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Fazlul Huq and the Coalition Ministry in Operation: The Second Phase

The second Huq Ministry which was known as the Progressive Coalition Ministry was composed of 9 Ministers, of whom 5 including the Premier were Muslims and 4 were Hindus. The new Ministry was formed in two phases - partly on 11 December and partly on 18 December 1941. The delay was probably because of the exploration of any possibility of a ministry under Khwaja Nazimuddin (the leader of the Bengal Legislature Muslim League Party) and the question of arresting Sarat Chandra Bose,¹ the Deputy Leader of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party and the elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose who was expected to hold the Home portfolio in the Ministry. On 11 December 1941, only three members of the Cabinet, namely Fazlul Huq (Chief Minister), Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Nawab Khwaja Habibullah (who along with his seven or eight followers² decided to join with Huq's side following the Muslim League Assembly Party election), took the oaths of office. Six more ministers were sworn in on 18 December. This was part of the strategy pursued by the then Governor J.A. Herbert as he thought it necessary 'to play for time'.³ Although the Bengal Congress (which earlier resolved to remain neutral towards a ministry formed by Fazlul Huq but to oppose Khwaja Nazimuddin in any event), stayed outside, the Progressive Coalition Ministry in an Assembly of 250 seats, commanded a comfortable majority (unlike a marginal majority of the previous Coalition Ministry) in the House and it did not have to depend on the votes of the European members. The Muslim League, on the other hand, attacked Fazlul Huq and his Coalition Ministry (which was sarcastically called by the Leaguers as the 'Syama - Huq Ministry') for 'having betrayed the Muslim cause by seeking a cross-communal alliance' and sat on the 'opposition bench'. Nazimuddin became the leader of the Opposition and under his leadership, the Muslim League left no stones unturned to disown, discredit and dislodge this Coalition Ministry. *The Statesman* wrote: "... Fazlul Huq became the Premier once again. But the Coalition which supported Fazlul

Huq had a very heterogeneous look. There was one cementing bond between its many elements, a common anti-party, personally and on grounds of policy matters towards H.S. Suhrawardy, Sir Nazimuddin and one or two others. These elements had no distinct common policy or programme of their own. There were Hindu groups in the Coalition, which had one immediate aim i.e., withdrawal or substantial alteration of the official Bills related to the Secondary Education and the Calcutta Corporation. The Hindu groups were not clear in their own minds about their aims. However, Huq had a clear majority in the Legislature. He would add to the laurels if he could keep it a majority at various stages in referring to his long and chequered public life. The ministry had its surprises, too, because who could have dreamt even a month ago that Shyama Prasad Mukherjee would become a colleague of Fazlul Huq or that of the Nawab of Dacca would leave the Nazimuddin?"⁴ But ultimately it came into true. The names of the Cabinet Ministers along with their political affiliations and portfolios are given in the table herein under:

Table V.1: List of Cabinet Ministers, their Parties and their Portfolios in the Progressive Coalition Ministry

Sl. No.	Name of the Cabinet Minister	Name of the Party/ Category	Name of the Portfolio
1.	The Hon'ble Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq, Chief Minister	Leader of the Progressive Coalition Party & Muslim Coalition Party	Home and Publicity Departments
2.	Nawab Khwaja Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca	Member of the Progressive Coalition Party	Agriculture & Industries Department
3.	Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim, M.L.C.	Progressive Coalition Party	Education & Commerce and Labour Departments (temporarily)
4.	Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed	Leader of the Krishak Praja Party	Communication & Works Department
5.	Khan Bahadur Hashem Ali Khan	Deputy Leader of the Progressive Coalition Party	Cooperative Credit and Rural Indebtedness Department
6.	Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee	President of the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha	Finance Department

Sl. No.	Name of the Cabinet Minister	Name of the Party/ Category	Name of the Portfolio
7.	Mr. Santosh Kumar Basu	Forward Bloc	Public Health & Local Self-Government Department
8.	Mr. Pramatha Nath Bannerjee	Forward Bloc	Revenue, Judicial and Legislative Departments
9.	Mr. Upendra Nath Burman	Scheduled Caste	Forest and Excise Department

Source: Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 December 1941, Report No.23; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim, *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. II, p. 127.

Fazlul Huq formed his second Ministry at a time when his political opponents in the Muslim League were in full swing and important political developments were taken place in Bengal vis-a-vis India. ‘Quaid-i-Azam’ Jinnah had emerged and under his leadership, the All-India Muslim League was strengthening its position in different parts of India. The Pakistan Scheme gained more popularity among the Muslims and it became the creed of the League – for which the Muslims were thriving for an all – India Muslim solidarity. By that time, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League established its strong foothold in Bengal and the majority of middle class Muslims of Bengal who were largely benefitted from various enactments during the previous Ministry, decided to go with Jinnah and his Muslim League and not with Fazlul Huq and his KPP (which was reduced to almost a non-entity), or the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party (which was nothing but an Assembly Party without having any organizational base). Not only that, Fazlul Huq took a very risky step by including Syama Prasad Mookerjee (of whom he was highly critical even a few months ago), in his Cabinet. Mr. Mookerjee, the Acting President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, ‘a Hindu fundamentalist organization operating as the spearhead of *Akhand Hindustan* (meaning United India)’, who was known for his ‘Hindu chauvinism’ and for which he became a controversial figure in Bengal politics. He strongly opposed to the Communal Award of 1932 as the Muslims were granted much more seats in the Assembly than before under it. He was totally against of the fixation of Communal Service Ratio, and also the passing of the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment) Bill (which was passed in July 1939) and the Secondary Education Bill - all of which were initiated by the Praja League Coalition Ministry. As the Vice-

Chancellor of the Calcutta University, Dr. Mookerjee took some official decisions (like to inaugurate the University Foundation Day by singing *Bande Mataram*, to salute the University flag bearing the emblem of Sri and Lotus etc.) which were considered by the Muslims as ‘entirely against Islamic ideals’.⁵ When a man like him was included in the second Ministry of Fazlul Huq, provided golden opportunity to the leaders of the BPML to defame the Ministry, carry on anti-Huq propaganda and mobilize the Muslim sentiment against Fazlul Huq in the *mofussil* areas, particularly East Bengal,⁶ the bastion of Huq’s support. Ispahani wrote a letter to Jinnah on 15 December 1941 informing him that: “Students will tour the whole province, delivering speeches and telling the Muslims of Bengal how Fazlul Huq has let them down and how the combination between Huq and Syama Prasad Mookerjee will affect them”.⁷

Immediately after the installation of the second Coalition Ministry led by Fazlul Huq in December 1941, prominent Muslim League leaders made extensive tours throughout the province and started vigorous campaign against Mr. Huq. This contingent of the BPML leaders (the *Azad* called it as *Kafela* or the caravan)⁸ included the ex-ministers like Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin, Tamizuddin Khan and so on. They attended almost five hundred meetings throughout Bengal within seven months (December 1941 - June 1942) and addressed a huge audience in which they made ‘a good deal of virulent abuse of the Chief Minister’ and denounced him (i.e. Mr. Fazlul Huq) as ‘a Mirjafar’ and ‘a traitor’ to the cause of Islam. They also raised the cry of the ‘Mahasabha Raj’ and accused that ‘the Hindu Mahasabha is running the Ministry’.⁹ Fazlul Huq and his associates were branded as “.... the Muslim Quislings who have surrendered Muslim Bengal to the Mahasabha just as Mir Jafar surrendered Bengal to Clive”.¹⁰ These allegations raised by the BPML leaders, were thoroughly highlighted by the League Press like the *Azad*, *Star of India* and later *The Morning News* (an English Daily started on 1 August 1942 and edited by Abdur Rahman Siddiqui) and helped in digging Fazlul Huq’s political grave. Although Syama Prasad Mookerjee was the lone representative of the Hindu Mahasabha in the newly formed Coalition Ministry, it was branded by the League leaders and the Press as the “Shyama - Huq Ministry” in order to undermine Fazlul Huq in the Muslim popular mind. The League Press particularly the *Star of India* went a step further and gave a clarion to all the Muslims: “The first fruits of Mahasabha rule in Bengal begin to

appear The remedy lies in the hands of the Muslims themselves. They must organise everywhere under the banner of the Muslim League and take a vow not to rest till the betrayal of the community is avenged by the overthrow of the present Ministry”.¹¹

Under this circumstance, Fazlul Huq could not sit idle and came forward to control the damage and smear the wounds. He along with some of his colleagues, made an extensive tour in certain districts to counter this attack of the Leaguers and mobilize support for his new political stand. But the Muslims in general who came more under the control of the BPML at that time, were not at all convinced by Fazlul Huq’s explanation rather they lost their faith in him. The Muslim students and youths led by Suhrawardy, launched anti-Huq demonstrations everywhere, raising the slogans like ‘Ghaddar Murdabad’ (i.e. Down with the Traitor).¹² The anti-Huq demonstrations further intensified with the arrest of Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, a student leader who later became the Secretary of Chittagong District Muslim League (1943-47), on 7 January 1942 on charge of uttering a firing speech against Fazlul Huq. Meanwhile, an indecent incident took place at Feni (in Noakhali district) during Chief Minister’s visit in East Bengal. Students of the Feni College who were the borders of the Muslim Hostel ‘behaved in an indecent manner’¹³ on which the Principal expelled seven culprits from the college. Not only that, ‘when the Chief Minister was passing from Lakhimpur to Raipur’, Maulvi Abul Hakim of Feni and several other leaders of the Muslim League ‘waited in ambush and threw mud in his car’ for which the Maulvi was ‘arrested and let off with a warning’.¹⁴ In this connection, Suhrawardy visited Noakhali and accused the District Magistrate of taking strong action against the Muslim League leaders of that place and directed all branches of the League to observe 1 February as ‘Anti-Repression Day’ to protest against the ‘various repressive and oppressive measures that have been taken by the government’.¹⁵ Although the Chittagong Commissioner reported that the trouble was being fomented by H.S. Suhrawardy, the Government considered that ‘it would be inexpedient at present to restrain Suhrawardy’ which was also exposed in the note of Fazlul Huq: “no doubt that Suhrawardy is at the root of all the troubles at Feni. If action is not taken against Suhrawardy - and I feel the difficulties in the way - something should be done to expose Suhrawardy so that public may know how lenient we have been with him”.¹⁶

Unperturbed Suhrawardy and other prominent leaders of the League continued their propaganda against Mr. Huq and they were supported in this anti-Huq campaign by none other than Jinnah who played a prominent role in the downgrading of Fazlul Huq. When the leaders of the BPML approached Jinnah to preside over the Bengal Provincial Muslim League Conference at Sirajganj on 14-15 February 1942, he readily responded and accepted the offer which made the Chief Minister more ‘nervous’¹⁷ and exerted more pressure upon him. Fazlul Huq became so restless at that time that he even sent a typical letter to J.A. Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal which ran thus: “..... he hears Sir Hasan Suhrawardy is now not to return to London and suggests that Sir Hasan might succeed him as Chief Minister or at least join the Cabinet”.^{17a} On his arrival, Jinnah clearly stated that the BPML leaders were not alone and ‘the rest of India would stand like one man with Bengal’ and advised: “..... they (i.e. Bengali Muslims) should stand absolutely solid and united under the banner of the All-India Muslim League. They should follow the policy and programme of the Muslim League fanatically that Muslim Bengal can not separate itself from the rest of India, and that it is Bengal and (the) Punjab which would be most benefitted by the establishment of Pakistan as embodied in the Lahore Resolution....”¹⁸ In the Sirajganj Conference (15 February 1942), Jinnah severely criticized the Bengal Governor for inviting Fazlul Huq once again to form the ministry. He said: “The Coalition Party having been dissolved, His Excellency should have called the leader of the single largest party which was unquestionably the Muslim League Party. Its leader Sir Nazimuddin is a responsible leader with a clear reputation. He has held responsible position long before this constitution came into operation.... His record is clean; he is a responsible man and has acquitted himself honourably throughout his career. It was Sir Nazimuddin to decide whether he would accept the commission to form a Ministry or not. If he made a mistake and said to His Excellency “Yes, I will” and had failed to do so or defeated by a vote of no-confidence, it would have been the funeral of the League and not the funeral of the Governor”.¹⁹ He also gave a warning to the Governor and the Viceroy that “there will arise in Bengal such a situation that no power has even seen for which there is no parallel in her history during the British raj”.²⁰ His Presidential Address to the Provincial League Conference at Sirajganj helped to boost up the organization strength of the BPML which underwent some changes at Sirajganj as Akram Khan was elected its President in the vacant place of Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy and Hasan Ispahani were re-elected Secretary

and Treasurer respectively. In this conference a resolution was taken appreciating the role played by the Muslim students in the agitation against the 'Shyama - Huq Ministry'. Going further the BPML leaders decided to set up a 'Muslim Students' Relief Fund' with Suhrawardy as Treasurer.²¹ Under his (Suhrawardy's) able leadership, the BPML intensified its activity and honestly tried to popularize the creed for Pakistan as he believed that it would benefit Bengal Muslims for more than Muslims in any other part of India. Not only that, he directed the League branches to celebrate the 'Pakistan Day' on 23 March 'in a fitting manner'. All these created a huge mass appeal and attracted the Muslims to come under its banner. Meanwhile, the Muslim League Council in its meeting held on 22 February 1942, condemned Fazlul Huq as a 'puppet in the hands of (the) Hindu Mahasabha' and appealed the Bengal Muslims to come forward and join in the anti-Huq campaign. Fazlul Huq on the other hand, in order to counter Jinnah's demands, pleaded for the transfer of power in the hands of the Indians and for that purpose he attended the All India Azad Moslem Conference held at Delhi from 28 February to 1 March 1942. This Conference was presided over by Khan Bahadur Alla Bax, the Chief Minister of Sind. The Muslim leaders present in the Conference, took a resolution that as India was approaching towards the danger line of the war, it was absolutely necessary for all the Indians to be united and demand their freedom. In this regard, the prominent Muslim leaders like Fazlul Huq, Dr. Khan Bahadur and Alla Bax sent a telegram to the British Prime Minister on 10 March 1942 where it was mentioned: "Most earnestly urge gravity situation occasioned by menace early invasion India imperatively demands immediate transfer India real power and recognition freedom enabling really representative Indians establish representative government with full powers assume responsibility defence country in effective collaboration other free and democratic countries resist aggressors. This represents general view Indian Mussalmans also".²² But Mr. Huq failed to combat the growing tide in favour of the Muslim League and gradually lost his hold as his followers gradually dwindled away which was reflected in the results of the first by-election held at Natore within four months (in April 1942) from the coming into office of the new government. In this by-election, Fazlul Huq's nominee lost with forfeiture of his security deposit and polled less than 10 per cent of the votes and got only 840 votes as against 10,843 votes secured by the candidate of the Muslim League.²³

All these brought Fazlul Huq at a critical juncture of his political career as he had to face not only the attacks and propaganda of the Leaguers but also some differences of opinion within his own Cabinet members. Although the declared aim of his Coalition Ministry was the promotion of communal harmony in Bengal, this was not whole heartedly supported and liked by few of his colleagues like Syama Prasad Mookerjee who was ‘more interested in the supremacy of Hinduism’²⁴ and his Party (i.e. Hindu Mahasabha) had its ‘sole objective Hindu domination’ and contained ‘many loyal Hindus desiring nothing but communal protection’.²⁵ The situation was so critical that even Herbert, the Governor of Bengal wrote: ‘It seems to me that the only solution is for Huq to retire from politics and I have little doubt that, if he were offered a post which would save his face and be reasonably remunerative, he would be glad to get out of difficult positions’.²⁶ In order to counter the Muslim League’s campaign for Pakistan and its implicit recognition in the Cripps Proposals (made by the Cripps Mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps in March 1942 which implicitly granted the right to the Indian provinces to secede from the proposed Indian Union but the proposals were rejected by the League as there was no definite assurance of a separate Muslim State), the Hindu Mahasabha observed ‘Anti-Pakistan Day’ on 10 May 1942. In this tumultuous situation wanted to bring back his support base and convened VIth Session of the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Conference at Kushtia (in the Nadia district) on 24 May 1942 under the presidentship of Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, M.L.A. The Conference was attended by Fazlul Huq, Khan Bahadur Hashem Ali Khan, Mr. Upendra Nath Burman, Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed and thousands of peasants and labourers of neighbouring districts. In the opening of the Conference, Fazlul Huq said that he was well aware of the problems faced by the peasants and he would try his best to redress their grievances. He reiterated that the K.P.P. had always stood by the *krishaks* and assured them that his new Ministry would try to do some real good for them and take all possible steps to mitigate the hardship that the Second World War had brought upon the *krishaks* and *prajas*. Regarding the abolition of the Zamindari system, Fazlul Huq said that had there been no war, his government by this time would have taken a concrete decision in this matter.²⁷

As it was very difficult for him to run the government smoothly and effectively, Fazlul Huq wanted to quit his post (which was expressed in his letter

written to the Governor on 2 May 1942) in complete disgust, as Nazimuddin and his supporters carried on a virulent propaganda ‘by way of personal vendetta’ against him. He wrote: “All talk about the Muslim League having been betrayed by me and Muslim interest having been jeopardized is nothing but bunkum. Their whole propaganda is nothing but personal crusade against me, and no question of principle is involved I am prepared to abdicate in the larger interests of the province”.²⁸ In his letter he was pleading for the formation of a National Government without a Chief Minister: “There is no provision in the Government of India Act about any Chief Minister, and the Act only speaks of Ministers and a Council of Ministers. It is laid down only in the Rules of Business that a Chief Minister is to perform certain duties but these duties can be equally performed by the Governor. In these circumstances, it would not very much matter if I resign and no Chief Minister is appointed in my place. The structure, as we have it will remain as it is, with liberty to Your Excellency to make additions or alternations. Normally one would have thought that if the Chief Minister resigns, the other Ministers should also necessarily resign, but in the view that I am putting forward, the resignation of the Chief Minister means no more than the resignation of any of the other Ministers”.²⁹ Not only that, for the successful functioning of the Ministry, Fazlul Huq suggested: “four more Ministers be appointed, so that when I go out of office, there may be 12 Ministers functioning. Of these four Ministers, I would suggest that two Ministers should be marked out as members of the War Cabinet to deal with nothing else than matters connected with the War. If Sir Nazimuddin does not join the Cabinet as a whole, he can have no objection to join the War Cabinet”.³⁰ In his own words: “The result will be, therefore, that 10 Ministers would be functioning as Ministers carrying on the work of administration, and two Ministers will form the War Cabinet, leaving it open to members of other groups to come and join this War Cabinet. In the circumstances proposed, no party can have any reasonable objection to offer cooperation to Government. I would expect Sir Nazimuddin and someone else from the Muslim League, for instance, Abdur Rahman Siddique, or Ispahani to join at least the War Cabinet. As for myself, I would like to have the Speakers job with specific allowance to be settled in consultation with Your Excellency”.³¹

But Herbert saw ‘little possibility of all parties agreeing to form a Ministry. The official Congress would almost certainly stand out and the local Muslim League

leaders might insist upon all Muslim Ministers being taken from the ranks of the present League Party in the Assembly. Nazimuddin would agree to work with the existing Hindu Ministers but would definitely refuse to work with Huq, and possibly with the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca. The fact is that the League is more bitter against the Muslim Progressive Party than against any of the Hindu political parties'.³² Not only that, regarding the reconstitution of the Ministry, he also gave his opinion: "Huq is still pressing me for a decision regarding the reconstitution of the Ministry. I fancy that his ideas are confused by the fact that he is attempting to serve two masters: his dominant colleague Mukherjee and his personal ambitions and loyalties. I have suggested to him that it is waste of time to discuss the appointment of additional Ministers and numerous Parliamentary Secretaries until the possibility or otherwise of forming a National Government is decided. I have further suggested that it is his business rather than mine to ascertain the terms on which the Leaguers are prepared to enter the Government and on which his Hindu colleagues are prepared to receive them. There is rather a tendency on his part to expect me to act as intermediary between himself and Nazimuddin, while he sits back and does nothing except watch me striving to achieve the ideal. I am not prepared to play that role indefinitely, although I have told him that if he wants to secure a suitable appointment as an excuse for his resignation, I am perfectly ready to assist him".^{32a} Fazlul Huq not only pressurized Herbert, the Bengal Governor, for an expansion of the Cabinet but also at the same time he expressed his will to get an ambassadorial post instead of the post of Chief Minister. In his Home Department's report to the then Viceroy Lord Linlithgow dated 6 June 1942, Herbert wrote: "I have sent you a copy of Huq's most recent letter to me he has evidently set his heart on some kind of ambassadorial post in the Near East. Meanwhile he continues to press for an expansion of the Cabinet and the question that will have to be decided before very long is whether in the event of an expansion taking place the new Ministers should come from the Muslim League or from the Coalition Progressive Party".³³ With this doubt, Herbert again pointed out: "Siddiqui has been carrying out negotiations between Nazimuddin and Huq with the help of the European Group, but so far they have not produced any definite result. I suspect that the League leaders are overcalling their hand, since they are not in a position to lay down conditions. The Progressive Coalition Party has made it clear in a recent resolution that they are only prepared to have representatives of the League in the Cabinet who recognize Huq's leadership. At the same time it is evident that the

progressive Muslims are becoming increasingly uncomfortable about their position. They are ostracized by the League, and they realise that the split with the League has put a great deal of power into the hands of Hindu Ministers".³⁴

In order to bring back the confidence of his Hindu subjects and promote communal harmony as opposed to the two-nation theory, Fazlul Huq became one of the sponsors of the Hindu-Muslim Unity Conference which was held at Calcutta Town Hall on Saturday, 20 June 1942 under the auspices of the Hindu-Muslim Unity Association, a non-political organization which was set up by the Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad in 1937 for 'the promotion of better communal relations in Bengal'.³⁵ The Conference was presided over by the Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad and it was attended by Dr. Nalinaksha Sanyal, Syed Badruddoza, Humayun Kabir, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, A.K.M. Zakariah, Maulana Ahmed Ali, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Kiran Sankar Roy, Satyendra Nath Majumder, Sir A.H. Ghuznavi, Rajen Deb, Syed Nausher Ali and so on.³⁶ In his very inspiring inaugural speech at the Conference, Fazlul Huq called upon the Hindus and Muslims to realize the fact that "they had got to live together, sink or swim together and it need be, lay down their lives together for the good of their common motherland".³⁷ He also put emphasis that "the teachings of Islam were for peace and peace only; without peace there could not be internal harmony and without harmony there could not be any progress of any kind".³⁸ In conclusion Fazlul Huq expressed his hope: "the 20th of June would be a red-letter day in the history of Bengal, marking a new era of communal peace and harmony".³⁹

At the same time, Fazlul Huq tried to defend himself against all the allegations and face the anti-Huq crusade launched by Jinnah but thought it expedient not to dissociate himself completely with the Muslim League as his revolt was only against the men at the helm of the affairs in the Muslim League rather than against the League ideals. So he wrote a long letter on 20 June 1942 to prominent Muslim Leaguers throughout India which was published in the *Hindusthan Standard* of 21 June 1942. In his letter Fazlul Huq severely criticized the leadership of Jinnah and considered the Muslim League as a plaything in the hands of a selfish autocratic group who suppressed the free expression of opinion within the organization. He wrote: "The whole atmosphere is entirely un-Islamic and utterly undemocratic. It is the will of one man that prevails and the members of the League are generally not permitted to

have any will or opinion of their own, and this one is more naughty and arrogant than the proudest of the Pharaohs".⁴⁰ He also attacked the League leadership that it did not hesitate to use *goondas* and anti-social elements in order to implement its arbitrary decisions. According to him, the present Muslim League had turned into an un-Islamic organization and there was hardly any true and genuine Muslim in the League. Fazlul Huq made the following observation: "The present Muslim League atmosphere is un-Islamic. I feel very strongly that the Muslim League should be under the guidance of real and genuine Muslims The policy pursued by the present Muslim League is neither Islamic, nor patriotic. It serves neither the Muslims nor anybody else. It pretends to be exclusively Muslim, claiming to serve Muslims alone, but really leading even the Muslim to political ruin and disaster".⁴¹ In order to rescue the Muslim League from the clutches of un-Islamic and undemocratic leaders, Mr. Huq felt the necessity of organizing the 'Progressive Muslim League' based on 'universal Islamic fraternity'. He wrote: "The Progressive Muslim League which I visualise would be distinctly Islamic in its ideals and would lead the Muslims to have a broad political outlook which, while maintaining the utmost fidelity to the best interests of Islam, will also keep in view the interest of the country as a whole. In other words, the ideal of the Progressive Muslim League will be Islam first, and Islam throughout, but without ignoring the legitimate rights of other communities. I feel that it is also necessary to inculcate the great truth that Islam came with a mission for the whole of mankind and that it preached to the world Catholicism and toleration in the highest form. Unity between Muslims and other communities has got to be regarded as a fundamental necessity for the political advancement of India".⁴² This proposal of Fazlul Huq (for the formation of the Progressive Muslim League), did receive some support from the leaders inside and outside Bengal. In Bengal, the Bengal Provincial Muslim Association and the Nikhil Banga Bangali Mussalman Chatra Samity which had been outside the Muslim League and believed in Hindu-Muslim amity extended a helping hand towards Mr. Huq. But to the ordinary Muslims, however, the idea of the Progressive Muslim League which was going to be formed against the existing Muslim League did not seem very different and they at that time, were more devoted to the ideal of all-India Muslim solidarity. According to Herbert, it was nothing but a 'paper' project.⁴³ Ultimately Fazlul Huq's plan did not materialize simply because neither the circumstances were at all favourable to launch a party in opposition to the Muslim League, nor Mr. Huq was in power for long to sustain the move.

Meanwhile the problem arose with the appointment of the Muslims in the F which became an important issue in the anti-Huq campaigns of the League and its press. In the A.R.P. services, at that time, the Muslims did not enjoy even 5 per cent⁴⁴ which fell far short of their legitimate 50 per cent communal ratio in services as fixed earlier by the Praja-League Coalition government. The Chief Minister was 'clearly unhappy over his relations with his colleagues, particularly with Dr. Mukherjee, and with Santosh Basu' whom he accused of 'deliberately filling up A.R.P. appointments with Hindus to the disadvantage of his own community'.⁴⁵ On 2 August 1942, Fazlul Huq wrote a very strong letter to Herbert, the then Governor in which he highlighted the 'feeling of bitter resentment in the minds of the Muslim Community of Bengal': "Let me begin by referring to the atrocious manner in which Muslim interests have been sacrificed by the appointing authorities in the A.R.P. services.... Possibly, the permanent officials wanted a breakdown of the cabinet.... they could not have adopted a more effective means of achieving their end. But I am not going to accept the position created by the officials. I am only referring to this affair simply to show how officials have been encouraged to act arbitrarily in consequence of their belief that they will always find in you a powerful supporter....".⁴⁶ While admitting the low proportion of Muslims in the A.R.P. services, Herbert on the other hand, considered the fact that 'the fault lay with the Muslims for not coming forward to join earlier'.⁴⁷ Whoever might be responsible for this, the Muslim disappointment was there and Fazlul Huq became the main target of attacks from the League leaders at various protest meetings. While addressing such a meeting in Calcutta, Suhrawardy said: "Muslims of Bengal can expect no better treatment from Fazlul Huq who had sold the right of Muslims to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee for his Ministerial 'Gadi' (i.e. seat).... He is powerless to do anything for Muslims...."⁴⁸

Few days later side by side with all these problems and anti-Huq campaign, Fazlul Huq witnessed a very important anti-British movement of that time which created great revolutionary upheaval throughout India. The AICC at its historic meeting in Bombay on 8 August 1942 finally approved of the 'Quit India' Resolution and Gandhiji gave a clarion call "Do or Die" in the mission to free India from the clutches of the British. Jinnah asked the Muslims not to participate in the movement and 'to continue to pursue their normal peaceful life'. In the meeting of the working of the AIML, Jinnah declared that "the movement was inimical to Muslim interests

because it had been launched to force the Government's hands to surrender to the Congress and concede their demands, which meant a death-blow to Muslim interests".⁴⁹ The League Working Committee adopted a resolution defining its attitude towards the 'Quit India' movement and containing its instructions to be followed by the Muslims during the course of the movement. It was categorically mentioned in the resolution: "Ever since the beginning of the war and even prior to that the sole object of the Congress policy has been either to cajole or coerce the British Government into surrendering power to the Congress While claiming the right of self-determination for 'India' which is a mere Congress euphemism for Hindu majority, it has persistently opposed the right of self-determination for the Muslim nation to decide and determine their own destiny".⁵⁰ Not only that, the resolution clearly declared that the 'Quit India' slogan "is a mere camouflage and what is really aimed at is the supreme control of the Government of the country by the Congress".⁵¹

Although some important Muslim League leaders like Syed Mohammad Hussain (Secretary of the Muslim League Party in the Council of State) and Syed Abdul Latif protested against this approach of the AIML towards the 'Quit India' movement, the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party and the Working Committee of the BPML welcomed the resolution. The Working Committee of the BPML in its meeting held on 28 August 1942, asked the Muslims of Bengal to abide by the resolution and act according to the instructions given in it.⁵² Herbert also pointed out the fact that 'the League is standing out from the movement'.^{52a} The European group in the Bengal Assembly, to whom the 'Quit India' movement meant 'recrudescence of the terrorist activities', also supported the stand of the Muslim League. The leader of the European group in the Assembly introduced a resolution in September 1942 supporting the Government's measures taken to suppress the movement. This resolution failed to satisfy Syed Badruddoja, a distinguished member of the Progressive Coalition Party who wanted to bring an amendment to the resolution, could not get success as 'his voice was drowned by uproar created by the Muslim League and the European members' who were against this amendment and 'demanded the ministry's definite commitment to the repressive policy'.⁵³ Fazlul Huq, on the other hand, could not sit idle and expressed his deep concern about the Congress-led Movement of 1942 which became evident from his telegram sent to the Viceroy for onward transmission to Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin stating that "the

permanent interests of world peace and freedom require immediate settlement with India”.⁵⁴ The Chief Minister was in a dilemma. He was neither in a position to suppress or ban the ‘Quit India’ movement (which would infuriate the Congress leaders and might lead them to take drastic step against his government) nor he could whole-heartedly support the violent activities during the course of the Movement and the suppressive policy of J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, who wanted prompt action against the Congress activists and who already sought the permission from the Viceroy to arrest ‘in the first instance, some fourteen persons belonging mainly to the Khadi Group’.⁵⁵ Although there were few arrest cases, Mr. Huq did not show his zeal to ruthlessly suppress the Movement and to take strong punitive action against the Congress leaders which might invite their withdrawal of support from outside the Cabinet and pose ‘threat’ to him and his Ministry.

Sir John Herbert was not at all happy with the ‘passive’ and to some extent ‘independent’ policy followed by Fazlul Huq and his Progressive Coalition Ministry and the Governor came to the conclusion that the policies, programmes and actions of the present Ministry were prejudicial to the interests of the British Empire. Also he was quite anxious about Fazlul Huq’s coalition with the Forward Bloc as its leader Subhas Chandra Bose, a detenue, had already escaped out of his country to join hands with the British enemies (Germany and Japan) for driving them out of the soil of India. While the Governor wanted to crush the ‘Quit India’ movement with a strong hand, exercising his power of discretion, the Chief Minister wanted to cope with the situation with the help of his permanent government officials and desired that the Governor should act as a constitutional head of the province, leaving the political matters of the administration to be decided and taken care of absolutely by the Cabinet. But the Governor did not pay any heed to his advice and acted in an unconstitutional manner and pressurized Fazlul Huq to pursue drastic steps against the ‘rebellion’. Prior to the outbreak of the ‘rebellion’, he was not at all satisfied with the attitude of Mr. Huq towards the forthcoming Movement which was reflected in his telegram sent to Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy on 21 July 1942. In his telegram Herbert wrote: “I have discussed the position with Huq and other leading Ministers. Huq’s attitude is not entirely satisfactory. Although he and other ministers are inclined not to regard consequence of open movement as likely to be serious in Bengal, he feels different about making counter – propaganda since he is unable at

present to join forces with Jinnah in opposing Gandhi”.^{55a} In a meeting of the officials, Mr. Huq very frankly mentioned that ‘in the event of drastic measures becoming necessary to maintain law and order, Mukherjee (Hindu Mahasabha) would resign and would be followed by Basu, Banerjee (Suspended Congress) and Shamsuddin Ahmed (*Krishak Praja*)’.⁵⁶ Herbert reported that: “He (i.e. Fazlul Huq) is finding his position increasingly difficult and is obviously anxious to get away, in order to enable Hindus and Muslims to decide whether they are going to work together or apart. He realizes that his own Ministry as a whole is not prepared to take the podium of maintaining law and order and will inevitably take the line of throwing the entire onus on to myself and the officials, and possibly himself by resigning as a protest against any repressive measures that may have been taken”.⁵⁷

During the course of the ‘Quit India’ movement in Bengal, Midnapore became the citadel of the said movement where the National Government was established and where the British Government unleashed a reign of terror in order to suppress the movement. The incidents of atrocity which took place in Midnapore and several other districts of Bengal got publicity in the newspapers and put Fazlul Huq in the defensive. He remarked in the floor of the Assembly: “Apart from hartals and a few demonstrations, instances have occurred in several districts, tampering with or damage stocks of railways with interruption of rail communication and destruction of instruments. Members are aware of the persisting interference with tramway services in Calcutta and with the damage done to public utility services, this and the attack on A.R.P. can not have any other result than giving assistance to the enemy. There have been sporadic cutting of telegraphic wires in many districts and in certain areas, post offices have been attacked and looted. In present conditions, where the enemy’s threat to our province has been by no means removed and when it is essential that communications should be kept open in order that military disposals may be maintained and no obstacle be placed in the way of troops concentrations for any purpose be it offensive or defensive, interference with railways, telegraphs and postal communications are very serious offensive matters”.⁵⁸ In order to redress the grievances of the Muslims regarding their appointment in different government services including the A.R.P., he said that his government took different steps for their recruitment in the A.R.P. and other departments of the government and already a large number of Muslims were appointed in the A.R.P. and he instructed the

Communal Ratio Officer to strictly enforce the ratio in services. He also mentioned that steps were taken to improve the efficiency of the A.R.P. personnel to strengthen the fire brigade by forming auxiliary Fire Service, street fire parties and House Protection Fire Parties, on a voluntary basis in different districts of Bengal. Regarding the disruption of supply of foods and price rise, Fazlul Huq said: “We depend for sugar on Bihar, for salt on the West Coast ports and places outside India .e.g., Aden, for most varieties of dal on Bihar, for oil seeds and mustard oil on the U.P. and Bihar and so on. Even in the case of rice, we have seen the difficulty of securing the adequate supply to the public at controlled prices. The difficulty of price control is greater still when we have no control over the sources of supply. The difficulties of transport have aggravated the problem. Recently, wheat allotments have been difficult to obtain because of the disturbance of railway communication and inputs from Bihar have almost stopped as a result of local disturbances..... In the case of some other commodities, there have been a chronic shortage, for example, the supply of Kerosene has been cut 50%. This meant that everyone have got to reduce his consumption Meanwhile, the province can help itself very considerably by organizing a comprehensive anti-hoarding drive in Calcutta and the districts with the active support and cooperative organisation of the leaders of public opinion”.⁵⁹ Referring to the situation arising out of the ‘Quit India’ movement and the arrest of the Congress leaders in Bengal, he said: “Myself and my colleagues deprecated the initiative of a mass movement and assure the public that we are prepared to see that any movement which might be initiated was checked and peace and tranquility maintained. At the same time, we were anxious to avoid action, which might precipitate crisis and we appealed for a settlement which would avert one. Unhappily, such a settlement was not effected and, alternatively, Bengal have been spared disasters on the scale going in some provinces. There have been disturbances both in Calcutta and elsewhere of sufficient gravity to give cause for serious anxiety”.⁶⁰ The Governor of Bengal considered it absolutely necessary for taking drastic steps against the Congress-led Movement and was very much concerned to ensure that the district authorities would appreciate ‘the necessity of nipping subversive activities in the bud’ and he assured them that such actions as they felt necessary would ‘receive the full support’ of his Government. But in this matter, Herbert wrote: “my present Ministers are not proving helpful. On executive matters Huq gives me adequate advice; but he is hampered throughout by his Hindu colleagues”.⁶¹

As the Governor was not quite satisfied with the attitude and activities of Mr. Huq and his Ministry regarding the suppression of the Movement, he summoned Syama Prasad Mookerjee and other Ministers of Fazlul Huq's Cabinet and asked them either to accept the policy of the Government of India or to resign.⁶² Although Syama Prasad Mookerjee himself did not support the suppressive policy of the British Government, he was unwilling to tender his resignation at that point of time. He told Herbert: "I did not resign immediately for two reasons. I would like first to put the all-India issue before the Viceroy and request him to carry my message to His Majesty's Government. I knew this would not lead to anything, but this was the constitutional way of a Minister's views being made known to the highest British authorities in respect of vital matters affecting the peace and welfare of India. Secondly, since my colleagues were not going to follow me, I was anxious to have an assurance from Herbert that he would not take advantage of my resignation, dissolve the Ministry and install the League into power again".⁶³ At the same time Syama Prasad wrote a historic letter to Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, on 12 August 1942 in which he gave concrete and constructive suggestions for an 'honourable Indo-British settlement', an immediate settlement between the Raj and Congress. He wrote to the Viceroy: "The demand of the Congress as embodied in its last resolution, virtually constitutes the national demand of India as a whole. It is regrettable that a campaign of misrepresentation is now being carried on in some sections of the foreign press characterising the Congress demand as a virtual invitation to Japan and a surrender to chaos and confusion. No one desires that India should be plunged into a mass movement resulting in disorder and anarchy. At the same time a refusal on the part of the British Government to deal with the real demand of the people in a spirit of true statesmanship will be an even greater disaster, for by this unwise decision it is they and not the Congress who will precipitate a crisis in India".⁶⁴ He concluded that the British Government 'must make up its mind to transfer power before negotiations can at all be started'⁶⁵ and requested the Viceroy to forward this letter to the British Prime Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps and the Secretary of State for India, 'so that, whatever the British Government may do, it may appreciate our attitude towards the present crisis'.⁶⁶ But the Viceroy took time to give a reply to his letter which ultimately came towards the end of September without having any fruitful decision in favour of the Indians. Disheartened Syama Prasad made up his mind to tender his resignation as he fully realized the fact (keeping in mind the hostile and unsympathetic attitude of the

Governor and the coterie of officials who practically ruled over Bengal) that he could hardly conduct any ministerial work leading to the welfare of the people of the province. He charged the British officials, particularly Mr. Porter: “One I.C.S. Officer, because he was a Bengali, was superseded in spite of Ministerial advice. Another British I.C.S. officer had the audacity to put down in writing that the rates of payment of evacuees in East Bengal were much higher than they deserved and as ‘an imperial officer’ – the words not mine but his – he refused to carry out the order of the Provincial Government. This officer still remains in position of trust and responsibility”.⁶⁷ He sent his resignation letter to Sir John Herbert the Governor, on 16 November 1942 and four days later (i.e. 20 November 1942) it was accepted by the Governor. It is a remarkable document which was highly criticized and proscribed by the Government. In his resignation letter Syama Prasad wrote: “Broadly speaking my reasons for resignation are two fold. First, as I intimated to you at the earliest opportunity on 9th August last, I disapprove of the policy adopted by the British Government and the Government of India with regard to the present political situation in the country. I am aware that, you, as a provincial Governor, have hardly any responsibility for the formulation of this policy. But my second reason mainly concerns you. And that is connected with the manner, in my opinion unwarranted, in which you have interfered with the work of the Ministry and have rendered so-called provincial autonomy into a meaningless farce If it is a crime to aspire to see one’s country free and shake off foreign domination including British every self-respecting Indian is a criminal..... The doctrine of benevolent trusteeship stands exploded and you can no more throw dust into our eyes. Indian representatives therefore demanded that the policy of administration of their country in all spheres, political, economic and cultural, must be determined by Indians themselves, unfettered by irritating acts of unsympathetic bureaucrats and bungling Governors”.^{67a} After resigning from the Cabinet, he issued a Press Statement in Calcutta on the issue of repression which was as follows: “My experience as a provincial Minister for eleven months possessing great responsibility for which they are answerable to the people and the legislature, have very little powers, especially, in matters concerning the right and liberties of the people. The Governor has chosen to act in many vital matters in disregard of the wishes of the Ministers, and thus depended on the advice of a section of permanent officials, who are indifferent to the interests of the province. If the British Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for India has the courage to direct an enquiry into

the manner in which popular rights have been disregarded against the advice of the responsible Ministers, the hollowness of their claim that Dominion Status is already in action in India will stand exposed”.⁶⁸ Going against this statement, *The Azad* in its editorial (which was edited by Akram Khan, the Muslim League Leader), wrote: “He resigned because of his difference of opinion on the question of flat rate collection of fines for civil disobedience movement, from which the Bengal Government, at the instance of the Government of India, wanted to exempt the League and the anti-Congress Muslims. The president of the Hindu Mahasabha could not tolerate it”.⁶⁹ It is not that Syama – Huq combination did not last long simply because both the leaders lost faith and confidence on each other and developed a strained relationship or both of these leaders failed to deal with the conflicting pressures from their rank and file but it was the British interference in governance (which made the provincial autonomy a charade) which prompted Syama Prasad to tender his resignation to Herbert who considered this act nothing but ‘an attempt to regain popularity’⁷⁰ among the Hindus. There was so much of interference on the British side; particularly of Herbert that even Fazlul Huq made serious allegations against him that the Governor of Bengal showed favouritism towards the Muslim League. He brought definite charge against Herbert in his letter to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, as Huq wrote: “..... my Governor was pursuing a policy of definite obstructions, and of rendering my administration constitutionally impossible”.⁷¹ This type of accusation, to some extent, was acknowledged by the Viceroy which was reflected in his letter written to the Secretary of State for India: “.... I have a feeling that Herbert may have taken slightly too rigid a line with him (Huq) and I have tried to make that clear to Herbert , the importance of adopting an accommodating attitude”.⁷²

When the Bengal Legislative Assembly met for the budget session next February 1943, Syama Prasad on the very first day (i.e. 12 February 1943) issued a long statement on ‘why I resigned’ which reiterated the points that the underlined earlier in his resignations letter to the Governor. He stated: “The Keynote of the policy of interference was that people of the land were not to be trusted and power, whenever possible, must remain in the hands of chosen British officials enjoying the confidence of the Governor and his coterie. In the matter of the question of release of political prisoners, the Ministers were anxious to pursue a policy which while fully consistent with the present War emergency would at the same time help to mobilise

public opinion of all shades in favour of the defence of the province against Axis aggression. Whatever the recommendations affected the general state policy or individual cases, systematic obstruction came from the permanent officials, whom Ministers could not remove, ultimately backed by the support of the head of the provincial administration. The revised scheme of Home Guard approved by the Council of Ministers calculated to lay the foundation of a people's army, irrespective of caste, community or politics, was summarily rejected by the Governor in as much as the stalwarts of the Department of Law and Order were not prepared to trust Bengalees to unite in the defence of their own motherland or in maintaining internal security. The present situation regarding food and supply of essential commodities has taken an acute turn. But here also the interfering hands of the Governor and the policy of his own selected officials whom the Ministry was bound to accept, whether it liked them or not, have been mainly responsible for the lack of co-ordination and for the failure to draw up a comprehensive scheme for the relief of the people at large".⁷³ In the concluding part of his historic statement, Syama Prasad made an appeal to all sections of the House so that they might unite in their own struggle to uproot tyranny and oppression: "We have often fought with each other and thereby not only weakened ourselves but have strengthened those reactionary forces whose very continuance depends on our differences. Today in the crisis that threatens us, not as Hindus or Muslims but Bengalees and Indians, let us demand the inauguration of an administration which will recognize out just economic and political rights. A Hindu and a Muslim may differ on many things. But do they not equally detest slavery and it is for ending the state of intolerable slavery that I am asking for your support and co-operation".⁷⁴

The resignation of Syama Prasad Mookerjee from the Coalition Ministry not only dealt a heavy blow on the expectations of the Hindus of Bengal but also added to the difficulties of Fazlul Huq in running the government although he still managed to have the support of the two remaining Hindu (Forward Bloc or 'Non-official Congress') Ministers. The Opposition became enthusiastic and thought that the resignation of Mr. Mookerjee would be followed by Mr. Huq which would lead the Ministry into 'normal death'. The BPML leaders (who so far criticized this Ministry for absolutely coming under the influence of the Hindus), closely monitored all these political developments and got excited to utilize the situation to come to power. The

European members of the House also applied their 'pressure tactics' and asked Fazlul Huq to dissociate himself from the statement of Syama Prasad which he declined to execute rather he said: "Personally I was not prepared categorically to deny all that Dr. Mookerjee had said; there was much in the statement with which I certainly agreed".⁷⁵ He was very much disappointed with the outrages alleged to have committed on women at Sanon in the district of Noakhali and the transfer of the officer (who tried to do his duty) by the Chief Secretary who passed the order without making any consultation with the Chief Minister. So Mr. Huq tried to remind his immediate boss about his responsibility: "... you should act as the constitutional Governor and not as the mouthpiece of permanent officials, or of any political party. In other words, you should allow provincial autonomy to function honestly rather than as a cloak for the exercise of autocratic powers as if the province was being governed under Section 93 of the Government of India Act"^{75a} which adversely affected their relationship.

Fazlul Huq and his Cabinet members were not only 'disturbed' and busy with the violent 'Quit India' Movement in Midnapore (where the British military and police forces committed atrocities) but also with severe cyclone and tidal wave which devastated Midnapore and 24-Parganas districts on the night of 17 October 1942. Preliminarily it was reported to have been responsible for 10,000 deaths in Midnapore and 1,000 in the 24 -Parganas. It caused high casualties among cattle and heavily damaged the crops and led to critical shortage of foodstuffs and drinking water. Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal immediately instructed to take immediate relief measures in the affected areas and told the Bengal Premier to strictly adhere to the maintenance of law and order.⁷⁶ *The Statesman* wrote: "The magnitude of the disaster, which had fallen upon the unhappy inhabitants of Midnapore district by the recent cyclone and tidal wave, had been rightly given adequate publicity in the Press and had evoked a spontaneous response from all sections of the community. The Government, however, observed with regret that although much was commented upon the administration of relief, under what circumstances this was possible for Government officers to work in the devastated areas was not highlighted. The Government felt that full account had not been taken of the services rendered by the local officers in tackling an unprecedented problem in the most unfavourable conditions".⁷⁷

In 1942 when the Progressive Coalition Ministry was in power in Bengal, there was severe food crisis which finally paved the way for the outbreak of the great Bengal Famine of 1943 (which according to Paul Greenough, was nothing but a ‘man-made’ calamity). The production of rice crop was heavily affected by the cyclone of October 1942 and there had been a fall in its production to the tune of 2.4 million tons during 1942-43. In the past in order to meet up the shortage of rice in the province, a substantial quantity of rice was imported from Burma to Bengal. But due to the Japanese occupation of Burma, this supply of rice (to the tune of 200000 tons) was stopped which enhanced the scarcity of food in Bengal. Not only that, the Bengal Government in April 1942, introduced a scheme of removing surplus rice from three districts in Bengal and destroying boats in the rivers of East Bengal (which was known as the ‘Boat Removal Policy’). This ‘Denial Policy’ adopted by the Bengal Government not only disrupted the communication system but also the regular supply of foodstuffs and ‘produced most distressing consequences on the economic life of Bengal’. Along with these, the Government imposed a procurement levy for the use of its officials, army men and industrial workers.⁷⁸ As a result, the economic equilibrium of the province was very much upset and the peoples of Bengal began to suffer from the non-availability and inordinately high prices of rice. In order to combat the situation, the Governor appointed a British official as the ‘Rice Controlling Officer’ (without any discussion with the Chief Minister and his cabinet members) which completely went against the will of the Bengal Premier (who wanted to have an experienced Indian in that post). But all these steps on behalf of the Government went in vain and its officials failed to give some relief to the famine affected people. Infuriated Fazlul Huq charged the Governor for this catastrophe: “.... At the present moment we are faced with a rice famine in Bengal mainly in consequence of an uncalled for interference on your part, and of hasty action on the part of the Joint Secretary.....”⁷⁹ Absolving his Ministry of all charges, he pointed out the failure in this respect had been due to “matters over which we have no control.... We have done our best to meet the situation and if we have not been able to tackle the problem in all its aspects, I submit, it has not been due to any lack of efforts on our part”.^{79a} But it can be said without any doubt that the Raj’s rice policy mainly hurt the prestige and popularity of Fazlul Huq (because the common people only knew him and held him responsible for this alarming situation) and to some extent, also his Ministers.

The defamation of Fazlul Huq and his Ministry in dealing with the 'Quit India' movement and the food crisis, ultimately motivated the BPML leaders and the European Group (who tried their best to malign the Chief Minister and his Cabinet) who were in search of an opportunity to bring censure motions against Fazlul Huq's Ministry and to oust it from power. The other members of the House were in favour of raising protest against the police atrocities and suppression during the course of the 'Quit India' movement particularly in Midnapore. All these heated the Budget session (for the year 1943-44) which started on 12 February 1943. When most of the members in the Assembly except the Europeans, demanded an open and independent judicial enquiry into instances of repression in Tamluk and Contai Subdivisions in Midnapore district in the wake of the 'Quit India' movement, Fazlul Huq promptly conceded this. He agreed on the floor of the House that 'an enquiry is desirable'⁸⁰ not only because the allegations were of serious nature but also to give a chance to the accusers to prove their accusations. But this decision of the Chief Minister infuriated the Governor of Bengal who asked Fazlul Huq for an explanation of his "conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what imparts to be the decision of the Government". His Excellency J.A. Herbert went on to add: "You are well aware that this subject attracts my special responsibilities and you are also well aware of my views on the undesirability of enquiring in this matter".^{80a} A man of independent spirit and having a personality of his own, Fazlul Huq was highly offended at the indecorous language used by the Governor in the letter (dated 15 February 1943) and gave a strong reply on the next day. Mr. Huq wrote: "I owe you no explanation whatever in respect of my 'conduct' in failing to consult you before announcing what according to you is the decision of the Government, but I certainly owe you a duty to administer a mild warning that indecorous language such as has been used in your letter under reply should, in future, be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and the Chief Minister When I was in the House, I found that not only were the most serious charges brought by responsible members of the House, but the demand for enquiry was not opposed by a single member. Even the European group kept silent and the opposition were loudest in condemning us for not having made enquiries long before. In the circumstances, it was impossible to resist the demand for the enquiry that had been made....."^{80b}

Sir John Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, obviously did not expect this sort of a reply from the Bengal Premier and he had a fitting rebuff which he could not digest or tolerate. In order to prove himself innocent in the eyes of the Viceroy, the Governor sent a report to him on 22 February 1943 in which he stated that “the Ministry were in favour of an impartial enquiry by persons of the status of High Court Judges into the alleged excesses by officials in Midnapore! When I called him to render an account, while reproaching me for the peremptory tone of my summons, he blandly excused himself on the ground that he had not prejudiced my special responsibilities by committing the Government – he had only stated the views of the Ministry. Apparently, “What the Ministry said isn’t evidence”. It appears that anyhow he and his precious colleagues have no intention of honouring this species of pledge in full and only gave it to gain time.... It is up to Huq to extricate himself, and me, from the morass into which he had led us”.⁸¹ It clearly proves that there had been sharp differences between the Governor and Fazlul Huq’s Ministry and Herbert was very much determined to dismiss the Huq Ministry by any means. The European Group also departed from its traditional policy of rendering support and assistance to the government and decided to extend its support towards the Muslim League inside the Assembly ‘in order to throw out the Huq Ministry’.

Having going through this sort of an ‘existential crisis’, Fazlul Huq realized the fact that only Jinnah and his Muslim League could save him and the Ministry from the danger. He sought the assistance of the League, tried to patch up his differences with Jinnah and wrote a letter to him (Jinnah) on 13 November 1942 requesting him to lift the ban: “.... Remove the ban on me and my supporters and facilitate our entry in the League fold. I can assure you that I will abide by the discipline of the party and the instructions of the President of the Muslim League. As for the Progressive Muslim League, upto now, exists on paper only and it ceases to exist automatically with my entry and the entry of my supporters into the League. I need hardly emphasise the fact that in the interest of Islam and Muslim solidarity, I am prepared to make any sacrifice and to subordinate my personal interests and inclinations to the supreme demand of the Muslim nation. I am extremely anxious that the breach in the Muslim community should be made up and that efforts should be made that no Muslim may remain outside the folds of the League. I understand you will be leaving Delhi tonight, but I would appreciate it very much if you could

give me a few minutes time to talk to you personally and to explain everything frankly. Under providence I leave the interest of Bengal Muslims in your hands”.⁸² In its reply, Jinnah gave him a condition that at first Mr. Huq would have to dissolve the Progressive Coalition Party and tender his resignation from the Chief Ministership and it was only after that the League Supremo would remove the ban on him.⁸³ Fazlul Huq gave an immediate reply to Jinnah on 5 February 1943: “.... I am ready to tender my resignation which will mean the automatic dissolution of the Progressive Coalition Party. May I now get a line from you to tell me that I have understood you alright, and that the ban put on me will be lifted as soon as I tender resignation of my office as Premier? If so, I will take the step I have indicated and I hope you will render the barest possible justice, as soon as your conditions are satisfied”.⁸⁴ Jinnah gave an immediate reply on 10 February in which he suggested Mr. Huq to fulfill certain conditions subject to the final sanction of the Working Committee of the AIML: “(1) That you should express your regret for what you have done. If you have now come to the conclusion that you should be readmitted as a member, it is due to the organization, whose membership you value so much that you should show repentance on your part....

(2) That you should liquidate the Progressive Coalition Party or completely dissociate yourself from it and resign from your office as Premier. After that I told you, I was prepared to see that the ban should be lifted and that you and other Muslims who were expelled should be eligible for the membership of the Muslim League..... I shall move in the matter as soon as the above conditions are satisfied by you”.⁸⁵ Not only that, Jinnah sent a telegram to Mr. Huq on 11 February 1943 requesting him to give an immediate reply in order to ‘avoid circulation of incorrect and misleading version’.^{85a} Five days later (i.e. 16 February), Fazlul Huq sent a telegram to Jinnah stating that he would give his reply within a day (i.e. 17 February). But before receiving his reply, Jinnah did not waste any time to publish all these correspondence before the public in the leading newspapers which practically shocked Fazlul Huq. In his letter (written on 17 February 1943) to the League Supremo, Mr. Huq accused Jinnah for the breach of faith, releasing the correspondence that had passed between him and Jinnah and the latter’s pendent attitude in removing the ban on him and tactfully closing the door of the League before him: “..... I stated categorically in my previous letter that if the ban on me was lifted and if the other

Muslims and myself who were expelled were readmitted to the Muslim League Parliamentary Party in Bengal, I would be prepared to resign. In the face of this categorical declaration, no further action was called for from me but it was for you to proceed to lift the ban in order to secure my fulfilment of the stipulation that I would resign..... You will thus see that I had gone to the fullest possible extent to meet the requirements of the situation but by a premature release of our correspondence you have evidently closed the door to further negotiations a step which no one deplors more than I do”.⁸⁶

This episode utterly surprised the leaders of the Krishak Praja Party and the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samity and they convened an immediate joint meeting to discuss the correspondence that had passed between Jinnah and Huq. In this meeting, they expressed that they were highly shocked and hurt by this conduct of their leader and took a resolution in which they put allegation on Fazlul Huq for carrying out the correspondence with Jinnah without the knowledge and consent of the Party or the Samity. They also sought a clarification of the situation by Mr. Huq.⁸⁷ Taking advantage of this situation, the BPML leaders began to exert pressure on Fazlul Huq’s Ministry in the Assembly. There was also the threat of the Japanese invasion which also worried the Ministry. When Fazlul Huq was sandwiched between the home front and the Muslim League (along with the Governor), he had to take part in the elections for the six seats in the Bengal Legislative Council. For getting political advantage in this election, Jinnah, without the knowledge of Mr. Huq, sent the Huq-Jinnah correspondence to the Press on 17 February 1943 which was also acknowledged by Mr. Huq in his letter to Jinnah (17 February 1943). He wrote: “It was apparently intended that the release of the correspondence should produce psychological effect favourable to the impending elections to various seats and office in the Bengal Legislature”.⁸⁸ Interestingly, this apprehension of Fazlul Huq came into a reality in the triennial elections to the Bengal Legislative Council which was held in March 1943. In this election in all the six Muslim seats (which were mainly located in East Bengal), the Muslim League candidates convincingly won by defeating the candidates of the Progressive Coalition Party of Fazlul Huq. Even one of the members of Mr. Huq’s Cabinet (Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim, Education Minister of Bengal) had to face defeat in this election.⁸⁹ The results of the voting are as follows:

1. Presidency Division: North Mohammedan Rural Constituency: Khan Bahadur M.A. Momin of the Muslim League got 61 votes; his opponent Khan Bahadur Amir Rahaman of the Progressive Coalition Party (sitting) got 50 votes;
2. Calcutta and Suburbs: Muhammedan Urban Constituency: Mr. Yakub H.S. Sattar of the League got 85 votes; his rival Mr. Atahur Raheen of the Progressive Coalition Party got 63 votes;
3. Dacca North-West Muhammedan Rural Constituency: Mr. S. Hamiuddin Ahmed (League) bagged 69 votes while his opponent Md. Ibrahim (Progressive Coalition Party) managed to get 45 votes;
4. Rangpur Rural Muhammedan Constituency: Mr. Abdul Latif (League) obtained 59 votes whereas his rival Mr. Azizul Islam (Progressive Coalition Party) got 39 votes;
5. Noakhali Muhammedan Rural Constituency: Khan Bahadur Abdul Goffron of the League defeated the sitting candidate Khan Bahadur Rezaul Huque Chowdhury;
6. Mymensingh East Muhammedan Rural Constituency: Khan Sahib Nurul Amin of the Muslim League defeated Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim, the Minister for Education by 25 to 20 votes.^{89a}

The BPML leaders were so overwhelmed by their massive success in the triennial elections that Ispahani, one of the prominent leaders of the BPML, sent a telegram to Jinnah, stating: “.... The League captured six seats contested against Huq’s Progressives..... Fazlul Huq looks a picture of misery”.^{89b} This success in the election helped a great deal to the BPML leaders to boost up their confidence and they became more excited to defeat Huq’s Ministry and form a new ministry led by them. Likely during the food debate, Tamizuddin Khan who was ex-minister of Public Health and Medical and also Agriculture and Veterinary Departments moved a motion of censure against the Ministry on 23 March 1943 as it failed “to assume responsibility for the actions of officers of the Government” which according to him was nothing but “grave constitutional delinquency”.⁹⁰ He criticized and condemned Huq Ministry’s “adherence to office’ in spite of its difference of opinion with the Government of India on the issue of resisting the “Quit India” movement. He also

alleged that without submitting its resignation, the Ministry was still denying its responsibility for the officers' conduct. The European Group led by David Hendry took the same approach and urged the Ministry that it should 'make way for those who with an equal knowledge of the constitution are prepared honestly to accept the responsibilities of office'.⁹¹ On the other hand, Kiran Shankar Roy, the leader of the official Congress, opposed the censure motion and described the attitude of its supporters as a 'bomb-shell' because some distinguished members of the House at that time were trying to form 'an administrative cabinet of all parties' minus the official Congress.⁹² Opposing the motion, Syama Prasad Mookerjee made an appeal to all the members of the House: "It is for us to forget our party affiliations for the time being, keep controversies aside for the present and unite on the basis of one constructive programme and it is then and then alone that we can truly and faithfully serve the interests of the people of this province".⁹³ Supporting this motion, H.S. Suhrawardy declared on the floor of the House that Syama Prasad Mookerjee had made an attempt 'to create disunity among Muslims so that his community could rule Bengal'.⁹⁴ The debate went on for three days and ultimately the motion was defeated by 86-115 votes.⁹⁵ The Huq Ministry was also able to escape defeat by 16 to 15 votes on 23 March 1943 in the Legislative Council on the special motion tabled by Khan Bahadur Sayyed Muazzamuddin Hossain (Muslim League) regarding the food crisis in the province. Although there was a split within the Progressive Coalition Party and the withdrawal of support of some Muslim and Hindu members of the House from the Ministry, Fazlul Huq still managed to have the majority in the House. But he was gradually losing his ground and popularity not only among the Muslims of Bengal (who were gradually leaning towards the Muslim League) but also among the Hindus (who henceforth lost their confidence in Mr. Huq as he expressed his desire in his latest correspondence with Jinnah to return to the League). The charged-up BPML leaders demanded that the Huq Ministry lost the support of the Bengal Muslims⁹⁶ and as the majority of the voters (of both the communities) did not have any faith in Mr. Huq at that time, he had no other option but to tender his resignation as the Premier. Nazimuddin, the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party and the 'projected' League contender for the post of the Premier (who was also a very 'favourite' candidate of J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal), issued the following statement: "The unparalleled success of the Muslim League in the elections in which it has captured all the seats – which were held by supporters of the present government and

defeated a Minister in office, proves beyond doubt that the present Muslim Ministers do not represent the Muslims of Bengal and have no following or support in them. In the circumstances, I hope Mr. Fazlul Huq will accept the clear verdict of Muslims in Bengal and resign immediately”.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, European members also came forward and extended their support and assistance towards the BPML in dislodging Fazlul Huq’s Ministry. In this mission, the European Group (supported by the League) made another joint endeavour to oust Fazlul Huq and his Ministry on 27 March 1943. On the very day, K.A. Hamilton of the European Group moved a censure motion against the Government for its alleged failure ‘to deal with black market and speculation in hoarding of foodstuffs’.⁹⁸ Speaking in favour of the motion on 27 March 1943, Suhrawardy addressed the honourable members of the House: “I regret to say that some Hindu leaders are utilising Mr. Fazlul Huq. They are behind him and are propping him up..... Mr. Fazlul Huq relies solely upon the Hindu community. His Muslim party members know fully well that they are not being supported by their constituencies.....”⁹⁹ But being a shrewd politician Suhrawardy understood the fact that the Muslim League did not have that strength in the Bengal Assembly to defeat Fazlul Huq’s Ministry and to form a Ministry of their own. So he realized the ground reality of having the support of the elected Hindu members of the House which was reflected in his speech on the same day: “... I can declare on the floor of this House that wherever Hindu-Muslim cooperation has been spoken of, wherever we have said that in this country we have got to live side by side, the Muslim community has applauded and supported it.... We have tried and as I have said – I use the word in its fullest significance – desperately not because we want to get into power but because we feel that Hindus and Muslims must work together. We have tried desperately for it but we have failed. As long as Mr. Fazlul Huq stays there, as long as the Hindu parties think that they can use him as a puppet, as long as they can bolster him up and support him, there is very little chance of compromise and understanding between us. An honourable understanding will only come if this impediment in our way is removed..... I wish to make this declaration on behalf of the Muslim League Party with the fullest sense of responsibility that should this impediment disappear, we shall sit down together and on our part there will be no stone left unturned to arrive at an agreement between the Hindus and Muslim”.¹⁰⁰ On the same note, on the same day,

Nazimuddin issued a statement: “I would also like to urge the non-Muslim leaders who are supporting the Ministry to request Mr. Fazlul Huq to resign for the establishment of a better relation between the Hindus and Muslims. It is obvious that persons who have lost the confidence of the entire Muslim Bengal should not be upheld by them in office. The policy of propping up unrepresentative men has led to communal embitterment in the Congress provinces. It will be worse in a province where the Muslims are in the majority. If my Hindu friends desire communal harmony and sincerely wish it, they will I hope, change their present attitude and adopt a course which will lead to the desired object without delay”.¹⁰¹

While the Leaguers and the European Group were targeting Fazlul Huq, Syama Prasad Mookerjee did not accuse the Bengal Premier for what was going through in Bengal during the last few months rather he put all the blame against the Governor of Bengal. He said: “What has happened during the last few months forebodes chaos and anarchy, but the responsibility does not rest on the head of the Chief Minister. The responsibility rests – and I say this with a full sense of responsibility myself, - on the head of the Governor of this province.... There have been occasions when officers had carried out the orders of the Governor as part and parcel of the Government of Bengal without the knowledge and concurrence of the Ministers of the province”.¹⁰² Syama Prasad’s moral support boosted the confidence of Fazlul Huq who came forward to give a strong reply (which was the last speech as the Bengal Premier) in the Assembly on 27 March 1943 against his critics and particularly against Suhrawardy’s personal attack on him. Regretfully he said: “Sir, my esteemed friend, Mr. Shaheed Suhrawardy, concluded his remarks by saying that so long as that particular individual, namely, Mr. Fazlul Huq is alive, there will be no peace in Bengal and hardly any prospect of a stable and useful Government. Sir, Mr. Suhrawardy was in a communicative mood this morning because he is apparently in high spirits that the dissolution of this cabinet is at hand and that he will soon have an opportunity once again of having command of the commerce port folio. Sir, I do not know if the House is aware that Mr. Suhrawardy is a very near and dear Kinsman of mine, but throughout his life his hostility to me has been definitely of a personal character.... I may tell you, Sir, without going into details that his hostility to me has been traditional and hereditary. He has never missed an opportunity of doing me the greatest possible injury, and he has delivered a speech today which is full of venom of

a personal character, and not as a public man or as a leader of a community or of a party”¹⁰³.

On the same day in his address to the House, Fazlul Huq expressed his regret as many of the honourable members were raising allegations against him and his Ministry without keeping in mind the real facts. They were also claiming his resignation from the post of the Chief Minister. He was ready to tender his resignation before the House or the Governor if it was absolutely necessary to save Bengal from the ongoing crisis. In order to avert the crisis, Mr. Huq told the Governor to constitute a National Government in Bengal comprising representatives of all parties or sections of the House. He told in the House: “... I have never been anxious for office and during the last few months I have told His Excellency the Governor to take steps to constitute a National Government in Bengal composed of representatives of all sections of the House. Even day before yesterday I spoke to my friend, the Leader of the European Group to use his influence with all sections of the House to form a National Government. Sir, I may tell the House that even yesterday I told His Excellency – I have written to him – that nothing is nearest my heart than to see a complete Government established in Bengal, and I have gone so far as to say that if at any moment it is found that I am a hindrance to the formation of a complete Government, I will resign the very moment I am asked to do in order that such a Government may be formed..... It is for His Excellency to call upon my resignation and it will be placed in his hands the moment he asks for it”¹⁰⁴. In the House, Fazlul Huq agreed with Mr. Kiran Sankar Roy and said: “I say this with a full sense of my responsibility that I agree entirely with Mr. Kiran Sankar Roy that the present state of things should not be allowed to continue. It is not a satisfactory state of things. At a time when the situation is so serious, when everything is passing to a crisis, it is not the proper method to govern by having a sort of party system of Government and bickering and charges and counter – charges on the floor of the House”¹⁰⁵.

He wanted to remind the Governor and the honourable members of the House: “This is the time, Sir, when the best talents of the country should be harnessed to the common cause of the country. The best talents should sit together, irrespective of party, irrespective of all other affiliations and apply their minds to find out what is the best remedy for the present state of affairs in the country. So far as that is concerned,

as I have said, Sir, I am not saying this only now, but I have been saying this for months and months together that if any time I am a hindrance I am prepared to walk out. I do not want to be a hindrance for a single moment for the formation of a complete cabinet in Bengal. If it means the consummation of the wish of Mr. Suhrawardy that I should be blotted completely out of existence, I am prepared to face my fate..... Wherever I am – in office or not – my services will always be at the disposal of my countrymen in any way that I may be called upon to do so. If there is a complete National Government, I will accept it most willingly, most gladly and most delightfully and give it the best possible assistance in my power”.¹⁰⁶ By delivering this long speech on the floor of the House (on 27 March 1943), Fazlul Huq tried to clarify his position and intention before the esteemed members and by doing this he tried his best to win their confidence and get the much needed support at the time of voting on the cut motion moved by K.A. Hamilton (on 27 March 1943) which was again defeated by a margin of ten votes¹⁰⁷ (99-109). The voting pattern in the House proved that Fazlul Huq still enjoyed the majority in the Assembly.

But on the very next day (i.e. 28 March 1943), Sir J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal asked Fazlul Huq to meet with him and the time was fixed at 7.30 P.M. Mr. Huq accordingly responded to His Excellency and the meeting was taken place on the scheduled date and time which continued upto 9 P.M. Both of them had a long discussion on the formation of a national cabinet and various proposals were put forward by the Governor, some of which Mr. Huq could not accept as they went against his self – respect. His Excellency, the Governor, immediately told him formally to tender his resignation which he was compelled to do. The whole episode was minutely narrated by Fazlul Huq: “.... When I met the Governor at about 7.30 P.M., I found him seated with his Secretary, and when we began the conversation we three were the only persons in that room. After a few minutes’ talk, the Governor asked for my resignation.... I vehemently but respectfully protested, but the Governor told me that he wanted my resignation, as I had made statement in the House to the effect that I would be prepared to tender resignation in order to facilitate the formation of an all-parties cabinet. I said that I still adhered to that position but that was no reason why I should resign without being satisfied about the fulfilment of the conditions for an All-parties Ministry. He, however, insisted on my tendering resignation then and there, and in order to clinch the matter, he brought out a typed

piece of paper purporting to be my letter of resignation to the Governor. I explained to him that if I tender my resignation at that stage, the Budget demands would remain unfinished and the Finance Bill would be sabotaged. But the Governor was still insisting on my signature. I then asked for time to consult my colleagues and my party. But the Governor was obdurate and refused my request. He was determined to have my signature then and there. I still resisted. Upon this the Governor slightly changed his front and assured me that no effect would be given to the letter of resignation immediately, but that he would keep it with himself to be shown to party leader in case there was a possibility of an all-parties cabinet. Upon this assurance given by the Governor, that the letter of resignation would not be made effective unless actually required for the purpose of the formation of an all-parties Cabinet, I signed that letter and handed it over to the Governor. I again reminded him that it was not meant to be treated as a letter of resignation and that no effect should be given to it unless the circumstances arose for which I had consented to sign that previously drafted piece of paper”.¹⁰⁸ The drafted letter of resignation (prepared by the Governor) which was signed by Fazlul Huq under compulsion, ran thus:

Dear Sir John,

Dated, the 28th March, 1943,

Understanding that there is a probability of the formation of a Ministry of representatives of most of the parties in the event of my resignation, I hereby tender my resignation of my office as Minister in the sincere hope that this will prove to be in the best interests of the people of Bengal.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/- A.K. Fazlul Huq¹⁰⁹

But the conspiracy hatched up by the Governor was not over. At about 10 P.M. Mr. Huq was informed that the letter of resignation which he was made to submit, had been accepted by His Excellency.¹¹⁰ Although Mr. Huq accused the Governor for his breach of faith, the latter clarified: “When Huq resigned, his Ministry was tottering. Just before resigning, he admitted to me (as he had done so often before) that the position of the Ministry was quite intolerable – it could only maintain itself by pandering to the wishes of those whose votes kept it in existence. Foremost among these were the Official Congress whose vote had saved the

Government the day before, though they normally abstain from voting. Huq said frankly that, in such circumstances good government was impossible and that where the Ministry was kept in force by the Congress vote, the law and order position was necessarily impossible. I want to make it clear that it is a parody of the facts to suggest (as has been done in certain sections of the press) that I forced out of office a Ministry which fully enjoyed the confidence of the Legislature. I have explained the position existing in the Legislative Assembly. In the Upper House the position of the Ministry was even more precarious. There they had lost to the Muslim League every one of six Muslim seats for which the triennial elections were recently held; and only escaped a vote of censure on the food question by 16 votes to 15.... If Huq had not resigned when he did, a motion of no confidence would have been moved in the Assembly on the 29th or 30th March. I felt, perhaps wrongly, that yet another debate on such a motion resulting in the fall of the Ministry would further embitter the relation between parties to an extent which could make negotiations for a Ministry of all the parties quite impossible.... I felt therefore that Huq's promise to resign, openly expressed in the Assembly, was an opportunity not to be neglected; and I must admit that I urged him pretty firmly to honour it, though "compulsion" is a quite unfair description".¹¹¹ It is to be mentioned here that Fazlul Huq initially formed a Ministry of all parties (except the Muslim League) which did not make any appeal to Sir John Herbert. Mr. Huq said: "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 cooperate in the administration on purely national and patriotic lines. I suspect that such a cabinet did not appeal to Sir John Herbert and he therefore hesitated to agree to the formation of such a cabinet and continued to evade its formation till at last he was compelled to give in. It is well known that the union of Hindus and Moslems and of other communities in a common endeavour for the political advancement of the country does not commend itself to Britishers with imperialistic views. Secondly, the group represented by Sir Nazimuddin was at that time a great political asset in the hands of British Imperialists. It was through this school of politicians that British statesman hoped to fight the Congress and indeed all nationalist activities".¹¹² Here on the question of Fazlul Huq's resignation, it can be said without any doubt that the formation of a Ministry of all the parties was nothing but a plea and the Governor of Bengal would dismiss him by hook or by crook in order to have a pro-British Muslim

League Ministry in Bengal led by Sir Khwaja Nazimuddin. According to scholar Rajmohan Gandhi, “Perhaps he was told that he would be dismissed if he did not resign”.¹¹³

But Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy was not at all happy at the way the Governor handled the situation and dismissed Fazlul Huq from his post. He wrote to Herbert: “.... I would not like you to think that I am at all happy at the way that this matter has been handled.... I am gravely disturbed, even now, at the possibility that we may have trouble in the House of Commons over his resignation”.¹¹⁴ The Viceroy also expressed his grievances in his letter to Leopold C.M.S. Amery, the Secretary of State for India: “ I am very disturbed about this business of Herbert and his Ministry. I dare say that he will get of it more lightly than he might for the Muslim League detest Huq, and their anxiety to discredit him will divert attention a little from the Governor, but I am, I must say, dismayed at the light hearted manner in which Herbert has handled this situation. I cannot imagine greater folly than to present some one of the type of Huq, with a draft letter of resignation, had him off from consulting his colleagues and his party on the ground that they will be certain to dissuade him from signing it; make him sign it as a result of an hour and a half’s conversation, and all this with the Budget not yet through, and with full knowledge of the instability of Huq, and the risk that even if he had been a willing signatory of the letter of resignation he might well have changed his mind overnight.... I am sure it is most dangerous for Governors to play politics, even if they are of outstanding capacity, and I bear that poor Herbert can hardly claim to be of the latter category.... though of course I accept the necessity for protecting his position and saving his face”.¹¹⁵ Herbert on the other hand, tried to defend his course of action: “If Huq managed to scrape through the session he would never have resigned, but would have continued his tricks, evasions, and misgovernment until again confronted with the Legislature.....”¹¹⁶ Perhaps he had been preceded in 1942 by the Governor of Sind who dislodged the non-League Muslim Prime Minister on the ground that the existing ministry no longer ‘possessed’ his confidence and wanted to have the Muslim League in power.

On the next day (i.e. 29 March 1943) after the forced resignation of Fazlul Huq, the House met on to discuss about the issue of his resignation. Nalinakshya

Sanyal, an honourable member of House, asked Mr. Huq about the authenticity of the news of his resignation. Disdainfully he told the House that it was true. Syed Naushar Ali, the then Speaker of the House (as he took over the charge after the resignation of Sir M. Azizul Huque who was in that post from 1937 to 1942) judged the situation and gave the ruling that as Mr. Fazlul Huq, the Chief Minister had resigned and his resignation had been accepted by the Governor, no business in the House could be transacted until a new Ministry was formed.¹¹⁷ In pursuance of the Speaker's ruling the question immediately arose in the House about the fate of the other members of Mr. Huq's Cabinet regarding which the Speaker gave his ruling that the Ministry was "factus officio" and therefore, after the resignation of their Leader, the Ministers would not be in a position to function and move the 'Budget Demands'. So the Assembly was adjourned by the Speaker for a fortnight.

Immediately after this announcement, a meeting of the Progressive Coalition Party (PCP) was convened in the Committee Room of the Assembly to review the constitutional position of the Ministry. In the evening another meeting of the Party was held at the house of the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca in which the Party leaders reiterated their confidence on Fazlul Huq's leadership and assured him to lend their support in further course of action and in continuing party activities. Side by side, Hossain Sarkar and Giasuddin Ahmed, Joint Secretaries of the KPP Parliamentary Party, convened a meeting of the Party at 4, Creek Row, on 30 March 1943 at 9 A.M. to make an overall assessment of the situation in which the Party members decided to organize a protest meeting on the same day at 5.30 P.M. at the Sraddhananda Park. Around seventy members of the Bengal Legislature belonging to the PCP gave their consent to be the conveners of the said meeting where Fazlul Huq and other leaders severely criticized and condemned the arbitrary actions of the Governor and demanded his removal.¹¹⁸ But Fazlul Huq and his teammates at that time were not 'strong' enough and 'capable' of posing a great challenge against the hostile Governor of Bengal. "Samsuddin Ahmed was 'superficial but clever and intelligent'. Hashem Ali, a man of mediocre abilityworked hard, but he could not go beyond certain limits'. Abdul Karim 'was old but entirely honest'. He had 'wit and good sense', but his 'brain often failed'. On the whole, Huq's team was not capable of having its own way against a hostile Governor and 'a reactionary, unsympathetic and unresponsive bureaucracy'.... Nazimuddin, supported by about 40 Muslim League M.L.A.s and all

European M.L.A.s, was waiting in the wing”.^{118a} It is to be mentioned here that the Governor was not at all happy to see two of the members of Fazlul Huq’s Cabinet (namely Mr. Santosh Kumar Basu and Mr. Pramatha Nath Banerjee) who belonged to the Forward Bloc and whose leader (i.e. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose) was trying to get the support of the enemies of the British in driving them out from the soil of India.

On the last day of March (i.e. 31 March 1943), Fazlul had a brief interview with H.E. the Governor, Sir John Herbert which was followed by his seven Ministers who held a discussion with him to find a way out of this ministerial deadlock. Like the Speaker, the Governor also reiterated the fact that the resignation of Fazlul Huq led to the dissolution of the Council of Ministers and they have lost their right to be in their ministerial office any more. They protested against this stance of the Governor as Fazlul Huq still commanded to have a majority in the Assembly. As this fact was completely ignored by the Governor, the suspension of the Assembly, according to them, would be unconstitutional. Two prominent members of the Cabinet (i.e. Khan Bahadur Abdul Karim of the PCP and Upendra Nath Burman of the Scheduled Caste) were reported to have tendered their resignation.¹¹⁹ The other Ministers also went in that line and formally tendered their resignations as well, which the Governor accepted.¹²⁰ *The Gazette* also announced the acceptance by the Governor of the resignation of A.K. Fazlul Huq with effect from March 29, and the other ministers from March 31, 1943’.¹²¹ By quickly accepting the resignations, the Governor brought into force the provision of Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 and took in his hands the reins of administration of the province. This Section of the Act also authorized him (H.E.) to make an estimate of expenditure for 1943-44. Meanwhile, Khwaja Nazimuddin along with H.S. Suhrawardy met the Governor and had a long discussion probably on the existing political crisis and the formation of a new ministry. He, according to the Governor, claimed on 5 April 1943 to have the support of 144 members (in a House of the effective strength of 202) consisting of 90 Muslims (the Governor considered that the figure might ‘be optimistic as to about 10’), 24 Scheduled Castes, 25 Europeans, 2 Anglo-Indians and 3 Unattached members. Although the Governor at that point of time, was not convinced enough (as Nazimuddin was not to be supported by the Caste Hindus and the Bose Group of the Congress and it would be difficult for him to form a ‘stable’ Ministry), he asked for “his assistance the formation of a stable Ministry; as broad-based as possible”.¹²² The

then political situation of Bengal was clearly reflected in an article published in *The Statesman* under the heading 'Bengal under Section 93' and therein it was highlighted: "... On the last day of the financial year, March 31, the Governor found himself with no Ministry and with no early probability of one. Negotiation and discussion between party leaders had discovered no way to an all-parties or many parties coalition on which a Ministry would be firmly based. Normally the remedy for such a situation is a general election and a new legislature. But this time is not eminently suitable for the stir and turmoil of an election in a province that is near the war front, nor at best is a general election a quick remedy. Even were an election advisable, the province must have some Government until it is over. Therefore the Governor has felt obliged to fall back on Section 93 of the Government of India Act as an immediate resource. We believe him that he has done so reluctantly and hopes soon to be able to revoke his decision. When a Ministry can be found that commands the confidence of the Legislature government through parliamentary institutions will be restored. If that is not possible the only way of getting rid of government by section 93 is to discover by a general election what the province wants. For the present, Ministers disappear, the Legislature is suspended, the Governor exercises their functions".¹²³

When the BPML leaders held regular meetings in the Committee Room of the Assembly House regarding their strength and the formation of a new ministry, the Progressive Coalition Party and its 107 members did not lose their hopes and reaffirmed their confidence in Fazlul Huq in a statement and asked him to hand over it to the Governor of Bengal.¹²⁴ Immediately, Fazlul Huq made a press release on the existing Constitutional crisis: "Bengal today is faced with a Constitutional crisis. The public are fully aware of the events which led to it. I need not refer to them in this statement. It has been suggested that an all-parties' Government should be immediately established to meet the vital problems facing the province at the present moment. In the opinion of the Progressive Coalition Party: "..... the Ministry should be representatives of all groups and parties in the Legislature under a Chief Minister acceptable to either the individuals or groups".¹²⁵ On pointing out the present problems of the province, he stated: "..... the most pressing problem in Bengal today is that of food and other essential commodities and no single party can by itself hope to offer an effective solution to the problem. This is one of the reasons why all parties

and groups without a single exception should unite to cooperate in the promotion of the security and welfare of the province and its people. The second item of the programme of such a representative Ministry would be a satisfactory settlement of the problem of internal security and civil defence. The third problem is that of the enjoyment of the largest possible amount of civil liberties by the people even in the present difficult conditions. This will require re-examination of the question of political prisoners and the evolution of a formula which will reconcile the question of individual liberty with provincial security".¹²⁶

But all these actions and statements on the part of Fazlul Huq, the PCP and KPP bore no tangible result and had no impact on the course of action of H.E. the Governor, John Herbert who on 13 April 1943 allowed and invited Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin to form a new ministry with members from the Muslim League only. Nazimuddin gladly accepted the Governor's invitation and immediately on the same day, extended his invitation to the Hindu members of the Legislature to send their representatives in forming a new, strong and stable ministry. On 18 April he convened a meeting of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party to prepare the list of ministers and it was decided that the selected list of ministers very soon would be handed over to the Governor. Fazlul Huq on the other hand, made a last attempt and he (as the leader of the PCP) along with Shamsuddin Ahmed (as the leader of the KPP), sent a telegram to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 21 April 1943 requesting him to continue the Governor's rule in Bengal till an All-Parties Government was formed in the province. But the 'dying groans' of Fazlul Huq and his associates went in vain as the Governor soon decided to withdraw his rule in order to install a new Ministry in Bengal under the leadership of Nazimuddin which was sworn in office on 24 April 1943. The removal of Fazlul Huq and the installation of Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin as the Chief Minister of Bengal, posed a serious blow to the political career of the *Sher-e-Bengla* who considered his dismissal as 'the death of my political hopes in Bengal'.¹²⁷ His arch rival, the League Supremo, who wanted his removal and the formation of a League-led Ministry in Bengal, became very much happy with this political change and few days later coined his feeling of satisfaction and relief at the Delhi session of the AIML (in April 1943) where Jinnah declared: "... to-day Fazlul Huq is no more, and I hope for the rest of his life he will be no more.... He has met his Waterloo".¹²⁸ Not only that, in the Delhi session, the prominent Leaguers

demonstrated on the dais a map of Pakistan which they probably did in order to celebrate the installation of the League Ministry in Bengal.¹²⁹ Thus the journey of Fazlul Huq's 15 months old Second Coalition Ministry came to an end and in its place, Nazimuddin's 'Bengal Coalition' (as it was called), began to roll forward but the new Ministry within a few days had to face the onslaught and severity of the great Bengal Famine and the move for a 'united and independent Bengal'(initiated by Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim) .

Notes and References:

1. Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 December 1941, Governor Fortnightly Report (GFR), L/P & J/5/148; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj, Vol. II (1940-43)*, Dhaka, 1999, pp. 125-126.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Statesman*, 14 December 1941.
5. *Star of India*, 26 January 1937, p. 5; *ibid.*, 29 January 1937, p.1; see also, *ibid.*, 30 January 1937, p. 1.
6. Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 January 1942, Confidential Report No.24; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 128.
7. Z.H. Zaidi (ed.), *Jinnah – Ispahani Correspondence, 1936-1948*, Karachi, 1976, p. 228.
8. *Azad*, 3 January 1942.
9. Herbert to Linlithgow, 22 January 1942, Report No.1; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 130.
10. Raghbir Ahsan to Jinnah, 27 March 1942, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 204, pp. 303-304.
11. *Star of India*, 26 January 1942, p. 2.
12. *Ibid.*, 22 January 1942, p. 5; *ibid.*, 23 January 1942, p. 4; see also, Herbert to Linlithgow, 22 January 1942, Report No.1, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 130.
13. It was noticed that the students ‘stood naked at the door and windows of the college’. See, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 152.
14. Government of Bengal, Home Political File 96/42; cited in Shila Sen, *ibid.*
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