered something like mass resignation. Two other resignations followed and I accepted the suggestion of the Governor to tender my resignation as well, in order to enable the Governor to constitute another Cabinet. My conspiring colleagues moved heaven and earth to get Hindu colleagues, but they utterly failed in their attempt. On the contrary, all the various groups in the house rallied round me, and no less than 173 MLAs, sent on their own account, a memorandum to the Governor declaring that they were willing to work the Constitution under my leadership. About forty members, calling themselves the Muslim League Parliamentary Party in the Assembly, sullenly held aloof. I did my utmost to induce them to join me in forming an all-party Cabinet, but they stubbornly refused to do so.

One would have thought that the obvious course left for the Governor was to call me to form a Cabinet. But he adopted a course which was at once unusual and unconstitutional. He waited long to see if Sir Nazimuddin could secure a majority and it was only when he finally despaired of having Sir Nazimuddin as Chief Minister, and perhaps because of pressure from other quarters that Sir John after 10 days’ hesitation asked me on the 11 December, 1941, to form a Cabinet. I shall not refer here to the manner in which my Party was crippled by the sudden arrest of Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose before I took oath of my office as Chief Minister.....It was for the first time that Moslems belonging to various points of view, Hindus belonging to the Congress and of other schools of thought together with various small groups and Scheduled Caste Groups all combined to co-operate in the administration on purely national and patriotic lines”.<sup>175</sup> Thus the Praja-League Coalition Ministry which was installed on and from 1 April 1937, collapsed and in its place, the Progressive Coalition Ministry (which was also led by Fazlul Huq), began its journey.

## Notes and References:

1. Anderson to Linlithgow, 19 August 1937, *Governor's Fortnightly Report (GFR)*, L/P & J/5/141; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947*, Dhaka, 2003, p. 101.
2. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 February 1937, p. 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 22 February 1937, p. 6.
- 3a. Helen M. Nugent, *The Politics of Partition: Bengal 1932-47*, Queensland, 1978, p. 175; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-89.
- 3b. Kazi Anwarul Huque, *Under Three Flags*, Dhaka, 1989, p. 117.
- 3c. *Ibid.*
4. They were Fazlul Huq, Nawab K. Habibullah, Sir Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Akram Khan, Khwaja Shahabuddin, Nawab Musharraf Hossain, Hasan Ispahani, Ahmed Ispahani, Khwaja Nooruddin, Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ali, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Syed Badruddoja, Mohsin Khan, Abdul Aziz Ansari, Molla Jan Mohammad, Habibullah Bahar, Shafiquddin Ahmed and Shamsur Rahman. See, *Star of India*, 26 October 1937, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, 18 October 1937, p. 5; also see, Anderson to Linlithgow, 5 November 1937, *GFR*, L/P&J/5/141; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics : Documents of the Raj*, Vol. 1 (1936-39), Dhaka, 1996, pp. 43-45.
6. See Fazlul Huq's reply to Maulana Azad in *Star of India*, 5 February 1938, p. 1 and *ibid.*, 28 October 1939, p. 1.
7. See the details of the pamphlet in K.K. Aziz (ed.), *Muslim Under Congress Rule 1937-1939: A Documentary Record*, Islamabad, 1978, pp. 388-419.
8. *Star of India*, 20 September 1938, p. 8; *ibid.*, p. 4, editorial.
9. Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 104.

10. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachhar* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1968, pp. 115 & 146-151; see also, Sirajuddin Ahmed, *Sher-e-Bangla, A.K. Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali), Dhaka, 1997, pp. 95-96 and 110-111.
11. *Calcutta Gazette*, 27 August 1937, p. 234.
12. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings* (B.L.A.P), 2nd Session (1937), Vol. 51, nos. 3-4; for details of the voting patterns on the Bill in the Assembly, see, Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947*, Vol. I: *The Land Question*, Calcutta, 1984, pp. 172-182.
13. Jahanara Begum, *The Last Decade of Undivided Bengal: Parties, Politics & Personalities*, Calcutta, 1994, pp. 62-65.
14. Account of a meeting of the East Bengal Landholders' Association held in Dacca and published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 April 1939; see also, Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, fns. 8 & 9 in p. 105.
15. M. Azizul Huque, *The Man Behind the Plough*, Kolkata, 2009 (reprint and published by Aliah University), p. 132.
16. Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, pp. 66-67.
17. M. Azizul Huque, *op.cit.*, p. 134.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, p. 67.
20. *B.L.A.P.*, Vol. LVII, No.3, pp. 58-60; see also, Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, pp. 68-70.
21. Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 106.
22. *B.L.A.P.*, Vol. LIV, No. 5, p. 333.
- 22a. *Ibid.*, pp. 351-353.
23. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 5 February 1939, FR. Linlithgow Collection, India Office Library and Records (IDLR) MSS Eur F/125/39; cited in Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-107.
24. Reid to Linlithgow, 19 April 1939, FR. Linlithgow Collection, IOLR MSS Eur F/125/39; cited in Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

25. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 148.
26. Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 104.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Sirajuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 113; see also, Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, p. 123 (fn 23).
29. *Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal (henceforth Report)*, Vol. I, Alipore, 1940, pp. 1, 3, 41-42.
30. B.D. Habibullah, *Shere Bangla Fazlul Huq*, (in Bengali), Barisal, 1374 (B.S.), p. 106.
- 30a. *Report*, Vol. I, p. 233.
31. B.L.A.P., Vol. LX, No.1, p. 30; see also, Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, p. 107.
32. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
33. Fazlul Huq told this in the Assembly on 18 March 1938; see, *BLAP*, Vol. LII, No. 5, p. 36.
34. *Ibid.*, Vol. LI, No.3, 26 August 1937, pp. 641-642.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 644-645.
36. *Indian Annual Register (IAR)*, 1938, Vol. II, p. 222.
37. *BLAP*, Vol. LV, No. 3, 15 December 1939, p. 100.
38. Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, pp. 75-76.
39. *Sadler Commission's Report*, Vol. IV, Part II, p. 33.
40. Jahanara Begum, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
41. *The Statesman*, 22 August 1940.
42. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1940.
43. Sirajuddin Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-107.
44. *The Statesman*, 28 November 1940.
45. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 105.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106; see also, *BLAP*, Vol.LIV, no.3, pp. 395-403.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
48. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 5 February 1939, Report No.3 of 1939, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 135.
49. Government of Bengal, Home-Police File P 3-1-19, Proceedings A 79-81, December 1938; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 113.
50. *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, Vol. II, July-December, p. 23.
51. Government of Bengal, Home-Appointment File IE-47, Proceedings B 171-174 of 1939; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 112-113.
52. Government of Bengal, Local Self-Government Circular No. 428(5)-L.S.G., dated 19 April 1939, File No.20-3 of 1938; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 109.
53. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.109.
54. B.D. Habibullah, *op.cit.*, p. 111.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Of the total number of 98 seats, 47 were to be reserved for the Hindus out of which 4 seats were to be for the Scheduled Castes. The remaining 51 seats were to be divided between elected aldermen (5), Mahommedans (22), Special Constituencies, including the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta Port Commissioners etc. (12), Labour (2), Anglo-Indian (2), and 8 nominated members of which 3 would be Scheduled Castes. The Bill which was placed before the House on 24 February 1939, was severely criticized and opposed by the Congress, the Independent Scheduled Caste Party, all Caste Hindu members of the Nationalist Party, while Fazlul Huq's own Party, the KPP remained neutral. For details see, *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, July-December, pp. 160-161; cited in Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-108 (fn.22).
57. *B.L.A.P.*, Vol. LIV, No.7, May 10, 1939, p. 419.
58. Kamruddin Ahmed, *A Social History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1970, p. 44.
59. Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History 1858-1947*, Bombay, 1959, p. 274; see also, Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 120.
60. *Star of India*, 1 September 1937.

61. Translated from Bengali, *Azad*, 20 January 1938, p. 8.
62. Raghieb Ahsan to Jinnah, 3 June 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F.204, pp. 173-178, cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 106.
63. *Star of India*, 25 June 1938, p. 6.
64. Nausher Ali to Fazlul Huq, 14 June 1938, *ibid.*, p. 7.
65. Fazlul Huq's statement, *ibid.*, 2 July 1938, p. 1.
66. Fazlul Huq to Shamsuddin Ahmed, 29 September 1938, *ibid.*, 4 November 1938, p. 4.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 5 February 1939 (Report No.3 of 1939), cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 133.
69. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 18 November 1938, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 119.
- 69a. *Star of India*, 21 February 1939, p. 5.
70. Brabourne to Linlithgow, 17 February 1939 (Report No.4 of 1939), cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 137.
- 70a. *Ibid.*
71. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 157-58.
72. *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. II, July – December p. 345.
73. *Star of India*, 23 October 1939, p. 5.
74. *Ibid.*, 26 September 1939, p. 5.
75. For details, see the resolution of the Working Committee of the AIML passed on 18 September 1939 in *Star of India*, 19 September 1939, p. 3.
76. Woodhead to Linlithgow, 17 November 1939 (Report No.22 of 1939), cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 224.
77. War Resolution-Assembly, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 234.

78. Ispahani to Jinnah, 16 December 1939 in Z.H. Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence*, Karachi, 1976, p. 136.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.
80. Enayetur Rahim & Joyice L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 230-232.
81. According to B.R. Tomlinson (*The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, p. 186), Bipan Chandra and others (*India's Struggle For Independence*, p. 444) and Sumit Sarkar (*Modern India, 1885-1947*, p. 372), in this election, Subhas Chandra got 1580 votes and Sitaramayya obtained 1377 votes. But according to Amales Tripathi (*Swadhinata Sangrame Bharater Jatiya Congress*, p. 259) and Nemai Sadhan Bose (*Deshanayak Subhas Chandra*, p. 214), the figure is 1580-1375 in favour of Subhas Chandra.
82. The Congress Ministries resigned in protest against the inadequacy of the declared aim of the British Government i.e. a Dominion Status for India after the War and because the Government at that point of time, was not thinking of 'transfer of power' in favour of the Indians and assuring them 'Poorna Swaraj' or complete independence.
83. Muhammad Waliullah, *Amader Mukti-Sangram* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1969, p. 331; see also, Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 126-127.
84. Herbert to Linlithgow, 7 February 1940 (Confidential Report No.3); cited in Enayeur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. II (1940-43), Dhaka, 1999, p. 7.
85. *Star of India*, 27 February 1940, p. 4.
86. Muhammad Waliullah, *Yug Bichitra* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1967, p. 378; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
87. There is a debate among the scholars, intellectuals and politicians over who drafted the resolution. See, Kazi Ahmed Kamal, *Politicians and Inside Stories: A Glimpse into the Lives of Fazlul Huq, Shaheed Suhrawardy and Moulana Bhashani*, Dacca, 1970, p. 12; and Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.) *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, Karachi, 1970, pp. XXII-III.
88. B.D. Habibullah, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

89. A.S.M. Abdur Rab, *A.K. Fazlul Huq: Life and Achievements*, Lahore, 1966, p. 120.
90. *Ibid.*; see also , B.D. Habibullah, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-94.
91. Presidential Address delivered by *Quaid-i-Azam* Mohammad Ali Jinnah at Lahore Session of the All-India Muslim League, March 1940; cited in Jamil-ud-din Ahmed (Collected and edited), *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, Vol. I (1935-1944), Lahore, 1960, pp. 143-163.
- 91a. For details, see, Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1985 and also ‘Azad, Jinnah and Partition’ in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.24, No. 21, 27 May 1989.
- 91b. Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 226.
92. Chaudhury Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore, 1961, p. 172.
- 92a. *Ibid.*, p. 235. Khaliquzzaman mentioned that Nawab Sahib of Chhatri and Sir Sultan Ahmad raised their opposition to the resolution of the Subject Committee.
93. Resolution on Pakistan, File No.F163/40-R. On this subject, a big file is preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi. See also, N.N. Mitra(ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, Delhi, 1990, p. 312.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Kamruddin Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 45.
96. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
97. Jamil-ud-din Ahmed (collected and edited), *op.cit.*, pp. 143-163.
98. *Ibid.*
99. Resolution on Pakistan, File No. F.163/40-R, cited in N.N. Mitra(ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, Delhi, 1990, pp. 312-313.
100. *Ibid.*
101. Syed Shahabuddin (ed.), *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Selected Speeches and Writings*, Hyderabad, 2007, p. 75.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.
103. For the Lahore resolution of the All-India Muslim League, see, Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, Dacca, 1974, pp. 168-69.
104. *Muslim League and Lahore Resolution*, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1990, p. XIV; cited in Sana Aiyar, "Fazlul Huq, Region and Religion in Bengal: The Forgotten Alternative of 1940-43" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 42, 6 (2008), pp. 1219-1220.
105. Sumit Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 379.
106. *Ibid.*,
107. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, Bombay, 1946, Third Edition, pp. 4-5.
108. Sharifuddin Pirzada(ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 348.
109. Herbert to Linlithgow, 24 June 1940, Confidential Report No.12; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. II (1940-43), Dhaka, 1999, p. 35.
110. *Ibid.*
111. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 218.
112. Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 July 1940, Confidential Report No. 13; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 38.
113. Cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 118.
114. *Ibid.*
115. Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 July 1940, Confidential Report No. 13; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 38.
116. Ispahani to Jinnah, 21 June 1940; cited in Zaidi(ed.), *Jinnah-Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948*, Karachi, 1976, pp. 142-143.
117. Jinnah to Ispahani (Private and Confidential), 24 June 1940; cited in Zaidi (ed.). *ibid.*, p. 146.
118. Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 July 1940, Confidential Report No.13; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 39.

119. *Ibid.*
120. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 117.
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122. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 8 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 281, pp. 21-23; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 119.
123. Herbert to Linlithgow, 23 February 1941, Confidential Report No. 3; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 78.
124. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 9 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-26; cited in Harun-or-Rashid *op.cit.*, p. 120.
125. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 8 March 1941, cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
126. Jinnah to Fazlul Huq, 15 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 281, p. 27; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
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143. *Ibid.*
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150. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 September 1941, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 111-112.
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