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Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics in the years before the Second Partition of Bengal (1947)

On 24 April 1943, H.E. the Governor Sir John Herbert with the concurrence of the Viceroy, issued a proclamation by which he revoked the provision of Section 93 and invited the leader of the Muslim League Assembly Party, Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin to form a new ministry. The aspirant Nazimuddin who made constant effort to collect support in order to form a new ministry, ultimately managed to have the support of 140 members in the Bengal Assembly (consisting of 250 members). On the other hand, the Opposition (led by Fazlul Huq) had 108 members. Following the dismissal of the Second Huq Ministry, a large number of Muslim M.L.A.s thought it expedient to cross the floor and join the League because of Governor's inclination towards Nazimuddin whom he invited to form a new ministry. As they flocked towards the League, the strength of the League Parliamentary Party rose from 40 to 79. Abul Mansur Ahmed, an eminent journalist of those times, narrated this trend in Muslim politics in his own fashion that 'everyone had formed the impression that the political character of the Muslim Legislators was such that whoever formed a ministry the majority would join him'¹ which could be applicable to many of the Hindu members of the House as well. Nazimuddin got full support of the European Group consisting of 25 members in the Assembly. Besides, he had been able to win the confidence of the Anglo-Indians and a section of the Scheduled Caste and a few other members of the Assembly. The party-wise positions in the Assembly were given in the Table given below²:

Table VI.1: Party-wise Positions in the Bengal Assembly

Government Supporters			Opposition		
Sl. No.	Party/Group	Party Strength	Sl. No.	Party/Group	Party Strength
1	Muslim League	79	1	Progressive Party	24
2	Bengal Swarajya Party	05	2	Krishak Praja Party	17
3	Scheduled Caste Party	20	3	Nationalists	13
4	European Group	25	4	Congress (Official)	25
5	Labour Party	02	5	Congress (Bose Group)	19
6	Independent Party	04	6	Indian Christian	01
7	Indian Christian	01	7	Independent	01
8	Anglo-Indian	04	8	Scheduled Castes	08
	Total	140			108

*One seat was vacant. The Speaker was not included.

Having been supported by 140 members of the Assembly, Nazimuddin on that very day came forward to form a new ministry which came to be known as the 'Bengal Coalition'. He formed a 13 member ministry, of whom 7 including the Premier were Muslims and 6 were Hindus. It should be mentioned here that whereas Fazlul Huq was forced to run the Ministry with only 8 (later 7) Ministers and 1 Parliamentary Secretary and his repeated requests to include an additional person in the Cabinet were turned down by the Governor, Nazimuddin was allowed to have as many as 13 Ministers, 13 Parliamentary Secretaries and 4 Whips³ from the beginning. Although 6 Hindu members (3 Caste Hindu and 3 Scheduled Caste) were included in the Ministry in order to maintain communal parity, it was very difficult to serve the purpose of the Hindu community as because both the sections of the Bengal Provincial Congress ('Official' and 'Bose Group') who mainly represented the Hindu interests, decided to stay outside the Ministry. In his Cabinet, Nazimuddin also did not include any Hindu Mahasabha representative (which was quite expected). A list of the Cabinet members along with their respective portfolios, are reflected in the Table given below:

Table VI. 2: **Allotment of Portfolios to the Members of the Cabinet of Nazimuddin**

Sl. No.	Name	Category	Portfolio
1.	Khwaja Nazimuddin	Muslim	Chief Minister; Home and Defence
2.	Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy	Muslim	Civil Supply
3.	Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan	Muslim	Education
4.	Khan Bahadur Syed Moazzemuddin Hossain	Muslim	Agriculture and Rural Development
5.	Nawab Mosharraf Hossain	Muslim	Judiciary and Administration
6.	Khwaja Shahabuddin	Muslim	Commerce, Labour and Industries
7.	Khan Bahadur Jalaluddin Ahmad	Muslim	Public Health and Local Self-government
8.	Tulsicharan Goswami	Caste Hindu	Finance
9.	Baroda Prasanna Pain	Caste Hindu	Works and Transport
10.	Tarakanath Mukherjee	Caste Hindu	Revenue and Relief
11.	Premhari Barma	Scheduled Caste	Forest and Excise
12.	Pulin Bihari Mallick	Scheduled Caste	Publicity
13.	Jogendra Nath Mondal	Scheduled Caste	Co-operative, Credit and Rural Indebtedness

Source: Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704 – 1971*, Vol. One, p. 211.

Out of these seven Muslim ministers two namely, Khwaja Nazimuddin and his brother Khwaja Shahabuddin (his inclusion incurred the displeasure of many within the League) and one Parliamentary Secretary namely, Khwaja Nasrullah belonged to the Nawab family of Dacca.⁴ This Bengal Coalition Ministry also included many other prominent Nawabs, big Zamindars, tea magnates, landed aristocracies, rich peasants and elites who were mostly opportunists and joined the Cabinet in order to fulfil their personal interests or ‘Class’ interests. So the common people of Bengal were sceptical about this League-led Ministry.

As soon as the installation of the Muslim League Ministry, there arose ‘a low-key rivalry’ on the issue of Parliamentary leadership between Khwaja Nazimuddin

and H.S. Suhrawardy (who was the Secretary of the BPML from 1937 to 1943 and was instrumental in launching anti-Huq campaigns in Bengal). In the newly formed Cabinet, Suhrawardy was the Civil Supplies Minister under Nazimuddin and he was very prominent and visible member of the 'Calcutta Clique' in the League as opposed to the 'Dhaka Clique' led by Nazimuddin. In spite of his valiant effort in ousting Fazlul Huq's Progressive Coalition Ministry, Suhrawardy's position was of a Deputy Leader (along with Khan Bahadur Syed Moazzemuddin Hossain) under Nazimuddin and he was not included in the Working Committee of the AIML by Jinnah. In 1943 he decided to abdicate the post of the Secretary of the BPML as he had to abide by the decision of the League High Command that that the 'persons holding Parliamentary offices like Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries would not be entitled to hold any office of the League organization'.⁵ Being the owner of the largest zamindari in East Bengal and having many political clients spread over this region, the Khwajas commanded considerable influence over the BPML. They were more strengthened because of unreserved support and patronage they had received from the League High Command which also maintained a very good relationship with the non-Bengali businessmen in Calcutta, the House of the Ispahanis who looked after the party fund. All these landed aristocracies and business tycoons tried to have their command over the Party organization by placing their own candidate in the Party Secretaryship. Maulana Akram Khan who was the supporter and admirer of the Khwaja group and the owner of the solitary Bengali daily of the province called the *Azad*, was at that time the President of the BPML. The Khwaja group nominated Abul Quasim who hailed from Satkhira in the district of Khulna. At a meeting of the reconstituted Council of the BPML which was held in Calcutta on 6-7 November 1943, Suhrawardy's own candidate and remote relative Abul Hashim was elected as the new Secretary of the BPML by defeating Abul Quasim. Although the nominee of the Khwajas was defeated in the election to the Party Secretaryship, their allies Maulana Akram Khan and Hasan Ispahani were re-elected as President and Treasurer, respectively.⁶ So both these groups had their men posted at different ranks and as a result there was disbelief and distrust amongst these two groups which was reflected in the writings of Abul Hashim, the newly elected Secretary of BPML (1943-47) who wrote in his memoir that 'at every session of the Assembly under the Nazimuddin Ministry, conspiratorial moves to bring it down took place, the rumour mill was set in motion to create distrust, and bribery in cash was a part of routine floor

management'.⁷ Hashim found himself in a difficult situation to do his routine works in the face of opposition of the Khwaja group as he was in favour of establishing the supremacy of the Party over the Parliamentary wing which according to him, was 'practically running a parallel show'. The conflicts between the Suhrawardy – Hashim and the Khwaja groups may be explained not merely as a clash between the East and West Bengal (as Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim came from West Bengal and their counterpart Nazimuddin belonged to East Bengal) or a rivalry for 'power' within the same social category, but more as a 'struggle between social strata – the rising middle-class vs. the landed oligarchy or, in other words, people vs. Palace',⁸ or the so-called Leftist (as Abul Hashim had socialist leanings) vs. Rightist struggle within the BPML which gradually became 'a fight between democracy and oligarchy'.⁹

Apart from organizational problems within the BPML, the most serious challenge that the Nazimuddin Ministry had to face immediately after its installation was the horrendous Bengal famine and the administration failed disastrously to tackle the situation. At the beginning of 1943, most of the South-East Asian countries including Burma (which exported huge quantity of rice to India) were occupied by the Japanese Army and it was apprehended that at any point of time, Bengal would join in that list. As part of the 'Denial Policy', the British Government removed rice and paddy from the 'dangerous zone' (i.e. those districts of Bengal which were likely to be seized first by the Japanese invaders), country boats, the most common means of transport in rural Bengal, were systematically destroyed to paralyze river communications along with a huge number of steamers and trains which severely affected the food supply in Bengal. The over-all situation was further aggravated by 'inflation, rise of prices of necessary commodities and hoarding being usually consequent upon the war'.¹⁰ Highlighting the factors which might account for the Bengal famine of 1943, *The Statesman* wrote on 23 September 1943: "Loss of imports from Burma is a big factor no doubt; the rapid growth of population and sudden influx of a very large number of men might have caused internal stresses, but they are just like a drop in the ocean. Moreover they did not happen in a day. The largest factor had outstandingly been a shameful lack of foresight and planning capacity of India's own civil government, Central and Provincial". Mr. V.V. Kalikar said in the Council of State on 20 November 1943 that 'neither the Bengal Government, nor the Secretary of State for India, nor the Government of India detected famine in Bengal in proper

time to avert the tragedy. It was an administrative scandal of the first magnitude'.¹¹ Same kind of interpretation on the Bengal famine was put forward by the noted historian Prof. Ayesha Jalal who wrote: "By May 1943, the spectre of famine was stalking the land, caused as much by a failure to organize adequate imports and proper distribution – mainly the Government's responsibility and hence something that could be blamed upon Nazimuddin's Ministry – as by an actual shortage of food. As Minister for Civil Supplies Suhrawardy had in charge of distributing food, and he was better at distributing patronage to the greedy than food to the hungry".¹² Suhrawardy was held responsible as he 'did little to alleviate it and possibly aggravated it by favouring his crony, Ispahani, as a government agent for procurement of food grains'¹³ and the Ispahani Co. used the opportunity to earn huge profits. The Nazimuddin Government also failed to pursue a proper and effective policy of import along with a systematic and genuine distribution of rice. According to Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal, "In this matter of food supplies and other respects, Nazimuddin has been definitely weak in controlling his colleagues and imposing coordination on them".¹⁴ As a result, the prices of food grains reached the levels at which it was beyond the capacity of the poor masses of Bengal to procure their food requirements. While in March 1943, the price of rice was Rs.15/16 per maund, it jumped up and rose upto Rs.30/40 per maund in May 1943.¹⁵ The following Table indicates the upward trend of price of rice in Calcutta and other areas in Bengal between March and May 1943.

Table VI. 3: Upward Trend of Price of Rice in Bengal from March to May 1943

Date	Price (per maund) Rs. Anna
3 March 1943	15 – 00
17 March 1943	19 – 00
28 March 1943	22 – 00
5 April 1943	21 – 00
26 April 1943	21 – 00
3 May 1943	21 – 00
10 May 1943	25 – 00
17 May 1943	30 – 00

Source: *Government of Bengal, Famine Enquiry Commission Report, Part I* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 40.

According to J.N. Uppal, a reputed scholar, Bengal had become ‘a food-grain speculators’ paradise’ where “the amount of unusual profits, made on the buying and selling of rice during 1943, was 150 crores” (estimated by the Famine Enquiry Commission).^{15a} He wrote: “It was commonly believed that some of the commercial firms concerned with food grains business notorious for shady practices enjoyed his (the minister of Civil Supplies Suhrawardy’s) patronage”.^{15b} Much of the wholesale trade and some retail trade in essential commodities (including the food-grains) were in the hands of the Marwaris. Although there were some Bengali hoarders and black-marketeers, the most vicious wolves that killed on the lives of the people were the non-Bengali compradors that mostly controlled the trade at that time. Along with the shortage of food-grains, there was also ‘cloth famine’ which according to Richard Gardner Casey (an Australian who served during World War II in Cairo, held a seat in the British Cabinet and became the Governor of Bengal on and from 22 January 1944), was ‘in the hiding in the hands of the Marwaris’ and at the same time, ‘black marketing was rampant’ with the possible indulgence and connivance of a Minister.¹⁶ Many contemporary Bengali intellectuals also gave a pen picture of that disastrous event in their writings, for example, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay’s *Ashani Sanket*, Bhabani Sen’s *Bhanganer Mukhe Bangla* and Tara Shankar Banerjee’s novel *Manwantar* etc. Many plays like *Nabanna*, *Main Bhuka Hun*, *Jaban bandi*, *Homeopathy* etc. were written highlighting the distressing condition of the famine – stricken people. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, also wrote a book on this famine entitled *Panchasher Manwantar* (Fifty’s Famine) in which he accused the Muslim League Ministry led by Nazimuddin, especially the Civil Supplies Department and Suhrawardy, the concerned Minister-in-Charge, as being mainly responsible for the catastrophe. But the Muslim League on the other hand, completely denied its responsibility and put the blame entirely on the previous ministry, i.e. ‘Syama – Huq’ Ministry.

Whoever might be responsible for the great Bengal famine of 1943, it took the toll of millions of people. According to the Reports of Famine Enquiry Commission (which was formed under the presidentship of Sir John Woodhead and better known as Woodhead Committee Report), 1-5 million people died in this famine. But according to Prof. Amartya Sen, “.... the Commission’s own method of calculation does lead to a figure around three million deaths.....”¹⁷ Bhabani Sen, a noted scholar,

in his book entitled *Bhanganer Mukhe Bangla* estimated that 3.5 million people died in this famine and it affected severely the lives of 20 million out of 60 million (i.e. 1/3rd) people of this province.¹⁸ He mentioned that in the famine – affected areas, 10 per cent of the total population or an estimated 1.2 million to 1.5 million men, women and children completely turned into beggars.¹⁹ At the same time, another 6 million people, including 2.7 million land-labourers, 1.5 million poor peasants, 1.5 million indigenous industrial workers and 2500 poor school teachers had to bear the same fate.²⁰ Starvation in the districts was rapidly increasing and huge number of beggars were boarding trains (without tickets) in search of a suitable place for food and shelter.^{20a}

In this disastrous situation, the short July session of the newly installed Nazimuddin Ministry began on 5 July 1943 with the statement of Suhrawardy, the Minister of Civil Supplies Department on the food situation in Bengal and the anti-hoarding campaign throughout the province. But the concerned Minister did not come forward to face the attacks from the Opposition in the House and his explanation was placed before the House by the Chief Minister himself. On the same day, Fazlul Huq, the former Chief Minister and now the Leader of the Opposition, took the opportunity to express before the House, the circumstances leading to his resignation from the Cabinet. He told that he did so as he got the impression that H.E. the Governor would form an all-parties Cabinet taking representatives of most of the parties – the promise which was deliberately forgotten by Sir J.A. Herbert, the honourable Governor of Bengal.²¹ Mr. Huq took ‘the occasion to continue his personal attacks’ upon the Governor.^{21a} In his long speech Fazlul 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 co-operate 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 statesmen hoped to fight the Congress and indeed all nationalist activities”.^{21b} In that July session apart from food crisis, the honourable members of the Assembly participated (at the floor of the House) in serious debates on various issues like the question of release of political prisoners, the Midnapore affairs, budgetary allocation of grants etc. In the Budget session, Sri Tulsi Charan Goswami, the new Finance Minister of Nazimuddin, placed before the House the demands for grants for the year 1943-44 which was opposed by Syama Prasad Mookerjee (as he raised a point of order), the former Finance Minister on the ground that the new Cabinet of Nazimuddin would have to place fresh demands for grants for the consideration of the House. The honourable Speaker of the House accepted and supported his argument and likely gave his ruling on this issue on 7 July 1943.²² The latter half of the July session became a hotbed of exciting debate on the Bengal famine and not only the honourable members sitting on the Opposition bench (like Fazlul Huq, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and so on) but also some members of the Government bench (the Leaguers) severely criticized the Government for its failure in tackling the serious food crisis in Bengal.²³ The Oppositions moved 19 special motions on food shortage out of which 9 were accepted for discussion in the House.^{23a} On July 1943 Syama Prasad Mookerjee participated in the debate on the ‘food situation in Bengal’ and completely blamed the new Ministry under Nazimuddin for its incompetence, corruption and unsympathetic handling of the disaster situation and particularly accused H.S. Suhrawardy, the Minister of Civil Supplies. He said: “..... In April Mr. Suhrawardy took office as Minister of Civil Supplies. I have scrutinised the numerous statements couched in beautiful language which were issued by him or on behalf of the new ministry. God knows why this attempt was made by him to play a colossal hoax on the unfortunate people of Bengal, namely, to declare that there was really no shortage of foodstuffs, no shortage of rice in Bengal and all that had happened was that there was mal-distribution and small hoarders, private consumers and agriculturists were mainly responsible for the present deplorable state of affairs..... Nonsense is an epithet which applies to the Civil Supply Minister because he is to-day entirely devoid of sense, and if that means nonsense, he is nonsense personified....”²⁴ In his firing speech he attacked the British Government’s anti-people ‘Policy of Denial’ in the name of war, stocking and hoarding of food-grains by a firm owned by Ispahani, a patron of the League. In the line of Syama Prasad, Fazlul Huq also told the House that the Government must bear the brunt of the suffering of the

famine-stricken people of Bengal. He accused that “The Ministers will not be saved, unless Providence in His Mercy deems it fit to forgive their sins Someday, sooner or later, they will be humbled to the dust.”²⁵ All these attacks and criticisms created tremendous impact and repercussion inside and outside the Bengal Assembly.

In this critical situation, a good number of people and N.G.O.s did not forget their responsibilities and came forward to assist the victims of this catastrophe. Consequently, several official and non-official relief agencies became very active in providing relief to the hungry destitute. The most important non-official relief agency was the Bengal Relief Committee and its leading members were Sri Badridas Goenka (President), Syama Prasad Mookerjee (Vice President), Dr. B.C. Roy, B. Kanoria (Secretary) etc. who engaged themselves in supplying relief to the hungry people of Bengal. Like the Bengal Relief Committee, the other noticeable non-official relief organizations were the Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Marwari Relief Society, Mayor’s Relief Fund, Jana Raksha Samity, Daridra Bandhab Bhandar etc. which also rendered their services in the form of opening gruel kitchens (*Langar Khana*) and by providing cheap grain to the distressed. Syama Prasad also took an all-out drive in organizing relief activities through the Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee and opened up a large number of relief canteens in different parts of Bengal. Syama Prasad Mookerjee showed his superb organization skill and practical sense in manoeuvring relief activities in different parts of Bengal through the Bengal Relief Committee and the Hindu Mahasabha Relief Committee. On 29 July 1943 he wrote a letter to H.S. Suhrawardy in which he adumbrated two-fold scheme of relief work – i) supply of food stuff at a reduced rate to 40,000 people and ii) free kitchens for 16,000 people. Suhrawardy immediately responded to his suggestion and assured Syama Prasad about government supply for the speedy implementation of the schemes²⁶ and later tried to provide one time meals through gruel kitchen (*Langar Khana*) to the famine-victims in Calcutta. The Bengal unit of the Communist Party of India also came forward in rendering their services by conducting relief work through the People’s Relief Committee (from September 1943) and by giving a cultural drive through the Anti-Fascist Writers’ and Artists’ Association, the members of which began to highlight the sufferings of the famine-affected people by staging different dramas on the Bengal famine.

The Nazimuddin Ministry also tried to tackle the situation in its own way. The government decided to control the sale of rice and paddy in Calcutta at fixed price from 28 August 1943 which failed to improve the condition and further adversely affected the food situation as food grains ceased to exist in the open market.²⁷ For the present food crisis, J.A. Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal put the blame on earlier Huq Ministry and certified the present (Nazimuddin) Ministry's willingness to combat the situation. He wrote: "The Huq Ministry made no real effort as a Ministry to tackle food. The most that can be said is that they allowed the officials to try to carry on, although it cannot be said that they gave effective support. The present Ministry is keen enough but practically the entire Press is against them, will give them no credit for what they do and spreads despondency and panic with a view to discrediting the Ministry and Government (including the Central Government)".²⁸ At the same time he predicted: "... I cannot foresee a time when Bengal will be wholly rid of its rice difficulties so long as H.E. India is not threatened as a single unit for purposes of rice-supplies and so long as the normal trade channels of supply have not been fully restored".²⁹ Whatever might be the Governor's analysis and observation, the leaders of the Opposition parties 'fiercely attacked the Nazimuddin Ministry for incompetence, corruption and unsympathetic handling of the disaster situation' which intensified and added excitement to the September session (of 1943) of the House. During the general discussion of the budget, the food situation naturally figured prominently and the Opposition bench (the majority of whom were from East Bengal) referred to the mounting death toll in Calcutta and mofussil areas due to starvation. At the floor of the House, Narendranath Dasgupta alleged that in the market of Patuakhali, the boys and girls were sold at the rate of Rs.5 to 40.³⁰ Abdul Wahab, the honourable member, told the House that the people of the rural areas did not have the food grains and they were dying like insects.³¹ Another member Hemaprabha Majumdar delivered an emotional and sensational speech. She told that the Civil Supplies Minister was carrying on a persistent propaganda that there was actually no shortage of food. She argued that if it was so, why the skeletons were being found in the streets and why the starving people were groaning for food in the nooks and corners of Calcutta.³² According to Fazlul Huq, this accursed government would have to leave having the curse of two crores people of Bengal on its head.³³ At the floor of the House, Syama Prasad Mookerjee gave a firing speech and moved a Special Motion on 'Food Situation in Bengal' on 17 September 1943 in which he accused the

Nazimuddin Ministry for being mainly responsible for ‘a gradual deterioration of the situation leading to appalling famine conditions now prevalent in all parts of the province..... The Ministry has failed to discharge the elementary responsibility of any civilised Government by its failure to save human lives and to procure for the people essential commodities for their bare existence’.³⁴ During this debate, the Opposition staged a walk-out on 22 September 1943 as a protest against the decision of the honourable Speaker not to allow Fazlul Huq, the Leader of the Opposition, to express his opinion on a speech of H.S. Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister on the food situation.³⁵ Against this motion, H.S. Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister, in his speech tried to defend the government, justify the food policy, justify the role of Messers Ispahani and Company and asserted that there was no political connection between the firm and the Ministry.³⁶ But his speech failed to impress even his own party members. As the Nazimuddin Ministry still enjoyed the support of the European Group under David Hendry, it succeeded in defeating the Special Motion (moved by Syama Prasad) condemning the Ministry’s handling of the food situation by 128 to 88 votes.³⁷ Attempts were made on two occasions by a group of famine victims to organize demonstrations near the Assembly chamber on 24 and 27 September 1943. According to the government report, the Opposition leaders like Fazlul Huq and Syama Prasad, made the blueprint for these demonstrations.³⁸ Considering the hardships of the famine victims and facing severe criticisms from all corners, the Government of India decided to take over the responsibility of providing food for greater Calcutta with a population of about 45,00,000 and with consumption quantity of 60,000 tons of food grains per month.³⁹ H.S. Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister, welcomed this decision and at the same time argued that the whole of the greater Calcutta region as well as important towns such as Dacca, Chittagong, Darjeeling, Kurseang etc. should be brought under the rationing scheme. It practically came into effect on 31 January 1944 in Calcutta and in South Suburban, Garden Reach, Tollygunj, Howrah and Bally-Belur municipalities.⁴⁰ But all these steps to a great extent, failed to get the expected results as it is evident from the speech of the acting Governor T.G. Rutherford (who finally took over the charge from John Herbert on 18 October 1943): “.... The retailers in controlled shops played a dirty game of keeping back portions of their supply received from Government for sale at the back door at enhanced prices. The corrupt officers both in villages and towns, intent on defeating government’s efforts to distribute what food there was at reasonable

prices”.⁴¹ In a meeting of the Council of the AIML in November 1943, Nazimuddin, the Bengal Premier, asserted that only an independent Bengal (free from the control of the Centre), could solve such a crisis. He brought allegations against the Central Government that it had failed to persuade the autonomous provinces to part with surplus foodstuffs for Bengal. His argument was that if Bengal would have been completely free from the control of the Centre, it would have more effective control over transport and also its economic resources to cope with any kind severity such as famine. Thus he put emphasis on the establishment of ‘independent sovereign states’ (which was also supported by Liaquat Ali Khan) in the areas where the Muslims constituted majority.⁴² On the other hand, Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy was not at all pleased with the Nazimuddin Ministry for its failure in facing the Bengal famine. According to him, the Nazimuddin Ministry did not have either the intention or the ability ‘to get down to things’ over the famine⁴³ which led the Viceroy to urge (in January 1944) His Majesty’s Government “to dismiss the League-controlled Ministry and impose British rule, but Churchill and Amery vetoed the proposal: they did not want to weaken the League which had blocked the advance of the seditious Congress”.^{43a}

Although the Nazimuddin Ministry succeeded in remaining in power, it lost people’s confidence because of huge death tolls due to famine. The next Budget Session which commenced in February 1944 also became very exciting, sensational and eventful as the opposition members of the House severely criticized the government for its failure in tackling the famine situation in Bengal. In the February session, discussion was made on the food policy of the Government, particularly the appointment of some Calcutta merchants as the chief agents to buy paddy and rice. Fazlul Huq, the Leader of the Opposition, took this opportunity to accuse the Nazimuddin Ministry and particularly H.S. Suhrawardy, the Civil Supplies Minister. At that time Mr. Huq was very ill. But discarding the physician’s advice, he went to the House and sought the Speaker’s permission to read out his written address sitting on the chair. The Speaker Nausher Ali himself did not have any objection in this matter. But Fazlur Rahman, a representative from the Dacca University raised his objection against his wishes and told the House that it would be a ‘bad precedent’ if Fazlul Huq was permitted in doing so.⁴⁴ Ultimately Mr. Huq was compelled to deliver his second written speech (he read the first one at the time of introducing the

Secondary Education Bill) and the last Budget speech, the ‘swan song’⁴⁵ standing on his feet at the floor of the Bengal Assembly on 27 February 1944. In his speech he raised his voice against the Government and said: “There is, constitutionally speaking, no Government in Bengal.... Here the Ministers are not responsible to the Legislature at all, but are responsible to Mr. Jinnah as the head of the Muslim League. So long as the Ministers have the approval of Mr. Jinnah, they need not concern themselves about the views of individual members, because they know that the members supporting them do not care for the opinions of their constituencies but are anxious to secure the good opinion of Mr. Jinnah. This may sound surprising but it is nevertheless a fact”.⁴⁶ While delivering his speech, Fazlul Huq also criticized the Congress – led Ministries in different provinces as their activities helped to enhance the strength and popularity of Jinnah and the Muslim League: “Unforeseen circumstances have also helped the Muslim League. During the Congress regime of Provincial Autonomy in seven provinces the Congress volunteers and officials were in many cases guilty of indecent excesses which were strongly resented by Muslims as encroachments on their legitimate rights and which created a strong anti-Hindu feeling in the minds of the Muslims throughout India. The Muslim League was quick to seize the opportunity. By unceasing propaganda and clever distortions of facts they managed to rouse the passions of the Muslim multitude against the Congress and as a next step against the Hindu community. Muslims were thus naturally drawn towards the Muslim League as the only organised political body among the Muslims and as their only heaven of refuge against Hindu opposition”.⁴⁷ He also attacked the British Government by saying: “British Imperialistic policy also favoured the growing political strength of the Muslim League as the Government expected to be able to set up the Muslim League against the political ascendancy of the Congress. The result is that the Muslim League has now got a foothold in hand which is not justified by the extent to which it can truly claim to be representative of the Muslim interests”.⁴⁸ In his long speech, Mr. Huq also highlighted the rich heritage of Bengal and its immense success and reputation in the fields of Science, Literature and Art, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Politics, Culture etc. Not only that, according to him, Bengal produced great personalities like W.C. Bonnerji, Surendra Nath Banerjea, Narendra Nath Sen, Motilal Ghosh, Bhupendra Nath Bose, Lalmohan Ghosh, Shamsul Huda, Abdul Rasul, Ashwinikumar Dutt, Ambika Majumdar and so on.⁴⁹ Thereafter he looked at the present Bengal: “But what is the case to-day? On their own showing and

according to their own admission, the Ministers by their irresponsible policy and reckless extravagance have brought about one of the most devastating famines known to history. And when the cup of misery of the people was full, horrible atrocities were perpetuated on the poor and the helpless destitute of Calcutta on the plea of removing them to suitable habitations elsewhere. I have seen dire scenes of horror which it is impossible for me to describe but not even the hundredth part of these atrocities would have been possible even 30 years ago. Now everything is possible because there is none to protest. Throughout Bengal there is none who seems prepared to raise his little finger to save his people from oppression or from the policy of the Ministers which may bring about ruin and devastation in the country”.⁵⁰ But his concern was not properly read by the distinguished members of the House. The Assembly rejected on 2 March 1944 an adjournment motion censuring the Government for banning the publication of a joint statement by leaders of the different political parties in the Opposition, criticizing certain observations made by R.A. Hutchings (the Food Secretary, Government of India), on the food situation in Bengal by 99 to 79 votes.⁵¹

Although the League-led Ministry was facing all-round attacks and criticisms for the disastrous Bengal famine, the popularity of the League was almost intact in urban Bengal which became clear in the polls of the Calcutta Corporation (which took place on 29 March 1944). In this election 50,000 voters out of a total electorate of 85,000 exercised their voting rights and all the leading political parties/groups of Bengal at that time (except the Official Congress), put up their candidates. Surprisingly, in this election to the Calcutta Corporation, Fazlul Huq’s Muslim candidates lost every seat to the Muslim League and the Communists got victory in the two labour seats by defeating the candidates of the National Chamber of Commerce and the Muslim League. Anandilal Poddar, a Marwari businessman, with the support of the Muslim League and non-official Congress, was elected as the Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation on 26 April 1944. The Party-wise position (out of the 85 elected seats), is reflected in Table given below:

Table VI. 4: **Results of the Election to the Calcutta Corporation, March 1944**

Political Party/Group	Seats Won
Non-official Congress (Bose Group)	17
Hindu Mahasabha	11
Independents	19
Muslim League	17
Muslim Majlis	02
Muslim Independents	03
Anglo-Indian	02
Communists (Labour)	02
Special Constituencies	12

Source: Pranab Kumar Chatterjee, *Struggle and Strife in Urban Bengal 1937-47*, p. 144.

Once again, the House met in June 1944 and in this session the members like Nalinakshya Sanyal, Dharendra Nath Dutta, Kiran Sankar Roy, Bankim Mukherjee etc. were very vocal against the Nazimuddin Ministry as it completely failed in facing the disastrous Bengal famine. Keeping in mind the consequences of the famine, the leaders of the different Opposition Parties under the leadership of Fazlul Huq, brought no-confidence motions against B.P. Pyne, T.N. Mukherjee and Sahabuddin. Accordingly, on 15 June 1944 the no-confidence motion which was moved against B.P. Pyne, Minister for Communication and Works, was discussed in the House. But it was defeated by 119 to 106 votes⁵² and the Nazimuddin Ministry narrowly escaped the defeat with the help of the European members. Still two other no-confidence motions which were moved against T.N. Mukherjee and Sahabuddin, were to be discussed in the House. But the Governor immediately issued an order for the adjournment of the session.⁵³ All these persuaded a group of members for crossing the floor and on 20 June 1944, eleven (11) members of the ruling party joined the Opposition.⁵⁴ It became quite clear from the fortnightly report of H.E. R.G. Casey (which was sent to Wavell, the then Viceroy on 4 July 1944), that the Nazimuddin government lost its majority and turned into a minority government which is reflected in the Tables given below:

VI. 5: Strength/Position of the Government & the Opposition on 1 February 1944

Government (Nazimuddin)		Opposition	
Party/Group	Number	Party/Group	Number
Muslim League Party	83	Progressive Muslim Party	23
Scheduled Castes	22	Krishak Praja Party	15
Caste Hindus	6	Hindu Nationalist Party	14
Unattached	4	Official Congress Party (excluding 8 in Jail)	17
		Congress Bose Group (5 in Jail)	18
		Scheduled Castes	4
Total	115	Total	91

Table VI. 6: Strength/ Position of the Government & the Opposition on 23 June 1944

Government (Nazimuddin)		Opposition	
Party/Group	Number	Party/Group	Number
Muslim League Party	74	Progressive Muslim Party	32
Scheduled Castes	17	Krishak Praja Party	15
Caste Hindus	4	Hindu Nationalist Party	13
Unattached	4	Official Congress Party (excluding 8 in Jail)	20
		Congress Bose Group (5 in Jail)	20
		Scheduled Castes	9
Total	99	Total	109

Source: Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. III (1944-1947), p. 20.

This proved that the Opposition were gradually concentrating their supporters and they posed a serious challenge to the Nazimuddin Ministry. Even Wavell, the then Viceroy, became suspicious about the future of the present Ministry. Lord R.G. Casey who took over the charge as the new Governor of the province from 22 January 1944 (from Rutherford) in his fortnightly report (4 July 1944), tried to give an idea to the Viceroy about the strengths of both the Government and the Opposition and he realized the fact that a new Government (replacing Nazimuddin Ministry) with 'a large and stable majority could be formed from the present members of the Opposition and from the members of the present Government who would desert Nazimuddin'.⁵⁵ But the Governor (as well as the European Group), did not want to give a chance to either, Syama Prasad Mookerjee ('who would not be acceptable' to the Governor as he deduced 'from his past actions that his real aim' was 'to prove the Constitution unworkable') or Fazlul Huq, the leader of the Progressive Muslim Party (as Lord Casey 'would not accept Fazlul Huq by reason of his past history').⁵⁶ Although Lord Casey did not have any faith in Fazlul Huq, Syama Prasad Mookerjee or the Nawab of Dacca, he put his confidence on Suhrawardy who according to him, had 'visions of controlling a group of Muslim Leaguers on the Government side that would enable him to claim the Chief Ministership from Nazimuddin'.⁵⁷

Not only the Opposition members were completely annoyed with the activities of the Nazimuddin Ministry but also the Leaguers expressed dissatisfaction against the role played by the Khwaja coterie, particularly against the inclusion of Khwaja Shahabuddin along with his elder brother Sir Nazim in the Ministry. There was an allegation that when Bengal was going through an appalling famine, the Nazimuddin Ministry gave priority in distributing patronage among its supporters and especially among some members of the Dacca Nawab family who became its beneficiaries. Many of them established private agencies, companies or firms, for example, Khwaja Shahabuddin's Shalimar and Co. Also there were accusations that the members of the Nazimuddin's Cabinet only engaged themselves in money-making and even their wives turned into 'government contractors'.⁵⁸ All these largely shattered the public image of the Ministry. Although the Nazimuddin Ministry since its installation showed general favouritism to the Muslim community, it still enjoyed the support of a small section of Hindus. But the spread of the Pakistan movement in Bengal

completely changed the situation and alienated that small section of Hindus who thought it expedient to keep safe distance from the Nazimuddin Ministry.

When the Nazimuddin Ministry was facing all sorts of attacks and going through all these internal and external problems, the Budget Session of the House took place in March 1945. In this session Nazimuddin and his Ministry got a tremendous setback and almost collapsed. On 18 March 1945 Muazzamuddin Hossain, Minister for Agriculture, placed the budget demand of Rs.2,04,00,000.⁵⁹ The Opposition led by Fazlul Huq, severely criticized the budget demand. He told the House: “The Minister-in-Charge of the Department has moved the demand without a speech. There has been no speech from any member so far, that shows that the House is not in a position to take the situation as if it s a debating society, because no debate is needed. As regards the government policy, we know very well what the government policy has been for last 2 years. They stole public money, they embezzled public money, they bribed members with public money. We do not want to speak upon that. The whole list has been exhausted and we have come to the last point that the whole demand must be put and I would submit most respectfully that you will not allow this delaying tactics and put the whole motion to the House”.⁶⁰ Under the influence of Fazlul Huq, 21 members of Nazimuddin’s tottering Ministry (Treasury Benches, belonging to the Muslim League) crossed the floor and joined the Opposition Benches on 28 March 1945.⁶¹ To fully utilize this golden opportunity, Dharendra Nath Dutta, the Deputy Leader of the Official Congress, opposed the Agricultural Budget and read out his cut motion. Nalinaksha Sanyal, the Chief Whip of the Congress, argued that there was no other option but to put the motion into vote.⁶² When the Opposition strongly demanded voting on the cut motion, both Nazimuddin and Stork (from the European Group) categorically mentioned in the House that the voting could not be done without discussion on the subject. But the Opposition led by Fazlul Huq vehemently opposed this argument and stuck to the demand for voting. In the midst of chaos and altercations, Nausher Ali, the Speaker, came forward to cool down the situation and made his announcement that Muazzamuddin Hossain, the Minister for Agriculture, could speak and defend his budget demand for ten minutes only. The Minister stood up and spoke for ten minutes⁶³ but till then, the European members of the House (who were the supporters of the Nazimuddin Ministry), did not turn up. Due to the absence of the European

Group, the cut motion when it was put to vote, it was defeated by 106 to 97 votes.⁶⁴ This is for the first time after the death of C.R. Das, a Ministry in Bengal was defeated by direct voting.^{64a} When the voting was over, 16 European members hurriedly entered the House but at that time the game was already over and the fate of the Nazimuddin Ministry was already been decided.⁶⁵ Frustrated Nazimuddin alleged that his Ministry lost majority in the House as some of his friends in the Treasury Bench were won over by the Opposition by offering bribes⁶⁶ and money of the Marwari businessmen was used for their 'purchasing'.⁶⁷

On the next day (i.e. 29 March 1945), Nausher Ali, the Speaker, gave his famous ruling on this issue: "The Ministry is the creature of this House, the House can make and unmake the Ministry and the Governor is but the registering authority of the declaration of the House. Besides direct no-confidence, there are other recognised methods. Sir Nazimuddin may claim that the decision of the House does not really reflect the opinion of the majority of the House but I doubt if it is permissible to be dragged into the realm of speculation after the verdict of the House against the Ministry to function as a ministry in this House. In these circumstances, I think that the House can not function any longer unless a new ministry is formed...".⁶⁸ According to this ruling of the Speaker, the journey of the Nazimuddin Ministry which lasted for barely two years (April 1943 – March 1945) came to an end. But this ruling did not at all please the Treasury Bench, the members of which severely criticized the Speaker for this kind of a decision. Even Casey, the then Governor, was not at all happy with this decision of the Speaker. However, two days later (i.e. on 31 March 1945), H.E. the Governor issued a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 in a *Calcutta Gazettee Extraordinary* taking the reins of administration of the province.⁶⁹ On the same day Nazimuddin, the outgoing Chief Minister, wrote a letter to the League Supremo Jinnah narrating the way his Ministry was terminated. He wrote: ".....The corrupt elements amongst M.L.A.s were all bought over in a couple of nights and locked up in a house and taken to the Assembly to register their votes. They were paid very large sums of money provided mainly by the Marwaris and Hindu Mahasabha. Our action against the hoarders and profiteers of cloth brought them out in the open and they thought that if by spending money they could have their nominees in the Cabinet, they will have an easy time..... In spite of this we had a very small majority, but the Speaker's ruling..... has forced Section

93”.⁷⁰ Although the Governor took the reins of administration of the province in his hands by imposing Section 93, he did not ask the Cabinet members of Nazimuddin to resign which generated hopes in the Treasury Bench and rejuvenated Nazimuddin sought the permission from Jinnah to form a Coalition Ministry with help of the Official Congress.⁷¹ Jinnah immediately responded to his appeal and gave him permission to form the Coalition Ministry with the Official Congress ‘but on honourable terms’.⁷² But Nazimuddin was not given any chance to materialize this scheme as the Governor decided to avoid the formation of a ministry till the completion of a general election. When there was political deadlock in Bengal, the elections in Britain was held in July 1945 which brought the Labour Party into power. The new Labour Government expressed its desire to settle the Indian problem and accepted the recommendation of a Governors’ Conference held in Delhi on 1-2 August 1945 that elections to the Provincial and Central Legislatures should be held in the coming winter. Likely, Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy, announced on 21 August 1945 that the elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures would take place. Quite expectedly, the Bengal Assembly was dissolved in September 1945. Few days later, the Labour Government of Great Britain sent a Parliamentary delegation to India to collect first-hand information about the political situation. On the basis of this report, the British Government officially announced in both the Houses of the Parliament that a Cabinet Mission would be sent to India to ‘act in association with the Viceroy’ and to ‘set up a machinery in agreement with the Indians whereby the Indian people themselves will decide their destinies’.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan scheme as envisaged in the Lahore Resolution (1940) of the AIML, became the creed of the Muslim League. But this scheme was viewed by the leading BPML leaders in terms of establishing two independent and sovereign states in two Muslim-majority zones, i.e. the North-West and North-East of India. In 1942 a group of Muslim literati and journalists of Calcutta founded the Purba (East) Pakistan Renaissance Society with Mujibur Rahman Khan, a veteran journalist, as convenor. Around this time, the Muslim intelligentsia of Dacca established the Purba (East) Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad. The members of this Society wanted to give an intellectual and cultural shape to the ideal of Pakistan in general and Eastern Pakistan or ‘Purba Pakistan’ (in Bengal and Assam) in particular. They promoted the idea that the Bengali Muslims were different not only from the Hindus but also from the

Muslims of other provinces.⁷³ While delivering his presidential address at a conference of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society in May 1944, Abul Mansur Ahmed (a famous journalist and a leading member of the KPP who later joined the Muslim League in 1944), said: “Religion and culture are not the same thing. Religion transgresses the geographical boundary but ‘*tamaddum*’ (meaning culture) can not go beyond the geographical boundary. Rather flourishes within depending on that ‘*sima*’ (geographical limit). Here only lies the difference between *Purba*-Pakistan and Pakistan. For this reason the people of *Purba* Pakistan are a different nation from the people of the other provinces of India and from the ‘religious brothers’ of Pakistan”.⁷⁴ In this Conference, the natural and geographical peculiarities of Bengal and Assam were also highlighted: “.... The rivers and rivulets, the ponds and swamp lands of Bengal and Assam are nowhere in India, not even in the whole Muslim world. The culture of this place is based on this individuality and therefore is totally different”.⁷⁵ All the leading members of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society and a number of Muslim League leaders like Abul Hashim and Abul Mansur Ahmed firmly believed that the Bengali Muslims formed a distinct nationality. So it was the legitimate right of the Bengali Muslims to demand *Purba* (Eastern) Pakistan. While discussing this issue with the then Governor R.G. Casey on 5 September 1944, Nazimuddin, the Bengal Premier, pointed out that the disadvantageous position of Bengal under the Central Government controlled by Bombay, Madras and the U.P., and the inadequate constitutional safeguards for the protection of the Muslim rights were the main reasons for their demanding *Purba* (Eastern) Pakistan. In his report to the Viceroy, R.G. Casey wrote: “They want Bengal (less the Burdwan Division), all of Assam and a part of Purnea district in Bihar contiguous with North-West Bengal. Nazimuddin tells me that they calculated that this combined area would give them a majority of 58 per cent of Muslims in place of 51 per cent if only all Bengal and all Assam were to be included.... He went on to say that they believe that, once this N.E. Pakistan was established, there would be no one more keen about it than the Hindus within its borders – and that he believed it possible that the Burdwan Division might come into N.E. Pakistan in due course. He (Nazimuddin) says that the Centre has always been controlled by Bombay, Madras and the U.P., and that these provinces have dominated Indian policy, to the disadvantage of Bengal. He says that it is this fact, together with the distressing intolerance towards the Muslims that the Congress Hindu Governments (what are now the Section 93 Provinces) displayed, that has made them

insistent on getting a sovereign state in N.E. India that will be independent of the rest of India”.⁷⁶ It becomes quite clear that ‘Centro-phobia’ was more prominent in the thinking of Nazimuddin ‘than the glories of an independent state’. The idea of the North-Eastern Pakistan which was nurtured by a non-Bengali Muslim like Nazimuddin gives us a clear impression of the idea of the Bengali Muslims about Pakistan. Prof. Ayesha Jalal made her own observation on this subject: “What the Bengali Muslims were really after was freedom from central control and Government House in Calcutta saw clear hints of a specifically provincial Bengali nationalism capable of being deployed against Jinnah’s centralist pretensions”.^{76a}

Meanwhile, the Congress leaders did not sit idle. When Gandhiji was confined to the Aga Khan Palace from February 1943, he lent his support to C. Rajagopalachari’s proposal (known as the ‘C.R. Formula’ or the ‘Rajaji Formula’)⁷⁷ for the partition of India on communal lines. After his release in the middle of 1944, Gandhiji wrote a letter to Jinnah (in July 1944) to have a talk with him on the basis of the C.R. Formula which was ultimately held at Jinnah’s Bombay residence from 9-27 September 1944. But the C.R. Formula did not please the League Supremo Jinnah who stuck to his demand for the separation of the whole of six provinces (Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, N.W.F.P., Bengal and Assam). He attacked the Formula as offering only ‘a shadow and a husk, a maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan’.⁷⁸ But it is to be mentioned here that it was almost the same Pakistan which was accepted by him in 1947. Prior to their talks, the leaders of the BPML and the East Pakistan Renaissance Society engaged themselves in formulating definite plans about the form, shape and boundaries of Eastern Pakistan. After thorough discussion, the Working Committee of the BPML devised its plans and conveyed its views to Jinnah for his considerations. All these plans were included in Raghbir Ahsan’s (who was a member of the Working Committee of the BPML from 1943 to 1947 and a member of the Council of the AIML in between 1939 and 1947) *Confederacy of East Pakistan and Adibasistan* which proposed for a confederation between Eastern Pakistan / *Bangsam* (comprised of Bengal and Assam) and the autonomous homeland of *Adibasistan* (meant for the Tribal people of certain adjoining districts of Bihar) on the basis of common defence, economic policy and foreign affairs.⁷⁹ The preamble of this plan reiterated: “.... it is one thing to constitute a separate province within the orbit of an Empire and it is quite a different thing to constitute a separate, sovereign and

independent state, responsible for its own defence, internal and external security, financial solvency and economic self-sufficiency”.⁸⁰ According to the report of Raghbir Ahsan, Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim (General Secretary of the BPML) and other young members of the BPML supported this scheme and they became the exponents of Greater Bengal and later initiated a move for a united and independent Bengal. Nazimuddin, Maulana Akram Khan, the President of the BPML and their followers on the other hand, advocated the alternative view, i.e. a truncated Bengal and proposed for North-East Pakistan wherein the Muslims would enjoy a clearer majority over non-Muslims which was exposed earlier in the conversation between R.G. Casey and Nazimuddin.

P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.) who had close relationship with Akram Khan and Abul Hashim, wrote that “on the eve of the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League passed a resolution in favour of a United Bengal which would exercise its sovereign will and decide whether to join Pakistan or Hindustan or to join neither, and instead remain completely independent”. In addition to this he stated that “the Provincial League sent its resolution to the Congress leader, Kiran Shankar Roy, to discuss it among themselves” and that they told Jinnah “that the Bengalis would be able to decide their own fate”.⁸¹ The leaders of the BPCC also felt the necessity to have a discussion with Gandhiji on this issue on the eve of his talks with Jinnah. Accordingly in August 1944, Kiran Sankar Roy led a delegation of the Bengal Congress (‘Official Congress’, recognized by the A.I.C.C.), met with Gandhiji and discussed with him the C.R. Formula accepting the principle of partition. Mr. Roy asserted that its application to Bengal on district-wise would result in the bifurcation of the province. The Congress delegation told Gandhiji that the people of Bengal were against of its partition “as Bengal situated as at present is culturally and linguistically one single homogeneous unit”.⁸² Not only that, Kiran Sankar Roy told Gandhiji: “If the worst comes to the worst, we in Bengal will all go into Pakistan, but for goodness sake do not partition Bengal. Do not vivisect it”.⁸³ After all these deliberations, Gandhiji gave assurance to the Congress delegation from Bengal that “he would not do anything without consulting Bengal”.⁸⁴ But the reality was that when Gandhiji had a discussion with Jinnah in September 1944, he completely failed to keep that promise. During their talks (from 9-27 September 1944), Jinnah denounced the C.R. Formula and told

Gandhiji that in it the legitimate claim of the Muslims that they alone should be entitled to exercise the right of self-determination was not conceded.⁸⁵ While Jinnah became aspirant to get Pakistan at the time of the British transfer of power, the C.R. Formula made it very clear that the whole scheme would become effective only after full transfer of power. It would practically mean – at first independence for a united India, afterwards partition. So Jinnah became quite suspicious of the offer of Gandhiji under the C.R. Formula and told him during the conversations: ‘.....I find that the question of the divisions of India as Pakistan and Hindustan is only on your lips and it does not come from your heart’.⁸⁶ Jinnah’s correspondence with Gandhiji reveals that he (Jinnah) always stood for Pakistan and he did not think of ‘two Pakistans’ (one in the North-East and another in the North-West). On 21 September 1944 Jinnah wrote to Gandhiji: “..... Ours is a case of division and that Pakistan and Hindustan will be two separate independent sovereign states”.^{86a} In another letter dated 25 September 1944, he elaborated his idea on Pakistan: “You (Gandhi) do not accept that Pakistan is composed of two zones, north-west and north-east, comprising six provinces, namely as Sind, Baluchistan, the N.W.F.P., the Punjab, Bengal and Assam subject to territorial adjustments.....”.^{86b} Dr. Shila Sen in her research wrote that before 1945 Jinnah ‘was not clear in his mind about Pakistan or Pakistans’.⁸⁷ During his talks with Gandhiji, Jinnah did not say that the Muslim Zones (meaning Eastern and Western) would be “units of Pakistan” but meant that ‘constituents in two zones’ would be ‘units of Pakistan’.⁸⁸ This sort of thinking of Jinnah provoked Dr. Sen to draw the conclusion: “.... it emphasized that the constituents in the North-Western and Eastern Zones would form units of Pakistan – meaning that either there would be two Pakistans or that there would be a Federation of Pakistan”.^{88a} But an in-depth study of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks reveals the fact that unlike the East Pakistan Renaissance Society and the BPML leaders, Jinnah viewed the Lahore Resolution (1940) in terms of one Pakistan and not two which is clearly been reflected in the writings of K.B. Sayeed: “.... the League really meant by the Lahore Resolution was the establishment of a single Muslim state including both the North Western and the Eastern Zones”.⁸⁹ In this context, it should be mentioned here that Fazlul Huq very much stuck to his belief in the separation of Muslims and in October 1945, he reiterated his conviction and stood by “the resolution whose wordings I drafted and which I moved in the Lahore session”.⁹⁰ This indicated that Mr. Huq at that time was willing to reconcile with Jinnah and was very much eager to write to Mr. Jinnah “to remove the ban he

has put on me so that I may join the Muslim League”.⁹¹ In this context Fazlul Huq also said: “.... If the ban was lifted unconditionally, he would be ready and willing to serve the League as an ordinary member and would serve the organization in any capacity they directed him provided it did not interfere with his own political views”.^{91a} But that opportunity was not given by Jinnah who at that point of time, did not feel the urgency to remove the ban imposed on Mr. Huq. Frustrated Fazlul Huq wanted to retire from active politics with honour and dignity and expressed his desire to Richard Casey that ‘he might be sent to represent H.M.G. in some capacity in Saudi Arabia’ which also did not materialize. Thereafter, Fazlul Huq had no other alternative but to assume the chairmanship of the Congress sponsored Bengal Muslim Parliamentary Board which was the common platform of various anti-League Muslim organizations.

Richard Casey, the then Governor of Bengal was closely observing the political developments in Bengal vis-a-vis India. He put his doubts on the scheme of ‘Eastern Pakistan’ in his letter written to Viceroy Lord Wavell on 17 December 1944. He wrote: “The conception of ‘Eastern Pakistan’ held by Nazimuddin [then prime minister of Bengal and member of the All-India League Working Committed] (and so, I imagine, by the Muslim League in Bengal) is not the standard idea of a Muslim State. He paints the picture of a wholly autonomous sovereign state with a bare Muslim majority of population, in which Muslims and Hindus would live in amity and share the responsibility for the business of Government (and all else) in approximate proportion to their numbers.... it [this conception] seems to show that they are groping after a state in which Hindus and Muslims would live together in amity, rather than upon any belief, that the interests of the two communities are irreconcilable. The basis of that community of interests can only be the general feeling in Bengal, shared by both Hindus and Muslims – (1) that Bengal is and always has been a region apart; - (2) that it has never had a ‘fair deal’ from India;.....”⁹² It should be mentioned here that the Bengali Hindus at that time, were totally against of the partition of Bengal and the Hindu Mahasabha was very much determined not to agree with any proposals that involved the partitioning of Bengal or the ‘vivisection’ of India. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, categorically denouncing Jinnah’s claim that the Muslims of majority areas alone should decide the separation of those portions from India, said in a public meeting: “If 25 per cent of the

Muslim could not agree to live in India how can 44 per cent of Hindus live in Bengal under 54 per cent of Muslims!”⁹³ Later in early 1947, the Hindu Mahasabha and its leaders changed the earlier stand and put forward their demand and started campaign for the formation of a separate Hindu province by partitioning Bengal.

By 1944, Abul Hashim, the then Secretary of the BPML, had a distinct conception of Pakistan which according to him ‘was not a communal demand but a political objective’. He was of the opinion that although the Muslims were ‘shouting for Pakistan’, almost all the League leaders and workers did not have any ‘idea of what Pakistan concretely stands for’.⁹⁴ So he felt the urgency to prepare ‘a well-thought-out and clear-cut manifesto’ which ‘will concretise our cherished ideal of Pakistan’.⁹⁵ Accordingly in March 1945, Abul Hashim formulated such type of a manifesto which was based on ‘the declared and unequivocal goal of the All India Muslim League as set forth in the Lahore Resolution’ and it partially served the outlines of the future constitution of the Eastern Pakistan. In the preamble, the *Manifesto* expressed: “The Bengal Provincial Muslim League feels that the time has now come for defining the clear outline of what the contents of Pakistan are – political, economic, social and moral – as related to the life and conditions of the people of this Eastern Zone. Such an outline will be effective not only in inspiring the entire Muslim humanity of Eastern Pakistan but will be equally helpful in instilling confidence and understanding among the millions of non-Muslims, steeped in prejudices and misgivings against the Muslim national movement. In placing this Manifesto before the countrymen, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League expects it to be regarded not only as a Charter of Freedom for tomorrow but as a Guide to action to-day”.⁹⁶ The Draft *Manifesto* contained the fundamental rights of the people of the ‘Free State of Eastern Pakistan’. The principal points were: “1) the sovereignty would be vested in the people; 2) universal adult franchise without distinction of sex, caste and creed; 3) equality before law; 4) guarantee of civil liberties; 5) guarantee of work for all persons by the state; 6) free and compulsory primary education, higher education through the medium of the mother tongue and particular emphasis on vocational and technical education; 7) free hospitals for the poor; 8) nationalization of all key industries, abolition of the Zamindari system and the encouragement of co-operative farming and co-operative marketing to guarantee the peasant fair prices for agricultural products; 9) minimum hiring wages for labourers and the guarantee of

unemployment insurance and old age pensions for all by the state; and 10) equality of opportunities and rights for women”.⁹⁷ Although the *Manifesto* gave priority to the application of the tenets of Islam and the revival of Islamic culture, it also assured the non-Muslims of their rights of practising their own religion and protecting their cultures. It stated: “The Muslim League leadership in Eastern Pakistan enjoins upon it the solemn responsibility of acting as the custodian of the interests of non-Muslims including the Depressed Classes and backward peoples to whom it guarantees not only common rights but also provision for their betterment in accordance with their own respective traditions and culture”.⁹⁸

Although the BPML which was the largest and the best organized provincial branch of the AIML with a record number of membership of over one million,⁹⁹ was going through an inner struggle between two groups – Suhrawardy-Hashim Group vs. the Khwaja Group and the provincial Parliamentary Board became the bone of contention as Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin were involved in its leadership race. On 30 September 1945 at a representative meeting of the Council of the BPML (which was attended by 439 out of 575 members of the Council), five members, namely, Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Moazzem Hossain, Ahmed Hossain and Raghieb Ahsan were elected (by defeating Nazimuddin’s candidates) to the Board through ballot and surprisingly, all of them belonged to the Suhrawardy – Hashim group.¹⁰⁰ It helped the Suhrawardy – Hashim group to command a majority in the Parliamentary Board (consisting of nine members) over the Khwaja Group (having four members, namely Akram Khan, Nazimuddin, Fazlur Rahman and Nurul Amin). In another meeting of the Board which was held a few days later, Suhrawardy was elected as its Secretary by defeating Nazimuddin. He was so shocked by his defeat that he expressed his desire to give up politics which is reflected in Richard Casey’s Fortnightly Report to Lord Wavell sent on 5 October 1945. The Governor in his report wrote: “As regards internal politics, I had a visit yesterday from Sir Nazimuddin who told me that, as a result, he was going to give up politics..... It appears that the Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League, one Abul Hashim, has been intriguing with Suhrawardy and has succeeded in securing a majority of 5 against 4 of Nazimuddin’s supporters on the Parliamentary Board, the majority party being like the Secretary himself of leftist sympathies. The selection of candidates for the forthcoming election rests with this Parliamentary Board and Nazimuddin is uncertain whether to rely on appeal to

the central organization, or to follow the example of Sind and get the Board adjourned sine die. It seems that Abul Hashim hopes to get candidates appointed who will be of a Leftist complexion and will support Suhrawardy rather than Nazimuddin for the Chief Ministership....”¹⁰¹ This sort of apprehension guided Nazimuddin (who was very loyal to Jinnah) to take the decision not to contest the election which was also followed by his brother Shahabuddin who during his interview with Richard Casey expressed the desire that Nazimuddin wanted to be considered for the vacant post of President of the Executive Council of Hyderabad.¹⁰² Nazimuddin feared that ‘his life would not be worth living under the pressure which Suhrawardy and his party would put on him’.¹⁰³ Although he decided ‘not to stand for election’, he along with his supporters in the Parliamentary Board participated in election campaign for the Central Legislative Assembly and toured a few districts of Bengal with Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim.

Elections to the Central Legislature (on the basis of separate electorates) were held in India in December 1945. In Bengal, the Congress won all the seats from the general, i.e. Hindu Constituencies and bagged seven out of eight seats and a pro-Congress Independent Candidate won the eighth seat. Sarat Chandra Bose got a convincing victory by securing 7,290 votes against Sanat Kumar Roy Chowdhury of the Hindu Mahasabha who managed to get only 88 votes.¹⁰⁴ All the Hindu Mahasabha candidates including its president Syama Prasad Mookerjee, lost their security deposits. Syama Prasad got only 346 votes whereas his rival Congress candidate obtained 10,216 votes.^{104a} The Muslim League, on the other hand, did extremely well and won all six Muslim seats in Bengal and captured all the thirty Muslim seats in the Central Assembly all over India. While the Muslim League won 86.7 per cent of the total Muslim vote in the elections to the Central Legislature, the Congress managed to get only 1.3 per cent.¹⁰⁵ The Europeans bagged three seats in the Central Assembly from Bengal.¹⁰⁶ Fazlul Huq also contested in this election from Bengal and was elected from Calcutta but none of the other KPP candidates was able to get success in this election to the Central Legislature.

Getting this extraordinary success in the elections to the Central Assembly, the Muslim League tried to exploit the Muslim sentiment by demanding Pakistan and plunged into the 1946 Assembly elections which were held under the system of

separate electorates (like that of 1937), with limited franchise. In 1945, the total number of voters in Bengal was 8,028,023 (i.e. 13.39% of the population) of whom 4,540,355 (i.e. 13.75% of the Muslim population) constituted the Muslim electorate.¹⁰⁷ The total number of non-Muhammadan voters in 1945 was 3,487,668 which was 12.96% of the non-Muhammadan population in Bengal. Besides the Muhammadan and non-Muhammadan voters, there was also a good number of Labour voters. All these are reflected in the tables given below:

Table VI.7: The Number of Voters in the Electoral Rolls in 1936 & 1945

House	Year	Muhammadan	Non-Muhammadan	Total
Bengal Legislative Assembly (BLA)	1936	3,462,767	2,817,173	6,279,940
BLA	1945	4,540,355	3,487,668	8,028,023
Adding Labour Voters				8,496,992
Bengal Legislative Council (BLC)	1936	3,683	10,210	13,893
BLC	1945	5,966	21,006	26,972

Source: Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. III, p. 120.

Table VI.8: Percentage of Population Enfranchised in 1936 & 1945

House	Year	Muhammadan	Non-Muhammadan	Total
Bengal Legislative Assembly (BLA)	1936	12.6	12.6	12.6
BLA	1945	13.75	12.96	13.39
Adding Labour Voters				14.17
Bengal Legislative Council (BLC)	1936	0.01	0.05	0.03
BLC	1945	0.02	0.08	0.04

Source: Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj*, Vol. III, p. 120.

In a House of 250 seats in Bengal, the Muslim voters were entitled to vote for 119 constituencies. In the Muslim constituencies, the strongest political organization was the BPML. But it faced an internal problem in the selection of its contesting candidates as the Suhrawardy- Hashim Group and the Khwaja Group were trying to incorporate their own candidates in the list which prompted Jinnah to come to Bengal in the mid of February 1946 to make a truce. He urged both the rival groups to abide by the decision of the Central Parliamentary Board and made an appeal to the party workers to work together in the mission of Pakistan: “There should be only one thing – Election! We may call it a ‘fortnight truce’. Work whole-heartedly for only one objective – Pakistan”.¹⁰⁸ There were other Muslim organizations like the KPP, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, Muslim Majlis, Momin Conference, Anjuman Watan etc. which altogether formed the Nationalist Muslim Parliamentary Board ‘to present a united front against the Muslim League during the elections and create a new political alternative for the Muslim masses in the province’.¹⁰⁹ All these organizations contested in a number of Assembly seats with the support of the Congress. But at that time, the organizational strength, popularity and glamour of the Krishak Praja Party of Fazlul Huq was withering away. By 1945, most of its important leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abdulla-el-Baqui, Shamsuddin Ahmed (ex-Secretary of the KPP), Hasan Ali, Nurul Islam Chowdhury, Giasuddin Ahmed and the like left the KPP and joined the Muslim League. Unlike the elections of 1937, the Congress also gave its candidates (on its own ticket) in a few Muslim seats. Apart from the candidates of these political parties, there were a large number of Independent candidates who also contested in the Muslim constituencies. In this Assembly Election, the Muslim League’s demand for ‘Pakistan’ overshadowed other political, economic or social issues and the Party engaged itself in organizing big ‘Pakistan’ conferences in different parts of Bengal particularly in those areas where the Krishak Praja Party had its strong hold and pushed the ‘Pakistan’ movement a step forward.

In the general constituencies, the most formidable and dominant political organization was the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC). Although the BPCC was well-organized and active political body in Bengal, it suffered from factional disputes for a long time. Since 1930s, two parallel organizations of the Bengal Congress viz. the Official Congress (led by Kiran Sankar Roy) and the Congress (known as ‘Bose group’ led by Sarat Chandra Bose) were visible. But on

the eve of the 1946 Assembly Elections, the leaders of both the groups of the BPCC sorted out their differences and built up a united front against the opposition. Thus the Bengal Congress regained its strength and posed a serious challenge to the opposition camp in the 1946 elections. Not only that, the trial of the Indian National Army (INA) officers also gave a psychological boost to the Congress. Along with the BPCC, there were many minor political parties like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Radical Democratic Party (RDP of M.N. Roy), the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Kshatriya Samity but many of these political organizations suffered from man-power and 'monetary anaemia'. It is to be mentioned here that the CPI and the RDP decided to contest in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1946 for the first time and both these parties decided to give their candidates also in some of the Muslim constituencies. Apart from the candidates of these political organizations, there were many Independent candidates who contested in the general seats.

Prior to the Assembly Elections of 1946, all the leading political parties of Bengal came forward to announce their election demands and promises and accordingly declared their election *Manifestoes*. The Congress, the largest and most active political organization at that time, was very keen to fight the elections mainly on the issues of Independence and the immediate transfer of power to the Indians and likely by the end of October 1945, issued a 12-point *Manifesto*. The main points of this *Manifesto* were: "1) establishment of a free democratic state with fundamental rights and liberties guaranteed in its constitution; 2) a federal constitution with a great deal of autonomy for its constituent units; 3) freedom of each group and territorial area to develop its own life and culture within the larger framework; 4) regrouping of provinces on a linguistic and cultural basis; 5) removal of poverty and raising of the standard of living; 6) modernization of industry and agriculture and social control of all sources of wealth, methods of production and distribution; and 7) championing the cause of freedom of all over other subject nations and the elimination of imperialism everywhere".¹¹⁰ In the Congress *Manifesto*, it was categorically mentioned: "In this election petty issues do not count, nor do individuals, nor sectarian crises-only one thing counts: the freedom and independence of our motherland, from which all other freedoms will flow to our people".¹¹¹ With these clear-cut aims and objectives, the Congress plunged itself in the Elections of 1946 which practically turned into a prestige fight between the Congress and the Muslim League. Although it was

branded as a 'Hindu organization' by the Muslim politicians in the opposition camp, the Congress completely recognized the right of self-determination of territorial units and felt the necessity to get back the confidence of the Muslims and win over their support. This stance of the Congress was reflected in the resolution taken by the Working Committee in September 1945 where it was stated: "... the Committee declares that it can not think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will...." but at the same time it reminded that "... acceptance of the principle inevitably involves that no changes should be made which result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area".¹¹² On 9 November 1945 while opening the election campaign for the Congress, Sarat Chandra Bose (who remained in the jail for a long time) delivered a long speech in Calcutta and reminded the audience that the Congress was the only political organization in the country which had been fighting for Indian independence for the last sixty years. Likely the Congress on 26 January 1946 appealed to all the voters all over India to support its candidates in the elections of 1946 and stuck to its 'independence' pledge and the Quit India Resolution of August 1942 became its 'battle cry'.¹¹³ But the Congress was not confident enough for getting the Muslim support as against the propaganda of the Muslim League and became very much anxious about its success in the Muslim constituencies. As a result, it became very much depended on the Scheduled Castes' support who numbered not less than 76 lakhs.¹¹⁴ In order to create a proper atmosphere for getting the support of the Scheduled Castes and the Muslims, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Secretary of the Central Election Board of the Congress wrote a letter to Sarat Chandra Bose on 25 December 1945 asking him the information regarding the formation of the Scheduled Caste Election Board in Bengal and instructed him to be more careful in selecting the Muslim candidates who could throw a serious challenge to the League candidates and would have better chances of winning in the Muslim constituencies. It should be mentioned here that while Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel were in favour of giving candidates in the Muslim constituencies clearly on a Congress ticket, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (who was in charge of selection of the candidates for the Muslim seats) pursued completely a different strategy by selecting some candidates purely on Congress ticket for certain seats and supporting anti-League or non-League groups including the Independent candidates for rest of the seats.¹¹⁵ Azad took this line probably because of non-

availability of a considerable number of suitable Muslim candidates for the Muslim constituencies as they refused to contest in those seats on the ticket of the Congress against the League candidates. Nevertheless, the General Election of 1946 became ‘a pitched battle with the Congress’^{115a} and it came out strongly with its demands, mobilized funds (collected from the Birlas, Dalmias and Kasturbhais), made all-out election campaigns to win the confidence and support of the voters.

Muslim League, on the other hand, declared to fight the General Election of 1946 absolutely on two issues; first and foremost ‘Pakistan’ and secondly, the ‘representative character of the League in regard to the Muslim community’.¹¹⁶ Jinnah, the League Supremo, categorically mentioned that the 1946 Assembly Elections would be taken as a plebiscite of the Muslims of India on the issue of ‘Pakistan’ and it was only because of that he did not place before the voters any other economic, social or political issue. Regarding the second issue, the Muslim League claimed itself to be the only authoritative and representative body of the 10 crores of Muslims living in India. Jinnah said: “We want to fight the elections so that they may once [and] for all convince those who doubt our representative character”.¹¹⁷ There is no doubt that these two issues of the League were closely interlinked and the issue of ‘Pakistan’ got so paramount (as it became a ‘battle cry’) that the leaders of the League sometimes regarded it the only one issue’.¹¹⁸ The Leaguers also considered the issue of ‘Pakistan’ as a charter of Muslim *Azadi* (Independence) or as an anti-thesis to *Akhand Hindustan*.¹¹⁹ While giving an interview with the Associated Press of America in November 1945, Jinnah made focus on the geographical, political and economic aspects of Pakistan:

“Geographically, Pakistan would embrace all the North-West Frontier, Baluchistan, Sind and the Punjab provinces in North-Western India. On the Eastern side of India would be the portion of Pakistan composed of Bengal and Assam.

Politically, the component states or provinces of Pakistan would have autonomy.

Economically, Pakistan divided into two separate Zones, is just as sound an undertaking as if it were a country with all its states in one bloc....”¹²⁰ Not only that, on National Defence he said: “... We can be strong with a Pakistan which has one

of its Zones in the west and one in the east of India. We would be more closely knit than the British Commonwealth of Nations".^{120a} It is to be mentioned here that Jawaharlal Nehru in his letter (dated 27 January 1946) written to Stafford Cripps, pointed out: "... Thus the crux of the Pakistan issue is this: A Pakistan consisting of only part of Punjab and part of Bengal, or no separation at all".^{120b}

The issue of 'Pakistan' already raised high hopes among all sections of the Muslim in India. Bengal, a Muslim-majority province where the bulk of the Muslim population completely depended on cultivation, was mesmerized by the 'Pakistan' scheme and the League leaders and the Muslim Press projected it before them as a 'kingdom of heaven'. In order to make a solution to the problem of bread or *Dal-Bhat* for the poor, the BPML raised so many popular slogans like 'Land Belongs To The Plough', 'Abolish Zamindari Without Compensation', 'Down With Vested Interests', 'Labourers Will Be Owners', 'Pakistan For Peasants and Labourers', etc.¹²¹ and tons of posters and placards were sent to the *mofussil* areas from the Election Office of the BPML which was at that time monitored by Abul Mansur Ahmed. Many Muslim industrialists like the Adamjees and Ispahanis, many business tycoons like the Memons, Khaojas and the Bohras, many Chamber of Commerce and Industries like the Federation of Muslim Chambers of Commerce and Industries (which was organised during 1943-45 under Jinnah's patronage), various provincial Muslim Chambers of Commerce and Traders' Associations extended their financial support towards the League and its Election Fund.¹²² Bengal was not an exception to it and the Parliamentary Board of the BPML prepared an 'ambitious and big' budget of about one million rupees¹²³ and the BPML leaders tried their best to reach that target. Not only that, Jinnah contributed Rs.200,000/- from the Central Fund ten day before the provincial elections.¹²⁴ In order to aware the people of Bengal about the election issues, the League felt the necessity of launching a strong Bengali weekly and likely the *Millat* came out on 16 November 1945 with Abul Hashim as the formal editor and young journalist Kazi Mohammed Idris as the working editor. The *Millat* not only popularised the 'Pakistan' demand but also reiterated the demand for the independence of the Bengali Muslims.¹²⁵ Before the Bengal Assembly Elections, Abul Hashim made an appeal to all the workers of the League: "... We should work hard for achieving cent per cent success in our struggle for Pakistan".¹²⁶ The BPML leaders mobilized the Muslim students, youths, teachers, doctors, pleaders, president

and secretaries of various schools and *madrasahs*, *imams* etc. in their election campaign. As the All India Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind and other *ulema* organizations were working for the Congress, the Suhrawardy- Hashim group felt the necessity of forming a pro-League *ulema* organization. As a result, an all-India *ulema* association, namely, Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam was launched with Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Usmani (U.P.) as President and Maulana Mahmud Qureshi Shamsi (Bengal) as Secretary which played a significant role in mobilizing mass support in favour of the League in the coming elections.¹²⁷ The *Morning News* in Calcutta claimed that the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, which campaigned for the Congress, was in favour of *Hindiat*, while the Jamaat-i-Islami, (which supported the League), stood for the *Islamiat*.^{127a}

The year 1946 was completely different from that of 1937 for Fazlul Huq and his KPP as most of its prominent leaders left the party and joined the Muslim League. The KPP not only became very weak but also it found itself in a very difficult situation to give its candidates against the Muslim League which was fighting the Assembly Elections of 1946 mainly on the basis of 'Pakistan', the slogan which almost completely 'hypnotized' the Muslim population. The KPP finally managed to file nominations in only 43 Muslim constituencies. Although Mr. Huq decided to fight against the League, he at several public meetings reiterated his faith in favour of 'Pakistan' (to win the Muslim votes) and claimed himself as its originator.¹²⁸ Like the elections of 1937, the KPP candidates including Fazlul Huq, gave priority to the issue of the abolition of the Zamindari system and highlighted this issue to retain the mass support in favour of the KPP. But this time, this issue was also hijacked by the BPML as it included this demand in its manifesto. Another important political issue which came in the forefront of the election campaign was the great Bengal famine of 1943-44. The KPP and other important opponents of the League took up this issue in their election campaign to win the confidence of the voters in their favour and brought allegations that the League Ministry was mainly responsible for this great catastrophe. But this allegation was totally discarded by the League leaders who put the blame absolutely on the preceding "Syama-Huq" Coalition Ministry. Although Fazlul Huq and the other KPP candidates tried their level best to highlight all these issues during their election campaigns, failed to win the hearts of the Muslim masses who rather thought it convenient to rally behind the League and join in its cry of 'Pakistan' which

ultimately overshadowed all other socio-economic or peripheral issues put forward by different political parties in this election.

In the general election of 1945-46, the Congress did exceedingly well in the 'general' Hindu constituencies and bagged 924 seats (in 1937 the figure was 714 out of 1585 seats). The Muslim League, on the other hand, achieved overwhelming victory in the seats reserved to the Muslims under separate electorates and won in 425 seats out of 492 seats all over India. The all-India electoral results of the Congress and Muslim League in the elections of 1945-46 are reflected in the Table given below:

Table VI.9: The All-India Electoral Results (1945-46) of the Congress and Muslim League

Province	Congress	Muslim League		Others	Total Seats
		Seats Reserved	Seats Won		
N.W.F.P.	30	36	17	03	50
Punjab	51	86	73	51	175
Sind	18	34	27	15	60
U.P.	154	66	54	20	228
Bihar	98	40	34	20	152
Orissa	47	04	04	09	60
Bengal	86	119	113	51	250
Madras	165	29	29	21	215
C.P.	92	14	13	71	176
Bombay	125	30	30	20	175
Assam	58	34	31	19	108
Total	924	492	425	300	1649

Source: N.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, Vol. I, pp. 230-231.

In Bengal, the elections to the Legislative Assembly took place in between 19 March and 22 March 1946. In this Assembly Election, out of 250 seats the BPML won in 114 seats, the BPCC got 86 seats, the European Group- 25, Independent (Hindu) won in 6 seats, the KPP candidates achieved victory in only 4 seats, the Anglo-Indians won in 4 seats, the Communist Party got success in 3 seats,

Independent (Muslim) candidates were elected in 2 seats, Indian Christians won in 2 seats, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Emarat Party, the Kshatriya Samity and Scheduled Caste Federation got 1 seat each.¹²⁹ Out of 250 members, 51 candidates returned to the Assembly unopposed who belonged to the Congress (numbering 15 who were all Hindus including one Scheduled Caste member), Hindu Mahasabha (numbering 1, Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee to whom the Congress gave an unopposed return for the Calcutta University), Independent Hindu (1), Europeans (23) and the Muslim League (11).^{129a} In the constituencies where the League contested, the voting percentage was 83.36 and in the general constituencies where the Congress candidates fought, the voting percentage was slightly low-75.2.¹³⁰ By eliminating smaller political parties and Independents, the BPML got overwhelming victory in 114 seats (as against 39 in 1937) contesting in 121 total Muslim constituencies (117 Territorial, 2 Muslim Women, 1 Muslim Commerce and 1 Dacca University) and obtained nearly about 83.64 per cent of the total votes polled in those constituencies. These 114 seats included all the 4 Special Seats, 6 Urban (out of 6) and 104 Rural (out of 111) seats. The Muslim League immediately after the elections, claimed to have the support of two Independent Muslim members (as Khuda Baksh who won from Berhampur, West Bengal and Chowdhury Shamsuddin Ahmed also known as Badsha Mian who was elected from Faridpur East, East Bengal formally joined the League)¹³¹ which increased its total strength to 116. Although the BPML got massive success in this election, its candidates belonging to the Khwaja group and the Dacca Nawab family suffered terribly. While in the elections of 1937 as many as nine members belonging to the Dacca Nawab family were elected to the Bengal Assembly, in 1946 it became 1/3rd (i.e. only three of them were able to return to the Assembly) which eased the situation in favour of Suhrawardy – Abul Hashim group. It is also to be mentioned here that most of the Independent candidates contesting in the Muslim seats in this elections, lost their deposits (the figure was 113) to the League candidates which symbolized the polarization of the Muslim voters mostly in favour of the League.¹³² The total votes cast in favour of the Muslim League were 2,036, 049 out of total 2,434,116 Muslim votes. The rest of the Muslim votes (i.e. 3,98,067 votes) went in favour of the non-League Muslim candidates.^{132a} The KPP candidates contesting only in 43 seats had to face severe defeat (as 65.11 per cent of its candidates lost their

deposits) in the hands of the League candidates and bagged only 4 seats as against the 36 seats (belonging to Rural constituencies) in 1937. When a good number of prominent anti-League candidates were defeated like Syed Nausher Ali (Speaker, fighting in two constituencies in Jessore and Jessore Sadar in the Congress ticket), Nawab Bahadur Habibullah of Dacca in three constituencies (as an Independent candidate), Nawab K.G.M. Farooqui, Mr. Jalaluddin Hashemy (Deputy Speaker), Ashrafuddin Chowdhury (Congress), Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi (JUH), Abdul Jabbar Pahwalan and Kazi Imdadul Haque (Independent), Fazlul Huq was the only prominent Muslim elected in the 1946 Assembly Elections in Bengal in opposition to the Muslim League.¹³³ He contested from two constituencies – Barisal South and Bagherhat (Khulna). In Barisal South, Fazlul Huq obtained 25,382 votes against the League candidate Khan Bahadur Sadruddin who managed to get only 9,596 votes and Mr. Huq thus got a convincing victory. But in Bagherhat, there was almost a neck and neck fight between Fazlul Huq (who got 16,759 votes) and the League contestant Doctor Mozammel Hossain (who obtained 14,059 votes) and Mr. Huq was elected with a narrow margin.¹³⁴ It is interesting to note here that out of the 4 seats won by the KPP in 1946, 3 belonged to Fazlul Huq's own district Barisal where the KPP had a strong support base since its inception and won 7 seats only from that district in 1937. But the golden days of the KPP were no more and in 1946, the KPP lost its ground to the BPML which though in 1937 failed to open its account in Barisal, in 1946 was able to establish its strong hold in this district and captured 6 out of 9 seats.¹³⁵ Like Barisal, another important stronghold of the KPP was the district of Mymensingh. While in the elections of 1937, the KPP was able to win 7 out of 16 seats (4 went in favour of the League and 5 for the Independents), in 1946, it faced a complete disaster and failed to open its account in this district. Here again the Muslim League candidates won convincingly. Maulana Shamsul Huda, a former KPP leader was only able to win the election as a candidate of the Emarat Party.¹³⁶ But the political parties/groups which failed to win a single seat in 1946 were the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind (JUH), Muslim Parliamentary Board (MPB), Nationalist Muslim (NM) and the Radical Democratic Party (RDP) and most of the candidates of these political parties lost their deposits to the League candidates. It is to be mentioned here that the Tippera Krishak Samity (TKS) which won 5 seats in Tippera in the 1937 Bengal

Assembly Elections, surprisingly did not participate in the elections of 1946. But four of its elected members came out to fight the elections on the KPP ticket.¹³⁷ The detailed 1946 Bengal Assembly Election results of the Muslim Constituencies and the vote share of the different political parties in the Muslim Constituencies (excluding Special Constituencies) are reflected in the Table and Diagram given below:

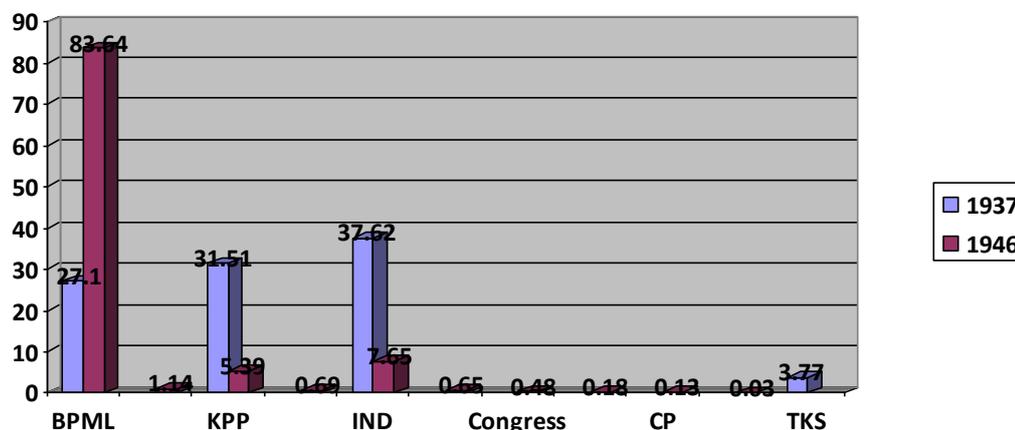
Table VI.10: Results of the Elections (Muslim Constituencies)^a to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in March 1946

Name of the Party	Number of Candidates	Seats Won	Success rate (%)	Votes Polled (excluding Special Constituencies)
BPML	121	114	94.21	2,036,049
KPP	43	4	9.30	131,191
JUH	12	-	-	27,756
EP	3	1	33.33	16,941
MPB	10	-	-	15,816
Congress	6	-	-	11,769
NM	5	-	-	4,426
CP	2	-	-	3,244
RDP	3	-	-	669
Independent	143	2	1.40	186,255
Total	348	121		2,434,116

Source: *Franchise: Election in Bengal 1946*, cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 215.

- a. These also included 3 Special (reserved) seats – 2 Women’s and 1 Muslim Chamber of Commerce and 1 Special (general) i.e. Dhaka University seat.
- b. JUH = Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, EP = Emarat Party, MPB = Muslim Parliamentary Board, NM = Nationalist Muslim, CP = Communist Party, RDP = Radical Democratic Party.

Fig.VI.1: Comparative Vote Share of the Political Parties in the Muslim Constituencies (excluding Special Constituencies) in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 & 1946

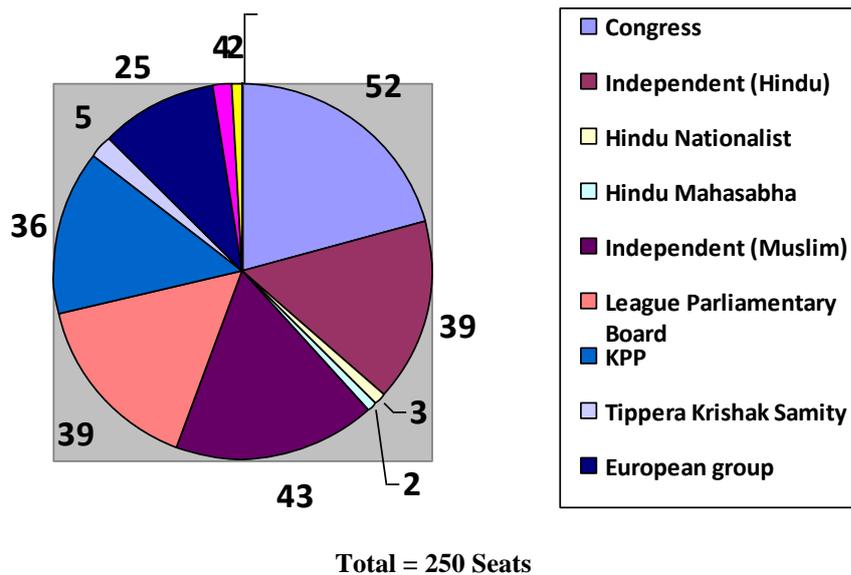


This Diagram is based on: *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 & Franchise: Elections in Bengal 1946*; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 75-76 & 215 – 216.

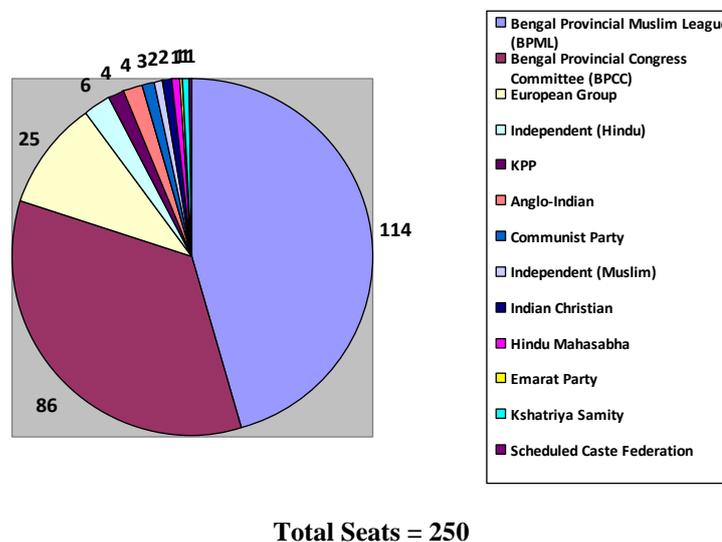
In 1946, the Congress won most of the Hindu seats in Bengal and had 86 members in the new Assembly. Although it gave 6 candidates in the Muslim Constituencies, it failed to open its account in those seats. The prominent Congress leaders who returned in the Bengal Assembly were Kiran Sankar Roy, J.C. Gupta, Monoranjan Gupta, Bepin Behari Ganguly, Miss Bina Das and so on. The Hindu Mahasabha put up 31 candidates, all of whom were defeated, except Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who won (unopposed) from a pocket constituency – the Calcutta University ‘by the forbearance of the Congress’.¹³⁸ The only formidable opposition to the Congress came from the Communists (CPI) who contested in 19 constituencies and bagged only 3 (Railway Labour, Tea Garden Labour and 1 Territorial Scheduled Castes constituency).¹³⁹ The winning candidates of the CPI were: Jyoti Basu, Ratanlal Brahmin and Rup Narayan Roy. Miss Kalpana Dutt, a young political activist of that time, contested as a candidate of the Communists at Chittagong but had to face defeat in the hands of Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta. Three ex-Ministers belonging to Scheduled Castes who were able to win in this election were Mr. Mukunda Behari Mullick, Mr. Prasanna Deb Raikat and Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal. Overall the Congress leaders were not satisfied with the election results and accused

the Leaguers for using unfair means during the elections and raised charges against the British officials for showing favouritism towards the Muslim League. Likely, Maulana Azad, the prominent Congress leader, immediately after the 1946 Bengal Assembly Elections, expressed his strong resentment: “Provincial election in Bengal is a sordid story of corruption and official interference of the worst type”.¹⁴⁰ In order to have a better idea and proper understanding of the election results, comparative demonstrations of the results of the elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in 1937 and 1946 are shown consecutively in the Diagrams given below:

Dig.VI.2: Results of the Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in 1937



Dig.VI.3: Results of the Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in 1946



As the BPML emerged as the single largest party (capturing 114 seats in a House of 250 members in 1946), the new Governor of Bengal, Sir Frederick Burrows (who succeeded Mr. R.G. Casey on 19 February 1946), invited H.S. Suhrawardy (who was unanimously elected Leader of the League Parliamentary Party) on 2 April 1946 to form a Cabinet. But the Muslim League did not have that magic figure (i.e.126) and was well short of 12 members to form the government and prove the majority in the House of 250 members. Suhrawardy made a serious attempt for a Congress-League Coalition Ministry in Bengal so that the Bengali Muslims and Hindus ‘might work together for the common good of the province’.¹⁴¹ He met both Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Kiran Sankar Roy, the Leader of the Congress Assembly Party and had talks with them from 11 April to 14 April 1946 on the prospect of a coalition ministry in Bengal. But before the commencement of conversation, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) set out some guidelines for Mr. Kiran Sankar Roy to have some talks with Suhrawardy which were as follows:

- i) “Barring the Chief Minister, the number of Ministers from the Congress and the League must be equal;
- ii) Any of the Ministers from the Congress Party must be allotted either the Home or the Civil Supplies portfolio;
- iii) An anti-corruption board must be constituted;
- iv) All categories of political prisoners, convicted or otherwise, should be released;
- v) Comprehensive steps for ameliorating the severe sufferings of the common people in regard to cloth and food-shortage should be taken;
- vi) Any communal legislation of a controversial nature should not be introduced without mutual agreement”, etc.¹⁴²

Ultimately their talks for a coalition ministry did not turn up as the League did not accept the Congress demand either of equal number of Ministers or of allotting the Home portfolio. Not only that, the issue of the release of the political prisoners was also a bone of contention between these political organizations. Abul Hashim, the then General Secretary of the BPML narrated the events: “We decided to constitute a coalition ministry with the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. The Congress high

command did not agree. They apprehended that if there was a coalition between the Muslim League and the Congress in Bengal, the All India Muslim League would demand similar conditions in other provinces of India”.¹⁴³ Dr. Ayesha Jalal revealed another aspect: “The Congress High Command was not prepared to let the Bengal Congress Committee come to terms with the League. This would give Bengal an opportunity to assert a greater measure of provincial autonomy which the Congress High Command could not afford to countenance since it had to look to the power and unity of its centre..... in fact the negotiations collapsed because the Congress High Command put pressure on the Bengal Congress to stand back: the breakdown of the negotiations was ominous for Bengal’s future”.¹⁴⁴ Having failed to form a Coalition Ministry with the Congress, Suhrawardy met with the then Governor of Bengal, Sir Frederick Burrows on 22 April 1946 and placed his alternative proposals. “He submitted the names of six other Muslim League supporters besides his own and of one member of the Independent Scheduled Caste group. He indicated that he would be able to add a second member of the Independent Scheduled Caste after about a fortnight.... and he satisfied me that he had a workable proposal to add a Caste Hindu to the Ministry”.¹⁴⁵ Still Suhrawardy was hopeful in getting the Congress support for which a few seats in his Cabinet were kept vacant (until 21 November 1946) in the hope that “an arrangement be arrived at with the Congress”.¹⁴⁶ It was expected that the European Group, numbering 25, would give general support to the Government.

At last Suhrawardy formed the Cabinet on 24 April 1946 which was consisted of 7 Muslim Leaguers and 1 Scheduled Caste representative who took their oath on that day (i.e. 24 April 1946) in the Throne Room at Government House at 12:30 P.M. The newly formed Cabinet included 4 (four) ex-Ministers (i.e. Suhrawardy, Moazzemuddin Hussain, Shamsuddin Ahmed and Jogendra Nath Mondal), 2 (two) ex-Parliamentary Secretaries (i.e. Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ali and Khan Bahadur A.F.M. Abdur Rahman), 1 (one) former Public Prosecutor of Noakhali (i.e. Khan Bahadur Abdul Gofran) and 1 (one) acting Chairman of the Rangpur District Board (i.e. Ahmed Hossain).¹⁴⁷ Although there were four Khan Bahadur title holders in Suhrawardy’s new Cabinet, his Ministry generally represented the Bengali middle class people. Interestingly enough, for the first time in the history of Bengal, a Ministry was formed which did not include any members belonging to the Dhaka Nawab family or the strong adherents (numbering at least 35 League M.L.A.s)¹⁴⁸ of

the former Chief Minister Sir Nazimuddin (known as the ‘Khwaja group’). It is simply because of this ground, the famous Muslim Dailies like the *Azad*, *Star of India* and *The Morning News* which were owned and controlled by the Khwaja group, became very critical about Suhrawardy’s new Cabinet. Only Abul Hashim’s weekly *Millat* was an exception. A list of the Cabinet Ministers in Suhrawardy’s Ministry along with their respective portfolios is reflected in the Table given below:

Table VI.11: List of Cabinet Members in Suhrawardy’s Ministry and their Portfolios

Sl. No.	Name	Category	Portfolio
1.	H.S. Suhrawardy	Muslim	Chief Minister; Home Department
2.	Ahmed Hossain	Muslim	Agriculture
3.	Khan Bahadur Abdul Gofran	Muslim	Civil Supplies
4.	Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ali	Muslim	Finance, Public Health and Local Self-Government
5.	Khan Bahadur A.F.M. Abdur Rahman	Muslim	Co-operative and Irrigation
6.	Shamsuddin Ahmed	Muslim	Commerce, Labour and Industry
7.	Khan Bahadur Moazzemuddin Hussain	Muslim	Education and Revenue
8.	Jogendra Nath Mondal	Scheduled Caste	Judicial, Works and Buildings

Source: Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. One, p. 216.

As the Congress was reluctant to join the new Ministry, Suhrawardy decided to change his attitude towards the Khwaja group to bring stability to his government. Accordingly, Khan Bahadur Nurul Amin, an important member of the Khwaja group, was elected the Speaker of the Assembly by defeating Md. Afjal, the KPP candidate by 137 votes to 93. Mr. Tafazzal Ali, the League candidate was elected the Deputy Speaker by defeating his rival, Pramathanath Tagore by 130 votes to 99 (as the European Group voted with the League).¹⁴⁹ In this connection it should be mentioned here that Fazlul Huq’s name came before the public in connection with the Speakership which was totally rejected by him: “Mr. Suhrawardy should have

known that the office of the Speaker in the present Assembly carries no more honour or dignity than that of the Superintendent of a zoological garden or the manager of a lunatic asylum".¹⁵⁰ When the Ministry was expanded by Suhrawardy on 21 November 1946, 4 (four) new Ministers took their oaths but Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal (Scheduled Caste) lost his portfolio (Judicial, Works and Buildings) which was distributed amongst the newly appointed Ministers from the Scheduled Castes. Fazlur Rahman, the former Chief Whip and a leading member of the Khwaja group, was included into the Cabinet and was allotted the portfolio of Land and Land Revenue Department and the Jails Branch of the Home Department. The rest 3 (three) belonged to the Bengali Hindu (one Caste Hindu and two Scheduled Castes). They were: Tarak Nath Mukherjee, CID, MBE who was in-charge of Irrigation and Waterways Department; Nagendra Narayan Roy who was given the portfolio of Judicial and Legislative Departments and Dwarakanath Barori was given the charge of Works and Buildings Department.¹⁵¹ Thus Suhrawardy reduced the total number of ministers from 13 (which was under Nazimuddin) to 11 but he limited the number of Hindu ministers to 3 which was 6 under Nazimuddin.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A.V. Alexander arrived in India on 24 March 1946 with a view to resolving the country's constitutional deadlock, 'to secure the widest measure of agreement as to the method of framing a constitution', 'the setting up of a constitution making body' and to bring into being of 'an Executive Council having the support of the main Indian parties'. This gave Jinnah a golden opportunity to put forward his demand for partition and express in clear terms, his view on 'Pakistan' which prompted him to convene a Convention of the newly elected Muslim League Legislators of the Central and Provincial Legislatures in Delhi on 7-9 April 1946. At the open session of the Convention (held on 9 April), Suhrawardy was asked to move the official resolution which stated: "That the Muslim nation will never submit to any constitution for a united India and will never participate in any single constitution – making machinery set up for the purpose..... That the Zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East and the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India, namely Pakistan Zones, where the Muslims are in a dominant majority, be constituted into a sovereign independent state and that an unequivocal undertaking be given to implement the establishment of Pakistan

without delay.... That two separate constitution – making bodies be set up by peoples of Pakistan and Hindustan for the purpose of framing their respective constitutions”.¹⁵² This resolution marked a sharp departure from the Lahore Resolution (1940) which envisaged two independent Muslim states in two Zones (i.e. North-East and North-West) of India and changed the word “States” into “State” and thereby the establishment of ‘a sovereign independent state’ (i.e. a single Pakistan State) was voiced by the elected representatives of the Muslim League and only a few months later (on 16 August 1946) the *Dawn*, the mouthpiece of the AIML, published a map of Pakistan in which Bengal and Assam were incorporated as its parts. The draft resolution was debated in a 69-member subjects committee which included 14 members from Bengal¹⁵³ who should have registered their opposition to the resolution of the Convention. Surprisingly, except Abul Hashim (who belonged to the Suhrawardy group), none of the members from Bengal (including the Khwaja group), is known to have raised any voice of protest against this resolution in the subjects committee. Although the Khwaja group earlier thought of an independent Eastern Pakistan in the light of the Lahore Resolution, later changed their stand to prove their allegiance towards Jinnah and did not hesitate at all to support Jinnah’s idea of a single ‘Pakistan’ state. But a few months later, Suhrawardy (who moved the resolution in the open session of the Convention at Delhi in April 1946) changed his stand for the time being and he, along with Abul Hashim, Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Sankar Roy, came forward to initiate a move for a united and independent Bengal.

On 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission announced its draft plan which was placed before the House of Commons by Clement Attlee. Regarding the Pakistan scheme, the draft stated that: “The setting up of a separate sovereign state of Pakistan on the lines claimed by the Muslim League would not solve the Communal Minority problem. Nor can we see any justification for including within a sovereign Pakistan, those districts of Punjab and of Bengal and Assam, in which the population is predominantly non-Muslim. Every argument that can be used in favour of Pakistan, can equally, in our view, be used in favour of the exclusion of the non-Muslim areas, from Pakistan. The point would particularly affect the position of the Sikhs.... We are, therefore, unable to advise the British Government that the power that at present resides in British hands, would be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign

states....”¹⁵⁴ Rejecting the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan, the Cabinet Mission proposed the formation of a Federal Union consisting of British Indian provinces and Indian States. But it proposed a weak Central Government which would deal with a limited number of subjects like Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. The provinces were to have full autonomy and residual powers. Not only that, there would be three groups of provinces-“Section A: all Hindu – majority provinces (Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa); Section B: all Muslim – majority provinces of the north-west (Sind, Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan); Section C: Muslim – majority provinces of the north - east consisting of Bengal and Assam. A Constituent Assembly would be elected by the provincial Assemblies by proportional representation where the members from Groups A, B and C were to sit separately to decide the constitution for the provinces and if possible, for the groups also. Thereafter, the whole Constituent Assembly (all three Sections, A, B and C combined) would sit together to frame the Union constitution. Then only the transfer of power, would take place”.¹⁵⁵ According to the Mission’s plan, on the demand of the Legislature of a province, the constitutions of the Union and of the Groups would be reconsidered and revisited “after an initial period of 10 years and at 10 yearly intervals thereafter”. The Cabinet Mission also proposed for the setting up of an Interim Government consisting of 14 members (6 Congress representatives, 5 Muslim League representatives and 1 each for the Indian Christians, Sikhs and Parsees).

The reactions of the Congress and the Muslim League to the plans of the Cabinet Mission were mixed. The Congress welcomed the plan as it rejected the ‘Pakistan’ proposal, recommended a scheme which was based on the concept of an undivided India. But the Congress leaders opposed the grouping of provinces and argued that compulsory grouping would deprive the provinces of their autonomy and hamper the interests of the Sikhs. They were not satisfied with the Mission’s clarification (on 25 May) that grouping would be compulsory at first, but the provinces would have the right to secede from a group after the first general election and after the constitution had been finalized. The Congress leaders also demanded that the Constituent Assembly which was proposed to frame the Constitution of India, should be “a sovereign body” and they criticized the absence of any provision for elected members from the Princely States in the proposed Constituent Assembly. At a

meeting with the members of the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy Lord Wavell, Jawaharlal Nehru categorically pointed out that the Congress was resolved “to work for a strong Centre and to break the Group system”. Gandhiji, however, warmly welcomed the plans of the Cabinet Mission at a meeting in Delhi on 17 May 1946 and declared that: “Cabinet Mission’s proposals contained the seed to convert this land of sorrow, into one without sorrow and suffering”.¹⁵⁶

The Muslim League, on the other hand, was not at all happy with the rejection of the ‘Pakistan’ scheme, but welcomed the Grouping Scheme. The AIML accepted the Cabinet Mission’s Plan on 6 June 1946 and declared in its resolution that “the basis and the foundation of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of six Muslim provinces in Section B and C”, and that the League agreed to “co-operate with the Constitution-making machinery proposed in the scheme outline by the Mission, in the hope that it would ultimately result in the establishment of completely sovereign Pakistan”.¹⁵⁷ In addition to this, Jinnah thought that the Congress would not accept the plan which ultimately would prompt the British Government to invite ‘the League alone to form the Interim Government at the Centre’.¹⁵⁸ But his assumption did not materialize as the Congress Working Committee after much heated debate, passed a resolution on 25 June 1946 accepting the long-term plan put forward by the Cabinet Mission. Although the AICC accepted the plan, the next AICC meeting which was convened at Bombay on 7 July 1946, was turned into a stormy one. In that meeting, Aruna Asaf Ali, the famous Socialist leader in her speech severely criticized the Cabinet Mission’s plan as a ‘trap laid by the British imperialists’ and pleaded for a united mass struggle to drive out the British rulers from the soil of India.¹⁵⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru who became the new Congress President replacing Maulana Azad, declared at that AICC meeting that “it is not a question of our accepting any plan..... We are not bound by a single thing.... except that we have decided for the moment to go to the Constituent Assembly”.¹⁶⁰ In a press conference on 10 July, Jawaharlal Nehru declared that the only commitment made by his party was to participate in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. At the same time he asserted that “.... the Constituent Assembly would never accept any dictation or any other directive from the British Government in regard to its work....”¹⁶¹ and went further that “.... the probability is, from any approach to the question, that there will be no grouping”¹⁶² as N.W.F.P. and Assam would have objections to joining

Section B and C. All these developments and statements created a great uproar within the League which led Jinnah to convene a meeting of the League Council at Bombay on 27-29 July 1946. In that meeting, the Council passed two important resolutions: by the first, it ultimately decided to withdraw its acceptance of the long-term plans of the Cabinet Mission and by the second resolution (passed on 29 July 1946), the Council gave a clarion call on the 'Muslim Nation' to go in the way of 'Direct Action' to achieve Pakistan.¹⁶³ In the second resolution of the Council, it was mentioned: "Whereas the Council of the All India Muslim League has resolved to reject the proposals embodied in the statement of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy dated 16th May, 1946 due to the intransigence of the Congress on one hand, and the breach of faith with the Muslims by the British Government on the other.... and whereas it has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest contented with anything less than the immediate establishment of Independent and fully Sovereign State of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any constitution-making machinery or any constitution, long term or short term, or the setting up of any Interim Government at the centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League; the Council of the All India Muslim League is convinced that now the time has come for the Muslim Nation to resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan to assert their just rights, to vindicate their honour and to get rid of present British slavery and the contemplated future caste – Hindu domination".¹⁶⁴ At the League Council meeting (on 29 July 1946), Suhrawardy rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan by saying: "... We can not any more rely either on the professions of British friendliness or on the hope that the Congress will one day do justice to us. The Congress was out to destroy Muslim resurgence in this country... Let the Congress beware that it is not going to fight just a handful of people fighting for power, but a nation which is struggling for its life and will secure that life".¹⁶⁵ On the next day (i.e. on 30 July 1946), the Working Committee of the AIML took a resolution by which all the branches of the League throughout India were directed to hold 16 August as a 'Direct Action Day'.¹⁶⁶

In order to abide by the decision of the AIML, the BPML took certain programmes to organize and observe such as: i) complete general *hartal* or strike; ii) explanation of the 'Direct Action' resolution of the AIML before the public gathering in mosques and public meetings; iii) *munajat* (special prayer) for the freedom of

Muslim India; iv) peaceful processions and demonstrations; and v) appeals to all other political parties to observe *hartal* on that day (Friday, 16 August 1946).¹⁶⁷ The prominent BPML leaders like Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and the like, tried to project the 'Direct Action Day' as a struggle against British imperialism. The Khwaja group, as it was expected, also came forward to implement the decision of the Working Committee of the AIML. Meanwhile, the Viceroy gave an offer to the Congress to form an Interim government at the Centre on 8 August 1946 and the Congress instantaneously accepted the offer on 12 August. Though the Viceroy officially announced the appointment of the Congress-led Interim Government with Jawaharlal Nehru as its Vice-President on 24 August, the offer to the Congress was an open secret to the Muslim League circles and embittered the political environment prior to the observance of the Direct Action Day. Strongly reacting against the creation of an absolutely Congress-led Interim government at the Centre, Suhrawardy in an interview with the Associated Press of America, warned: "[The] probable result of putting the Congress in power, bypassing the Muslim League, would be the declaration of complete independence of Bengal and the setting up of a parallel government. We shall see that no revenue is derived from Bengal and will consider ourselves a separate state having no connection with the centre".¹⁶⁸ Some official declarations of Suhrawardy also intensified communal tension and created tremendous repercussions. He declared 16 August as a public holiday in Bengal – a decision which was widely criticized and condemned. In the Bengal Legislature on 15 August Suhrawardy defended his decision by saying: "The government have declared a public Holiday under the Negotiable Instruments Act for the purpose of minimizing the risks of conflicts and in the interests of peace and order".¹⁶⁹ In addition to this, his announcement of the release of the 'pre-Reform' political prisoners on 15 August, also complicated the then political situation of Bengal.¹⁷⁰

Calcutta, which was the city of communal harmony and peace and many glorious anti-imperialist movements, became the first victim of communal blood-bath because of instigating activities and speeches of leading politicians. S.M. Usman, the Secretary of the Calcutta District League and the then Mayor of Calcutta, declared *jihad* or holy war against the Hindus and published and distributed several inflammatory leaflets and pamphlets (mostly in Urdu) to incite the Muslims to violence against the Hindus in the name of religion. On 10 August, he issued a

statement in Urdu in which he said: “I appeal to the Mussalmans of Calcutta.... to rise to the occasion..... We are in the midst of the month of *Ramazan* fasting. But this is a month of real *Jehad* [i.e. holy war] ... Let Muslims brave... Muslims must remember that it was in *Ramazan* that the Quran was revealed..... the permission for *Jehad* was granted by Allah [i.e. God]... The Muslim League is fortunate that it is starting its action in this holy month”.¹⁷¹ Similar type of incitement was expressed in one of the pamphlets of the Muslim League: “We Muslims have had the crown and have ruled. Do not lose heart, be ready and take swords.... Oh Kafir! Your doom is not far and the general massacre will come. We shall show our glory with swords in hands and will have a special victory”.¹⁷² The Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (BPHM), the Hindu press and many contemporary Hindu leaders of Bengal did not sit idle and strongly reacted against these reactionary statements and regarded these atrocious comments ‘as a threat to ‘Pakistanise’ the whole of Bengal forthwith’.¹⁷³ The majority of the Hindu Bengalis considered the ‘Pakistan’ scheme as ‘the permanent loss of political sovereignty and their subjection to the will of the Muslim majority’ and they were determined to protect their ‘home’ for which ‘they were ready to fight to the death’.¹⁷⁴ In one of its leaflets (written in Bengali), the Hindu Mahasabha urged: “Sixteenth August, Beware! The Muslim League has declared the 16th of August as the “Direct Action (Sangram – War) Day” and on that very day public has been asked to observe “*hartal*”. That day has been proclaimed as such for the Muslim League to attain Pakistan. The Bengali Hindus and every non-Muslim are opposed to Pakistan. Under these circumstances to observe “*hartal*” on the 16th as proclaimed by the League or to help them in any way would mean supporting their demand [i.e. Pakistan]. The Bengal’s Hindus can never do that. The League Ministry had the audacity to declare that day as a holiday.... By this method that day the Govt. Hindu employees will be forced to observe “*hartal*”. The Hindus will have to give a clear reply to this highhandedness of the Muslim League. It is the clear duty of every Hindu that he will do his usual normal duty and no Hindu, non-Muslim or anti-League Muslim shall observe “*hartal*” nor will he allow anyone to observe “*hartal*” ...”.¹⁷⁵

Thus the people of Calcutta belonging to both the communities (i.e. Hindus and Muslims) were heavily charged up before the observation of the ‘Direct Action Day’ and its observance on 16 August 1946 by the Muslim League, brought

disastrous consequences and Calcutta witnessed a 'reign of terror' for four days (16-19 August 1946) when it was completely under the control of the hooligans. A massive communal riot broke out in Calcutta and there was havoc massacre which came to be known in history as 'the Great Calcutta Killing'. When on 19 August, the holocaust ended, over 4,000 people (of both sides) lay dead and 10,000 injured in the streets and bye-lanes of Calcutta. *The Statesman* wrote: "This is not a riot. It needs a word from mediaeval history, a fury. Yet 'fury' sounds spontaneous and there must have been some deliberation and organisation to set this fury on its way. The horde who ran about battering and killing with 8 ft lathis may have found them lying about or bought them out of their pockets, but that is hard to believe".¹⁷⁶ It was not only a riot or 'a war between two communities', it was more than that and it took the character of a 'civil war'. Prof. Tapan Raychaudhuri who witnessed arson and murder in the vicinity of the Scottish Church College (the locality where he lived), narrated his 'very humbling' experience of those four days (16 to 19 August 1946) in his *The World in Our Time: A Memoir* which destroyed forever his 'pride in the non-communal outlook of educated Bengali Hindus'.¹⁷⁷ Nikhil Chakravarty, another eyewitness of that holocaust, described: "There was cold-blooded killing on both sides. The riot was well-organised on both sides. Suhrawardy organised the riot ruthlessly to show that... [the Muslims] will retain Calcutta. On the Hindu side, it was part of the campaign for the Partition of Bengal..."¹⁷⁸ The main participants and culprits of the Calcutta riot, according to Prof. Suranjan Das, were non-Bengalis, many of whom belonged to the underworld.¹⁷⁹ Same sort of interpretation was echoed in the report of Governor Burrows (dated 22 August 1946) in which it was stated that it was a programme between rival armies of the Calcutta underworld.¹⁸⁰ It can be said here that the business community (particularly the Marwari businessmen who gave their mansions and their workshops 'to be used as bases for operations'),¹⁸¹ the educated, upper-caste and middle class Hindus (the *bhadralok*) and Muslims and the underworld were actively involved in this riot to fulfil their own purposes. But it did not end with Calcutta and similar kind of incidents took place in Noakhali, Tippera and also extended to Bihar, Gurmukhteswar and other parts of India.

Immediately after this massacre, the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, a section of the Congress leaders and a section of the press absolutely put the blame on Suhrawardy and his Ministry and accused Mr. Suhrawardy of giving 'marching

orders' to the Muslims of Calcutta. Also his presence in the police control room at Lal Bazar when the killings went on the rampage throughout the city was questioned by them. *The Statesman* severely criticized the role of the Bengal Government and its complete failure in the judgement of the situation and its regrettable inefficiency in the running of administration: "The origin of the appalling carnage and loss in the capital of a great Province we believe the worst communal rioting in India's history was a political demonstration by the Muslim League. Bengal's is a Muslim League Ministry.... the obligation on the Bengal Ministry, is fulfilment of the League's declared policy of keeping 'Direct Action Day' peaceful was unique. But instead of fulfilling this, it undeniably by confused acts of omission and provocation, contributed to the horrible events which have occurred".¹⁸² Even Bucher, acting Army Commander, when he met the Viceroy in Calcutta on 26 August 1946, "commented on the completely communal attitude of the Chief Minister Suhrawardy...."¹⁸³ On the same day, Wavell, the Viceroy, wrote in his diary his observation about the position of the Bengal Government: "He [Governor] outlined the position in the Assembly where the Government was really dependent on the European vote and could be turned out. But there was no alternative ministry and a Section 93 administration was not possible. He said that Suhrawardy had forfeited everyone's confidence and suggested the possibility of a coalition ministry....."¹⁸⁴ On 27 August 1946, Sarat Bose, the then member of Congress Working Committee and leader of the party in the Central Assembly, demanded for the dissolution of the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawardy and proposed for the formation of an all-party ministry in Bengal in order to restore communal harmony and peace.¹⁸⁵ Viceroy Lord Wavell met Gandhi and Nehru in Delhi on 27 August 1946 and tried to convince both of them by citing the example of the 'Calcutta Killings' about the necessity of keeping British troops in India for an indefinite period. The Viceroy also suggested them that they should issue a statement asserting the position of the Congress that the provinces must remain in their Sections till the completion of the first elections under the new constitution. On the next day (i.e. 28 August), Gandhiji gave him a written reply wherein he categorically mentioned: "If British arms are kept here for internal peace and order, your Interim Government would be reduced to a farce. The Congress cannot afford to impose its will on warring elements in India, through the use of British arms. Nor can the Congress be expected to bend itself and adopt what it considers a wrong cause, because of the brutal exhibition recently witnessed in

Bengal. Such submissions would itself lead to an encouragement and repetition of such tragedies.....¹⁸⁶ In his reply, Jawaharlal Nehru also expressed the same mood: “Provincial autonomy is a basic provision and each province has the right to decide whether to form or join a group or not”.¹⁸⁷ As a result, Wavell’s meeting with the Congress leaders did not bear any result and he became extremely hostile towards the Congress but he was not able to take any step against it as Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State, requested him ‘to do nothing rash with the Congress’.¹⁸⁸ Despite the Viceroy’s resentment, a twelve-member Congress-dominated Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in on 2 September 1946 without having any League representative.

At this critical juncture, an initiative was taken by the members of the Muslim League to bring back its erstwhile members and leaders under the banner of the League. Likely, a Muslim League deputation (consisting of 300 Leaguers)¹⁸⁹ went to the residence of Fazlul Huq on 1 September 1946 and requested him to rejoin the League. Mr. Huq who was at that time very much willing to return to the League, told the deputation that “there was a ban on his entry into the League and unless the ban was removed he could not join it. The members of the deputation then suggested to Mr. Huq that he should sign a declaration that he was not against the League as an organization and he was willing to serve it with his life. On Mr. Huq’s signing such a declaration, the deputation promised to arrange for his return to the League fold”.¹⁹⁰ Likely, he wrote a letter to Jinnah on 3 September 1946 requesting and appealing him to lift the ban imposed on him in December 1941 and wanted to get back his lost position in Bengal politics. Jinnah immediately responded to his appeal, lifted the ban and allowed Fazlul Huq and his followers to join the League.¹⁹¹ In a press release on 8 September 1946 Jinnah stated: “In view of the public declarations made by Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq on Sept 1 and 3, and having given his written statement pledging his whole-hearted loyalty, devotion and support to the League unconditionally, and as he was followed up these declarations by his letter dated Sept 3 addressed to me requesting me to lift the ban which was imposed upon him nearly five years ago, and further in view of his assurance of an honest change-over and of joining the League, having already signed the membership form and pledge of the Muslim League which has been submitted by him through the Calcutta District League to the provincial organization for its acceptance of his membership and as the ban was imposed upon

him by the virtue of my emergency powers, I hereby remove the same, hoping that Mr. Fazlul Huq will sincerely, earnestly and selflessly serve the Muslim League, the national, authoritative, representative organization of the Muslims of India and our cause, the achievement of Pakistan".¹⁹² Although the ban was removed on him, Fazlul Huq was not at all happy with the essence of this statement of Jinnah. But as Mr. Huq at that time did not have any better option, he thought it expedient to return to the League. It ultimately strengthened the League and brought 'four most valuable extra votes to the Ministry'¹⁹³ which was very crucial at that time.

Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier who was severely criticized for his maladministration and mishandling of the situation following the observance of the 'Direct Action Day', 'sincerely wanted to restore confidence among Hindus'¹⁹⁴ after the Calcutta riots. He made an attempt to form a coalition government in Bengal with the Hindus which was also attempted and cherished by Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal.¹⁹⁵ But the *Star of India* rightly pointed out that Suhrawardy was not in a position to take any independent decision in this matter as everything was depended on the green signal of the League Supremo. So he met Jinnah at Bombay on 5 and 6 September, discussed with him the Bengal situation and requested him to give necessary permission for the formation of a coalition government in Bengal. But he failed to get the approval from Jinnah and the Nazimuddin group also opposed it as they were 'keen for an ouster of Suhrawardy from the provincial League leadership'.¹⁹⁶ Lord Wavell reported this in his diary of 8 September 1946 that "the only event to record is an interview with Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal, who had gone to Bombay to see Jinnah, and was on his way back to Calcutta. He had obviously drawn a complete blank with Jinnah, who had refused to allow him to establish a coalition ministry in Bengal, unless there was a satisfactory coalition at the Centre. Perhaps he trusts Suhrawardy as little as I do..... Suhrawardy was obviously very worried. I dislike and distrust him intensely. I have always thought him a dishonest, self-seeking careerist with no principles. I think Jinnah is worried too, but he seems as intransigent as ever".¹⁹⁷

Returning to Calcutta in empty-handed, Suhrawardy had to face tremendous attacks from the Opposition in the Bengal Legislative Assembly when its second session started from 12 September 1946. On that day, the Congress brought the

adjournment motion in the House as a protest against the Calcutta massacre which was ultimately defeated in the Legislative Council by 29 votes to 17 (9 members, including the 6 Europeans, refrained from casting their votes).¹⁹⁸ On 19 September Dharendra Nath Dutta, Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, moved the no-confidence motions in the House against the League Ministry in general and the Chief Minister in particular. The Congress members like Bimal Coomar Ghose, Ishwar Das Jalan, Bhupati Majumdar, Kiran Sankar Roy, Bina Das and the like came forward to support him. Moving this no-confidence motion, D.N. Dutta accused the Government (which was the custodian of the law) for violating the law and also provoking the people 'to break the law'. In his speech, he severely criticized the police and Executive Officers for their failure in 'maintaining the law and order' and also condemned the Council of Ministers for their irresponsible conduct at the time of communal riots.¹⁹⁹ Keeping in mind the aftermath of the Calcutta riots, B.C. Ghose demanded that for the 'future political and economic well being of the province.... the Chief Minister must vacate his high office'.²⁰⁰ Ishwar Das Jalan of the Opposition, reiterated the failure of the Government and told in the House: "so far as the Government of Bengal is concerned, it had failed to preserve law and order, not only in a lane or a by lane but in the broadest streets of Calcutta, not only for an hour or two but for days together".²⁰¹ He also expressed his strong resentment against the Chief Minister that the catastrophe even took place when Suhrawardy himself was present in the police Control Room. Nisith Nath Kundu, Niharendu Dutta Majumdar, Ganendra Bhattacharjee and Bijoy Krishna Sarkar participated in this debate and highlighted the corruption, inefficiency, sluggishness and partiality of the League Ministry and the police altogether. Participating in this debate Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, gave the longest speech in the House on 20 September 1946 wherein he strongly attacked both the Government and the Chief Minister: "... What happened in Calcutta is not the result of a sudden explosion but it is the culmination of an administration, inefficient, corrupt and communal.... We are like poles asunder when you say that you will plunge the country into war if you do not get Pakistan and we say that you shall not get Pakistan. These views are irreconcilable...."²⁰² Regarding the future of Bengal as well as India, he uttered: "What about the future? My friends, the Muslims, say that they constitute 25 per cent of India's population, and that is so big a minority that they will never agree to live under 75 per cent Hindu domination. Now if that is their honest and genuine point of

view how can they expect that 45 per cent of the Hindu population of this Province will ever agree to live under a constitution where that particular nation represented by Muslims, constituting only of 55 per cent will along dominate?... Now, if the Muslims of Bengal under the leadership of the Muslim League feel that they can exterminate the Hindus, that is a fantastic idea which can never be given effect to: three and a half crores can never exterminate three crores nor can three crores exterminate three and a half crores..... It is therefore vitally necessary that this false and foolish idea of Pakistan or Islamic rule has to be banished for ever from your head. In Bengal we have got to live together. We say as a condition precedent this Ministry must go. Only then can we create a state of affairs which will make it possible to build a future Bengal which will be for the good of all, irrespective of any caste, creed or community".²⁰³ Jyoti Basu, the CPI leader who was selected from the Railway Labour Constituency in the 1946 Bengal Provincial Assembly Elections and later became the Chief Minister of West Bengal, said before the House that the British Imperialists, who were looking after Indian administration, were the main criminals for the communal riots and pointed out the fact that while 'the Sind Governor disallowed the declaration of holiday on 16 August, the Bengal Governor did the contrary in Calcutta'. He made an appeal to preserve Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony and at the same time, put emphasis on the formation of a coalition ministry in Bengal.²⁰⁴ Kiran Sankar Roy, the Opposition Leader in the House, urged the Bengal Government to suppress hooliganism and vandalism at any cost and restore peace and promised to extend his full co-operation in bringing communal harmony and peace.

In reply to the Opposition's no-confidence motions against him and against his Ministry, H.S. Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister cum the Home Minister, tried to defend his action prior to the Calcutta riot: "The 16th August had been declared by me a holiday. That was done for the purpose of minimizing conflicts but the Hindu newspapers and leaders deliberately interpreted it in a different light and exhorted their young men to oppose it in all possible way".²⁰⁵ The members of the ruling party like Abul Hashim, Minister Shamsuddin Ahmed, Mohammad Habibulla Chowdhury, M.A.H. Ispahani and the like participated in the debate and put the blame mainly on the 'Hindu Press' (particularly the *Basumati*) for the unfortunate and regrettable happenings in Calcutta. Fazlul Huq who just rejoined the League, considered the riot

as 'pre-planned' and called it a purely 'fiendish fury' with which both Hindus and Muslims had been murdered. In a highly emotional speech at the floor of the House, he said: "while we are shouting here, the fate of India is going to be decided not by resolutions here and there, but in White Hall and in Delhi. It would have been better if we had watched and seen what would be the upshot and the result of the talks which are now going on between the Viceroy and the Party leaders. I am optimistic in this respect. I feel Sir, that all will end well. If there is a Coalition Government at the Centre there is no reason why there should not be a Coalition Government in all the provinces.... I want to see peace established in the country".²⁰⁶ After a long debate which continued for two days (19-20 September 1946), the no-confidence motions against the Ministry and the Chief Minister were put on to vote. The motion against the Ministry was defeated by 131 to 87 votes and the other against the Chief Minister was defeated by 130 votes (Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister abstained from voting) to 85. The European Group (20 members), the Communists (3 members) and the Speaker remained neutral whereas 5 members from the European Group, 2 members from the Congress and 1 Nationalist Muslim remained absent at the time of voting.²⁰⁷

At the all-India level, Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy who was very keen to include the Muslim League in the Interim Government (in order to make it meaningful, lasting and to pacify communal tension and violence in various parts of India), resumed his talks with Jinnah from 12 October to 15 October 1946 and after a series of negotiations, he (Jinnah) ultimately gave his consent and the League finally decided to join the Interim Government.²⁰⁸ On 15 October 1946, Jinnah submitted the list of five Muslim League nominees (4 from North India and 1 from Bengal), namely, Liaquat Ali Khan, Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar (N.W.F.P.), Raja Ghaznafar Ali Khan (Punjab), I.I. Chundrigar and Jogendra Nath Mondal (Bengal).²⁰⁹ But the selection of Jogendra Nath Mondal, a Scheduled Caste candidate as a Muslim League nominee by Jinnah (which was probably 'a counter-move to the challenge thrown by the Congress when it selected a Muslim as a Congress nominee in the Interim Government'),²¹⁰ instead of Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin, Fazlul Huq or any other Muslim League leader from Bengal or Assam, completely demoralized the League leaders of both the provinces. It was a shocking experience for them and this decision of Jinnah shattered the power, position and ambition of the BPML leaders and thwarted their attempt to bid for power at the Centre. Suhrawardy was reported to

have criticized this dictatorial discretion of Jinnah as “an injustice to Bengal”.²¹¹ Even Nazimuddin, who was very loyal to Jinnah, was shocked to know that ‘he was also not in Jinnah’s mind as Bengal’s representative in the Interim Government’.²¹² He was not at all happy with his decision and described it as a “poor show”. Although his decision infuriated and frustrated the BPML leaders, Jinnah remained unperturbed and the League finally joined the Interim Government on 26 October 1946.

But the tragic incident in Calcutta was still alive in the minds of the people of Bengal and it had tremendous repercussions. Noakhali, a Muslim – dominated district in East Bengal, witnessed within about seven weeks of the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’, a massive communal riot (led by Mian Ghulam Sarwar) in which hundreds of Hindus were massacred by the Muslim hoodlums. From Noakhali, the riot spread to Tippera (where the poor peasants, mostly Muslims, led by the Communist *Kisan Sabha* leaders like Moklesur Rehman and Krishna Sunder Bhowmik, rose up against the aggressive rioters at Hasnabad thana and prevented the flame of the riots from spreading further) and thereafter to Bihar where aggressive Hindu communalists massacred a huge number of Muslims and the Congress government failed to cool down the situation. Same kind of butchery took place in U.P., Punjab, Bombay etc. The situation became more intense because of the inflammatory statements and speeches of Vallabhbhai Patel, Jinnah and others which added fuel to the fire. In order to restore communal peace in Bengal, Gandhiji (who believed in one-party Government and did not insist on a coalition in Bengal),²¹³ rushed to Noakhali in early November 1946, tried to bring confidence in the minds of the people and became the symbol of a secular, democratic India. But Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, a staunch Gandhian and Gandhiji’s secretary during his stay in Noakhali thought that Gandhiji had definite political intentions behind this move: ‘Gandhiji dealt with the problem as a whole and explained that we should proceed in such a manner that the [Muslim League] Government might be put in the wrong and the struggle lifted to the necessary political plane.... mere humanitarian relief was not enough, for it would fail to touch the root of the problem’.²¹⁴ Probably the political motive of Gandhiji prompted Fazlul Huq initially not to support his (Gandhiji’s) visit to Noakhali.

Fazlul Huq who was highly critical in the Bengal Assembly against the Suhrawardy Ministry and the police because of their inefficiency during the days of

the Calcutta killings, took up the cause of the Muslims who were the victims of the riots and decided to participate in relief activities and devote his life to their welfare and betterment. He even went to Bihar for their cause. He was elected the President of the All Bengal Relief and Welfare Society²¹⁵ and monitored relief works in the riot affected areas. At the same time, Fazlul Huq openly criticized the Suhrawardy Ministry for its failure in tackling different crises (like communal tension, tram strike, Tebhaga Movement etc.) in Bengal and brought the charge of corruption against the Ministry. He had the conviction that Bengal was once again on the threshold of famine. He visited Barisal and Mymensingh districts and noticed the inefficiency and inability of the government officials and particularly, the Department of Civil Supplies. Not only that, according to Huq, the faulty educational system of the government was responsible for educational backwardness of the Muslims and urged the government to set up a Muslim University in Bengal. When Suhrawardy did not give him any assurance in this regard, Fazlul Huq threatened him to take 'Direct Action' against the government.²¹⁶ Accordingly, Fazlul Huq met Gandhiji at Noakhali and 'began to talk about a coalition government in Bengal as the only remedy for Bengal's ills'.²¹⁷ But Gandhiji and the Congress High Command did not show any interest in this scheme. Within a few days, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Baldev Singh went to London on the invitation of the British Cabinet and after consultations with them the British Cabinet issued a statement on 6 December on the 'Grouping' wherein it was categorically mentioned that the 'Grouping' was "an essential part of the scheme of May 16", i.e. of the Cabinet Mission Plan. This official announcement compelled Gopinath Bardoloi, the Congress Premier of Assam, to send his two representatives to meet with Gandhiji in Noakhali, asking for his advice in this regard. This meeting took place on 15 December wherein Gandhiji advised the Congress delegates of Assam to reject 'Grouping' and not to go into the section with Bengal and told them: "It is an impertinent suggestion that Bengal should dominate Assam in any way".²¹⁸ Gandhiji did not sit idle and in order to restore peace and communal harmony in Noakhali and Tippera, he along with his followers, started his walking tour on 2 January 1947. At the same time, he began to deliver lectures quoting the messages of Prophet Muhammad to win the confidence of the Muslims and to mould their lives in the direction of peace and unity. Fazlul Huq did not take his visit to Noakhali sportingly as he apprehended that Gandhiji's visit would extensively bring to the surface the atrocities committed by the Muslims on the Hindu

minorities of Noakhali and Comilla which would once again pollute the political environment and bring tension in those regions. Huq, therefore, criticized Gandhiji at a public meeting held at Comilla on 12 February 1947 for spreading and enhancing communal hatred amongst the two communities and advised him to leave Noakhali as soon as possible. He categorically mentioned that being a non-Muslim, Gandhiji had no right at all to preach the tenets of Islam. Gandhiji was surprised to see Mr. Huq's comment in the newspaper and tried to defend his stay at Noakhali. He strongly refuted Mr. Huq's argument on the ground that he did not belong to any particular community and simultaneously he considered himself as a pure Hindu and a pure Muslim. Gandhiji also said that the Muslims had every right either to accept his lecture or to reject it what he uttered during his prayers and meetings in Noakhali.²²⁰ Thereafter, Fazlul Huq sent a telegram on 18 February 1947 to Gandhiji in order to 'have a heart to heart talk with him' though he (Huq) still maintained that his (Gandhiji's) stay in Noakhali was 'wholly meaningless' and the proper place for him would be New Delhi where he could 'negotiate for the peace of all the communities in India'.²²¹ Getting positive response from Gandhiji, Fazlul Huq started his journey from Calcutta on 26 February to meet with him. On the next day (i.e. 27 February 1947), the meeting between them took place at Haimchar and both of them had a very healthy discussion. The discussion helped Mr. Huq to remove his doubts and misunderstanding with Gandhiji. It was soon reflected in his speech at the meeting of the Bar Association of Mymensingh on 4 March where Fazlul Huq said: "... What Mr. Gandhi was doing in his present goodwill mission in the disturbed areas of East Bengal was really praise-worthy".²²² Going ahead, Mr. Huq expressed his intention 'to spend the rest of his life in preaching goodwill amongst the Hindus and Muslims' and 'that, he added, would make Bengal really happy and prosperous'.²²³

Meanwhile, the Suhrawardy – Hashim group within the BPML got tremendous blow as Jinnah nominated Liaquat Ali Khan and some other Muslims from outside Bengal for elections from the Bengal Assembly to the Indian Constituent Assembly on the basis of separate electorate. Out of 33 Muslim seats reserved for Bengal, Muslim League candidates won in 32 seats and Fazlul Huq was returned as an independent candidate in the remaining 1 seat. Out of these 32 League members, there were 7 non-Bengali Muslims of whom 4 were non-residents.²²⁴ Many of the elected League members from Bengal to the Indian Constituent Assembly belonged to

the Khwaja group. To the utter dismay of the Suhrawardy – Hashim group, Nazimuddin, the leader of the Khwaja group, on the advice of Jinnah, decided to contest the election to the Central Assembly in a by-election from the Burdwan-cum-Presidency constituency and was returned unopposed on 28 October 1946.²²⁵ Not only that, when Liaquat Ali Khan joined the Interim Government, Jinnah made Nazimuddin his Deputy in the Assembly.²²⁶ All these developments boosted the confidence of the supporters of Nazimuddin in Bengal. Within a few days, both these groups within the BPML went into a tussle when Maulana Akram Khan tendered his resignation from the presidentship of the BPML in early November 1946. Abul Hashim of the Suhrawardy group and existing Secretary of the BPML, declared himself as a willing candidate for the party presidentship whereas the Khwaja group set up Fazlul Huq as their candidate²²⁷ to prevent Abul Hashim's election to that post. To win the hearts of the Muslims, Fazlul Huq expressed his belief in 'Pakistan' and its attainment in a statement published in *The Morning News* on 31 January 1947: "In view of the likelihood of a vacancy in the office of the President of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, consequent on the resignation tendered by Moulana Akram Khan, I wish to offer myself as a candidate for the same in case the resignation of the Moulana Saheb is accepted.... I am anxious to place my humble services at the disposal of the Muslim League at the critical juncture of our fight for an honourable existence as an independent nation in India. As the mover of the momentous resolution in Lahore it will be a matter of pride and glory for me to lay down even my life for the attainment of our national goal of Pakistan, as I feel that no sacrifice is too great for an ideal which is the noblest of all in human life. I am sure I can count upon every honest vote in the hope that I make this appeal to my fellow members of the Council of Bengal Provincial Muslim League to cast their votes in my favour.... My hope is still stronger that the occasion may not arise for an election and that the Moulana Saheb will consent to continue in office and guide us as he has done all his life".²²⁸ During this presidential contest, Fazlul Huq requested Abul Hashim to withdraw his candidature in his favour which Hashim did not agree at that point of time (but later considered his decision as 'a great blunder').²²⁹ But the election of either of the candidates as the President of the BPML would cause a lot of problem to Jinnah as neither of them directly belonged to his camp. So the League Supremo decided to interfere in this matter and sent a telegram to Suhrawardy asking the latter to meet him at Karachi to discuss 'certain matters concerning Bengal situation'.²³⁰ It

was likely that in that meeting at Karachi, Jinnah made clear about his intention and accordingly intimated Suhrawardy what was to be done by him in order to avert a possible split within the party. As a result, a meeting of the League Parliamentary Party was convened on 8 February 1947 under the presidentship of Suhrawardy wherein a resolution was adopted urging the Council to request Maulana Akram Khan to withdraw his resignation and continue the presidentship of the BPML in order to keep intact Muslim unity and solidarity and to avoid further split within the organization. On the next day (i.e. 9 February 1947), at the Council meeting of the BPML, Suhrawardy moved the official resolution appealing to Maulana Akram Khan to continue as President. Only a few Council members did not support this resolution as they wanted to see Fazlul Huq at the presidential chair of the BPML.²³¹ Following his earlier resignations (in those cases, the Khwaja group requested Maulana to withdraw), Maulana Akram Khan withdrew his resignation letter on 12 February, giving the reason: 'I take the decision of the Council as a command of Muslim Bengal which I cannot think of disobeying'.²³² It was shocking and disheartening to both Fazlul Huq and Abul Hashim and the latter was very much disappointed in Suhrawardy particularly his dubious role in this presidential election. Disgusted Abul Hashim decided to take leave for some months from the BPML secretaryship and Habibullah Bahar, a Joint Secretary, became the Acting Secretary of the BPML.²³³ There is no doubt that Fazlul Huq committed a mistake by giving his consent to be a candidate of the Khwaja group in the presidential election of the BPML and by relying upon Khwaja Nazimuddin and his followers who at the last moment violated their promise and betrayed him. Actually, the members of both the Khwaja group and the Suhrawardy group did not consider Mr. Huq as trustworthy and they did not at all want to see him in the chair of the President of the BPML as well as in the chair of the Bengal Premier once again which was reflected in an editorial of the *Hindusthan Standard* entitled 'The Old Quarrel' wherein it was stated: "Neither group had any confidence in Mr. Fazlul Huq".²³⁴ He gave a quick response to this editorial and wrote a letter to the editor (published on 9 May 1947) in which Huq wrote: "In course of your remarks on the Muslim League Parliamentary position in Bengal (under the caption 'The Old Quarrel' dated the 6th May), you have remarked that Suhrawardy is still in power because the Muslim Leaguers have not yet been able to find a more acceptable substitute. This is correct, but it is very unkind on your part to say that I could not be selected because I was not acceptable to the two contending groups. The

truth is that I am not in the picture, not because I am unacceptable, but because I am convinced that the office of Chief Minister in Bengal cannot be acceptable to any honest man. I told all my friends that I have had enough of Bengal politics and I would like to keep aloof from rank communalism, dishonesty and corruption. I am sorry you were led to make that remark about my being unacceptable, because of your ignorance of my decision, regarding the Premiership of Bengal”.²³⁵

On 20 February 1947, the British Government made very important officials announcements. Firstly, it decided to remove the then Viceroy Lord Wavell and to appoint Lord Louis Mountbatten in his place (who assumed the office on 24 March 1947). Secondly, the British Prime Minister, Attlee announced in the Parliament that it was the ‘definite intention’ of His Majesty’s Government (HMG) ‘to take necessary steps to effect the transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948’. It was asserted that if an agreed Constitution (as proposed by the Cabinet Mission) was not ‘worked out by a fully representative Assembly’ before the due date, ‘His Majesty’s Government will have to consider to whom the powers of the Central Government in British India should be handed over, on the due date – whether as a whole to some form of Central Government for British India or in the same areas to the existing Provincial Governments for British India...’²³⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru hailed the announcement of the date for transfer of power and on the very next day of this official announcement (i.e. on 21 February), he met with Wavell and told the latter about ‘the possible partition of the Punjab and Bengal, if agreement was not reached’. Many Hindus and Sikhs in Bengal and Punjab who were alarmed at the prospect of compulsory grouping which might lead them in Pakistan, insistently launched campaign for the partition of their provinces. The All – India Hindu Mahasabha (which always stood for and fought for an *Akhand Hindusthan*), under the enthusiastic leadership of Syama Prasad Mookerjee (who was its President at that time), started a movement for the dismemberment of Bengal in order to establish a separate Hindu-majority West Bengal Province (including Calcutta). The Congress Working Committee (CWC) soon held its meeting from 6 to 8 March 1947 and raised the demand for the partition of Punjab into two parts- a predominantly Muslim part and a predominantly non-Muslim part. Likely Acharya J.B. Kripalani, the then Congress President, in an interview said that “the principle might be applied to Bengal also”.²³⁷ It is very interesting to note here that in that meeting of the Congress

Working Committee (which was held on 6-8 March 1947), not a single leader from Bengal or Punjab was present to put forward his or her arguments and in their absence a very emotional, sensitive and decisive decision regarding the division of these two provinces, was taken by the CWC. Enclosing the Working Committee's resolution with his letter, Jawaharlal Nehru also wrote to Wavell on the next day that "The principle would, of course, apply to Bengal also".²³⁸ In this letter, Nehru went further and suggested the Viceroy that Bengal and Punjab should be partitioned even if India was not partitioned – the demand which had already been raised by Birla's *Hindusthan Standard* and later it was echoed by Syama Prasad Mookerjee.²³⁹ The issue of the partition of Bengal and the mixed response to its division was reflected in the Fortnightly Report of F.J. Burrows, the then Governor of Bengal, who wrote to Wavell on 19 March 1947: "The movement for partitioning Bengal is gathering momentum. Hindu opinion is at present very divided. For once Sarat Bose and Gandhi see eye to eye, and both condemn the movement, of which Syamaprasad Mookerjee and the Hindu Mahasabha are the chief protagonists. Suhrawardy has made a number of speeches on the subject, his line being that Bengal must be independent of the Centre, that Hindu and Muslim Bengalis must work in harmony for the common prosperity of the Province, and that one-party rule in this and other Provinces must end".²⁴⁰

The Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee in its meeting took a resolution on 4 April 1947, in favour of partition and – urging the formation of a new state of West Bengal within the Indian union.²⁴¹ The non-Congressites like Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Nalini Ranjan Sarker and the like were also invited to attend this meeting. This resolution of the BPCC gave a fillip to the Hindu Mahasabha which laid down its 'lines of action' at its annual session held on 4-6 April at Tarakeshwar (in the Hooghly district) wherein Nirmal Chandra Chatterjee, the acting President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, spoke: "Let us declare to-day that as the Muslim League persists in its fantastic idea of establishing Pakistan in Bengal, the Hindus of Bengal must constitute a separate Province under a strong National Government. This is not a Question of partition. It is a question of life and death for us, the Bengali Hindus..."²⁴² This sentiment was also reflected in the speech delivered by Syama Prasad Mookerjee in that Conference: "I can conceive of no other solution of the communal problem in Bengal than to divide the province and

let the two major communities residing herein live in peace and freedom”.^{242a} In that Conference of the Hindu Mahasabha, a resolution was passed authorizing Syama Prasad to ‘constitute a council of action to establish a separate homeland for the Hindus of Bengal; 100,000 volunteers are to be enrolled by the end of June, the Constituent Assembly are to be asked to appoint a Boundary Commission; and as soon as the area of the new Province has been settled, the Hindu members of the Legislative Assembly in this area are to demand that it should be constituted into a Province, if necessary leaving the Bengal Assembly and forming themselves into a separate legislative body’.²⁴³ Not only that, in that resolution it was also said that the ‘new Province should be constituted before the British Government transferred power’.²⁴⁴ Thus in April 1947, both the BPC and the Hindu Mahasabha were thinking alike and took almost identical resolutions for the formation of a separate province for the Hindus of Bengal. At the same time, the leading Hindu non-Bengali business tycoons of Bengal (Birla, Goenka, Jalan etc.), various industrial and commercial organizations and many influential newspapers (like *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Hindusthan Standard* etc.) also supported the demand for a separate West Bengal province. Likely on 30 April, at a meeting of big Marwari and Gujarati entrepreneurs in Calcutta, Nalini Ranjan Sarker moved a resolution urging the partition of Bengal: “We demand partition in a spirit altogether different from that in which the League wants Pakistan. It is not the result of our choice, but of the impossible situation in which we find ourselves due to the demand of the Muslim League for creating a Sovereign Pakistan State in Bengal outside the Indian Union”.²⁴⁵ Accordingly in that meeting, a committee was formed with members like B.M. Birla, D.N. Sen, J.K. Mitra, S.C. Roy, Bir Badridas Goenka, B.L. Jalan, D.C. Driver, M.L. Shah, Nalini Ranjan Sarker and so forth to work on this project. On the same day (i.e. 30 April 1947), Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, spoke out in favour of division: “If there was to be a division of India then it should be as complete and thorough as possible, including the division of the Punjab and Bengal – so that there might not be left any room for conflict”.^{245a}

But the partition of the province was not a universal demand of the Bengali Hindus and a section of the Bengali Congressites (like Akhil Chandra Dutta, Sarat Chandra Bose, etc.) raised protest against the AICC’s March resolution in favour of the division of Punjab and the Congress President’s adherence to that principle which

would be applicable to Bengal also. Sarat Chandra Bose (the elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose), who resigned from the Working Committee of the AICC on 6 January 1947, strongly reacted against this party stand and said: “By accepting religion as the sole basis of the distribution of province, the Congress has cut itself away from its moorings and has almost undone the work it has been doing for the last sixty years. The resolution in question is a departure from the traditions and principles of the Congress. And I am forced to the conclusion that it is the result of a defeatist mentality..... Any division of the country or of the provinces on religious basis will not help us in bringing about amity, not to speak of unity, which the Congress has so long stood for. An overhasty surgical cure will involve us in confusion and disorder”.²⁴⁶ On 23 March under the initiative of Akhil Chandra Dutta, former Vice-President of the Central Legislative Assembly and a veteran Congress leader, a conference of prominent persons, including some M.L.A.s was convened in Calcutta wherein the participants spoke against the proposed partition of Bengal and considered the partition as a ‘retrograde and reactionary move’. In that Conference, the members reiterated: “The partition of Bengal will create a permanent cleavage between the two communities and perpetuate an evil which is bound to die out even earlier than some people find it difficult to believe” and authorized Sarat Chandra Bose and Akhil Chandra Dutta to form a committee of action against partition.²⁴⁷ At the end of April 1947, Sarat Chandra Bose formed the All Bengal Anti-Pakistan and Anti-Partition Committee with himself as President and Kamini Kumar Dutta, M.L.C. as Secretary to raise the voice of protest against the scheme of Pakistan and the partition of Bengal.^{247a} Few days later, Kiran Sankar Roy, the leader of the Bengal Congress Parliamentary Party, met the Viceroy on 3 May 1947 and told him that ‘he had always been strongly in favour of unity [of Bengal] and he had only been driven to recommending partition by the intransigence of the Muslim League and pressure from the Congress’.²⁴⁸ Apart from a section of the Bengal Congress leaders, there were other political personalities (non- Congressite Hindus) who also voiced against the partition scheme. For example, Jogendra Nath Mondal, Law member, Government of India and a prominent Bengali Scheduled Caste leader and ex-Minister of Bengal, told at New Delhi on 21 April 1947: “The present communal trouble was a temporary phase which could not last long and that the division of the province was no solution to the problem. It was not in the interest of Hindus to divide the province and the Scheduled Castes were definitely opposed to partition”.²⁴⁹

Some prominent BPML leaders (like Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and so on), also protested against the scheme of the partition of Bengal and stood in favour of a united and greater Bengal. On 8 April 1947, while giving an interview Suhrawardy said: “I have always held the view that Bengal cannot be partitioned. I am in favour of a united and greater Bengal”.²⁵⁰ Again at a press conference in New Delhi on 27 April, he gave same kind of statement and stood against the partition of Bengal which according to him, ‘would be suicidal even from the Hindus point of view’ and visualized for ‘an independent, undivided, sovereign Bengal in a divided India’.²⁵¹ There Suhrawardy also added: “Today we are in the midst of a struggle in India between contending factions of all-India importance, each intent on enforcing its views on the other and neither willing to give way except at a price which the other is not prepared to pay. Their disputes profoundly affect the politics of all the provinces and the problems are being treated as a whole. An entirely different state of circumstances will arise when each province will have to look after itself and when each province is sure to get practical, if no total independence, and the people of Bengal will have to rely upon each other”.²⁵² Two days later, he issued a statement from Calcutta on 29 April in support of United Independent Bengal and accused the alien capitalists and their Indian counterparts for their indulgence towards partition: “Cent per cent alien capital, both Indian and Anglo-American, exploiting Bengal is invested in West Bengal. The growing socialist tendencies amongst us have created fears of expropriation.... They have the prudence to visualise difficulties in a free and united Bengal. It is in the interest of the alien capital that Bengal should be divided.....”²⁵³ Around this time, Khwaja Nazimuddin, ex-Premier of Bengal and the then Deputy Leader of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly and member of the League Working Committee, at an interview to *The Statesman*, also spoke in favour of an independent sovereign Bengal: “An independent sovereign Bengal is in the best interest of its people, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, and I am equally certain that partition of the province is fatal to the interests of Bengalis as such....”²⁵⁴ Going against his earlier stand and thinking, Fazlul Huq also stood against the partition scheme of the British Government and in a press statement, he suggested: “Since those who have sown the wind are unable to control the whirlwind, there must be an agitation calling upon HMG to rescind their decision of February 20 and allow India to proceed peacefully on the road of progress”.²⁵⁵

Jinnah, the League Supremo, in his statement at New Delhi on 30 April 1947, denounced the move for partitioning Punjab and Bengal and considered it as ‘a sinister move actuated by spite and bitterness’. According to him, it was intended ‘to unnerve the Muslims by repeatedly emphasizing that the Muslims will get a truncated or mutilated Pakistan’.²⁵⁶ There Jinnah reiterated his demand for the creation of a Muslim National State consisting of six provinces: “The question of division of India as proposed by the Muslim League is based on the fundamental fact that there are two nations – Hindus and Muslims – and the underlying principle is that we want a national home and a national state in our homelands which are predominantly Muslim and comprise the six units of the Punjab, the NWFP, Sind, Baluchistan, Bengal and Assam..... It is a mistake to compare the basic principle of the demand of Pakistan and the demand of cutting up the provinces throughout India into fragmentation”.²⁵⁷ Moulana Akram Khan, the President of the BPML, firmly committed to this ideal and stood solidly behind the Quaid-i-Azam. On 4 May, he unequivocally said: “The question of a separate independent state in Bengal isolated from other Pakistan areas does not arise. The Muslims of India constitute a single united nation and we aim at setting up a single united nation and we aim at setting up a single united state which will include all the Muslim majority provinces”.²⁵⁸ But Gandhiji stood against of this sort of thinking and put the responsibility for the partition of Bengal absolutely on the existing Suhrawardy Ministry. While answering the questions at his prayer meeting in Sodepur Khadi Ashram on 10 May 1947, Gandhiji emphatically said that: “.... if there was partition, the Muslim majority would be responsible for it, and what was more, the Muslim Government that was in power..... If he were Mr. Suhrawardy, he would invite the Hindus to partition his body before they thought of partitioning Bengal..... Enmity cannot last for ever. The two communities... were brothers and must remain so in spite of temporary insanity”.²⁵⁹ But Gandhiji’s way of thinking and his understanding of the problem was not reflected in the speeches and writings of Sardar Patel who was constantly trying from Delhi to rally the people of Bengal in favour of Bengal’s dismemberment. In his letter of 13 May 1947 written to K.C. Neogy, a Central M.L.A., Patel wrote: “I am afraid this cry of a sovereign independent Bengal is a trap in which even Kiran Shankar [Roy] may fall with Sarat Babu. The only way to save the Hindus of Bengal is to insist on Partition of Bengal and to listen to nothing else”.²⁶⁰ Few days later on 22 May, Sardar Patel wrote a letter to Sarat Chandra Bose wherein he made an appeal: “In these critical times, we cannot afford to be stand-

offish and must pool our resources and take a united stand”.²⁶¹ In his reply, Sarat Chandra Bose wrote to Patel: “I consider it most unfortunate that the Congress Working Committee conceded Pakistan and supported partition.... having been in close touch with the public opinion both in West and East Bengal, I can say that it is not a fact that Bengali Hindus unanimously demand partition [of Bengal]. As far as East Bengal is concerned, there is not the slightest doubt that the overwhelming majority of Hindus there are opposed to partition. As regards West Bengal, the agitation for partition has gained ground because the Congress came to the aid of the Hindu Mahasabha and also because communal passions have been roused among the Hindus on account of the happenings since August last. The demand for partition is more or less confined to the middle classes..... I entirely agree with you that we should take a united stand; but I shall say at the same time that the united stand should be for a united Bengal and a united India.....”²⁶²

Meanwhile, in the presence of prominent Congress and League leaders of Bengal (who were the supporters of the United Sovereign Bengal), a joint committee was formed for ‘drafting the salient features of the Constitution of sovereign Bengal’ which was speedily completed by 19 May 1947. On the next day, at a Conference, both Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim signed the draft Constitution of United Bengal.²⁶³ On that day (i.e. 20 May 1947), in his statement to the press, Sarat Chandra Bose said: “..... Conceding Pakistan and supporting partition would be suicidal to the cause of Indian independence and also to the cause of social progress. It will make the partitioned provinces happy hunting grounds for imperialists, communalists and reactionaries. It will dissolve the existing linguistic bonds and instead of resolving communal differences will accentuate and aggravate them”.²⁶⁴ On 23 May, he sent the draft Constitution of United Bengal to Gandhiji for his approval. In its reply Gandhiji said: “Sovereign Bengal or its subsequent joining India or Pakistan – must carry with it the co-operation of at least two – thirds of the Hindu minority in the execution and in the legislature”.²⁶⁵ He also proposed for the specific reference to Bengali language and culture in the draft Constitution. But in the amendment (in the first paragraph), both Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim were only able to incorporate an overall two-thirds majority instead of at least two-thirds of the Hindu minority (which was proposed by Gandhiji) because of the stiff opposition which came from Suhrawardy and other prominent BPML leaders.²⁶⁶ Fazlul Huq who was elected to the Constituent

Assembly inspite of stiff opposition from Suhrawardy and the League, extended his support to this move for a separate undivided Bengal and made campaign in the *Nabayug* in favour of an 'autonomous' and 'sovereign' Bengal.²⁶⁷ It is to be mentioned here that the Bengal Committee of the C.P.I. also expressed its deep concern on this issue and was totally against of the partition of Bengal: "..... if Bengal is partitioned, it will ruin everybody...."²⁶⁸ It criticized the demand for Pakistan and Bhowani Sen, the Secretary of the Bengal Committee, made a statement in the party organ *Swadhinata* on 27 April 1947 extending its support towards Sarat Chandra Bose's All-Bengal Anti-Pakistan and Anti-Partition Committee 'in order to frustrate the diplomatic manoeuvres of the British imperialists'.^{268a}

But all these feelings and movements against the partition of Bengal and voices in favour of the 'United Sovereign Bengal' failed to make any change in the thought process of Jawaharlal Nehru. He gave a statement on 28 May 1947 against the scheme of 'Sovereign Bengal' and said that the Congress would be ready to support the move for a 'United Bengal' if the province was kept within the Indian Union.²⁶⁹ On the same day, the Working Committee of the BPML passed resolutions denouncing its any relation with the published constitution of 'Independent Bengal' and affirming its support towards the League demand for Pakistan: ".... The working committee stands firmly by the Muslim League demand for Pakistan. The committee reiterates its confidence in the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam M.A. Jinnah and declares that he alone has the authority to negotiate and settle the future constitution on behalf of the Muslims of India as a whole and the Muslims of Bengal shall stand by his decision".²⁷⁰ But all these developments in favour of partition did not please the Krishak Praja Party and one hundred prominent KPP leaders and workers expressed their opinion against the partition of Bengal, dreamt for a Socialist State and made an appeal asking every patriotic Indian to stop communal warfare: "We have reached the gate of freedom of our great and noble country. Power will soon be transferred to Indian hands..... Some insist on division of India before the British quit and others demand partition of Bengal and the Punjab, if the former becomes inevitable. We are opposed to both, as no good or useful purpose will be served by these divisions. On the other hand it will definitely weaken India's defence, increase communal strife and decrease India's political and economic influence before other nations of the world. The Muslim League will get a moth-eaten and truncated Pakistan, if it refuses to join

the Indian Union. We shudder at the disastrous fate of Muslims in the mutilated Pakistan..... In our opinion only a Socialist State based on justice and democratic principles can solve the communal and other vital problems of this country. In such a State religion must be separated from politics”.²⁷¹

Meanwhile, a group of Bengali intellectuals and academicians like Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Dr. Meghnad Saha, Dr. Sisir Mitra, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and so on who believed in the prominence of Calcutta as a great industrial and intellectual hub, jointly sent a telegram to Lord Listowel, Under Secretary of State for India, on 7 May 1947 wherein they criticized the present ‘Communal Ministry’ for its complete failure in maintaining law and order in the province and strongly felt the necessity of the formation of a separate West Bengal Province including Calcutta: “Education, trade and industry in Bengal have almost collapsed owing to recurrent riots causing insecurity of life and property. The present Communal Ministry is totally incapable of maintaining law and order. We strongly support the immediate formation of a separate West Bengal Province guaranteeing under a non-communal Ministry safety of life and unhindered progress in education, industry and commerce, with the continuance and development of Calcutta, a vital part of West Bengal, as a moral, intellectual, social and economic centre”.²⁷² F.J. Burrows, the then Governor of Bengal, who was also very concerned about the future prosperity of Calcutta, took a different stance and was opposed to the partition of Bengal. In his meeting with the Viceroy, Burrows tried to convince his boss that Bengal because of its geographical location could not effectively be a part of Pakistan: “..... Bengal was 700 miles away from the nearest point of the remainder of Pakistan. It could form a link with the Pakistan state but could not effectively be part of Pakistan as such”.²⁷³ In that meeting Burrows categorically mentioned that East Bengal which was suffering from food deficiency and lacked in major industries, could not ‘live in partition’ and would ultimately lose its prominence: “It would stagnate to such an extent and become so poor that it would end up as a rural slum”.²⁷⁴ It became quite clear that in case of partition, Calcutta would go with West Bengal which according to Burrows, would ultimately invite an ‘open revolt’.²⁷⁵ In order to avoid ‘furious rioting’, he stood in favour of a united Independent Bengal which he thought, could be a reasonable solution to Bengal’s highly sensitive and delicate problem. Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy, was not thinking alike and took a

different approach. He felt that ‘it would be most undesirable in many ways to give Bengal the opportunity of standing out independently’.²⁷⁶ He stated at the same time: “The crux of the matter was whether it was in the best interests of India to insist on the partition of Bengal or to allow it to be an independent nation. If Bengal was allowed the choice to remain independent, that would be helping towards the “Balkanisation” of India and going against everything that Congress stood for, and their sacrifice in agreeing to Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah would also object to an independent Bengal”.²⁷⁷ According to the Viceroy, the principle which was working behind the partition of India, would also be applicable right through to the Indian provinces including Bengal and the Punjab. But later in his wire to the Bengal Governor on 28 April 1947, Mountbatten kept ‘the door open to a United but independent Bengal belonging neither to Pakistan nor Hindustan’.²⁷⁸ On 1 May Mountbatten suggested that ‘members of the Constituent Assembly in Bengal should vote on the future, as between independence or joining Hindustan or Pakistan, of the Province before deciding the issue of partition.....’²⁷⁹ Next day (i.e. 2 May 1947), he wrote to Burrows: “Another alternative [for keeping Bengal united outside Hindustan and Pakistan] would be to insist on a general election on the electoral roll so that the view of the full electorate could be obtained”.²⁸⁰ On 3 May when Kiran Sankar Roy met with the Viceroy, the latter told him about his plan to give option to Bengal to remain united and independent of both Hindustan and Pakistan either by the vote of the representatives in the Constituent Assembly or through a referendum.²⁸¹ On this aspect, Burrows, the Bengal Governor, informed Mountbatten both by sending telegram and by writing a letter on 4 May 1947 that for holding a referendum in Bengal, a minimum period of three months would be required.²⁸² At that point of time, Mountbatten had the conviction that his scheme would be able to get Jinnah’s approval. On 7 May he told in his staff meeting that Suhrawardy gave him the information about Jinnah’s assurance that he would agree to an ‘independent Bengal’.²⁸³ But Jawaharlal Nehru was not thinking in that line and on 10 May he told the Viceroy that “there should be a transfer of power as soon as possible on a Dominion status basis”.²⁸⁴ While sending the new plan on 13 May (drafted by V.P. Menon and approved by Nehru and Patel but it was not shown to Jinnah), Mountbatten changed his earlier stand and wrote to the Secretary of State: “The issues.... are limited to joining existing Constituent Assembly or joining together in a new Constituent Assembly. I have omitted choice of Provinces of standing out

independently”.²⁸⁵ It clearly meant that neither Bengal nor Punjab was given the choice to remain united and to stay outside Hindustan or Pakistan.

On 18 May 1947 Mountbatten went to London (with his new plan) to make consultations with His Majesty’s Government. The British Cabinet immediately approved it and gave him the green signal to go ahead with his Plan for the partition of the country. On 28 May the Viceroy returned to Delhi from London and five days later (i.e. on 2 June 1947), Mountbatten, in a conference, announced his Plan for the transfer of power on the basis of partition and dominion status before amongst others, the ‘Big Seven’ of Indian politics, namely, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, J.B. Kripalani (Congress), Jinnah, Liaquat and Abdur Rab Nishtar (Muslim League) and Baldev Singh, a prominent Sikh leader. On the next day (i.e. 3 June 1947), the High Commands of both the Congress and the Muslim League finally accepted the Mountbatten Plan. In this conference, not a single BPML leader, was nominated by Jinnah to attend and in this Plan, the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, were not given any scope to vote for an Undivided Bengal outside Hindustan and Pakistan. Instead of that, they were given two options: firstly, the whole of Bengal could join either the Indian Union or Pakistan and secondly, Bengal could be partitioned – one part would go to India and the other part would join in the side of Pakistan. Interestingly in the Mountbatten’s Plan, no province was given any choice to opt out of both Hindustan and Pakistan which compelled the N.W.F.P. to be a part of Pakistan. On 5 June 1947, Sarat Chandra Bose, the chief exponent of a United Sovereign Bengal, gave a statement: “If the people of Bengal, the Punjab and the Frontier Province had been allowed to find their own remedy themselves without any interference from the top, I am certain they would have found it”.²⁸⁶ On 8 June, frustrated and disheartened S.C. Bose expressed his disappointment in this manner: “... the dream of independent Indian free from British Imperialist Control and influence, will more and more become a forgotten dream.... Bengal’s voice has to be shifted and she has to continue to be a pawn in the all-India game.... if Bengal is rent in twain, the two provinces of Bengal will be exploited more and more by exploiters, white and brown..... It [the 3 June scheme] is bound to lead to perpetual conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims in the Hindu – majority provinces as well as in the Muslim – majority provinces. If peace is what we seek, we cannot get it by

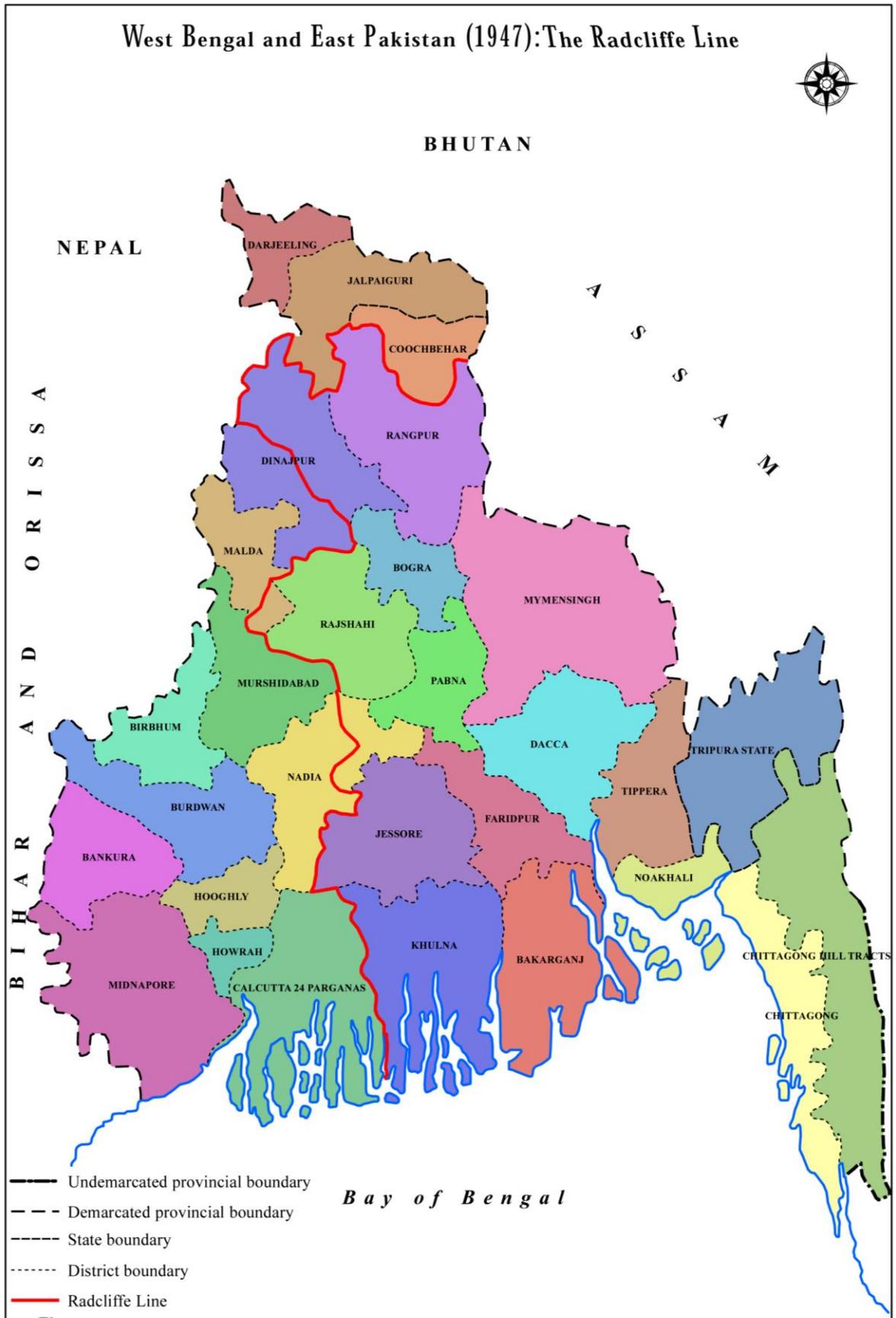
accepting H.M.G's plan. If independence is what we seek, the Plan sounds its death-knell".²⁸⁷

In order to persuade the League to agree with the Mountbatten's Plan, Jinnah convened a meeting of the Council at the Imperial Hotel, Delhi, on 9 June 1947 which was attended by Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmed and the other members of the Council from Bengal. Before the commencement of the meeting, Abul Hashim asked Suhrawardy whether he would move the official resolution. Suhrawardy's reply was negative: "No, Hashim, they have not asked me to do so; but I may have to speak something for it, for the alternative is ghastly"²⁸⁸ – which reflected his attitude for the time being. The details of that meeting of the League Council were narrated by Abul Hashim, one of the attendants, in his memoir *In Retrospection*. In that meeting, Jinnah placed his proposal before the members of the Council accepting the partition plan and accordingly, a resolution was passed by a majority of votes (only 11 Council members cast their votes against the partition plan as counted by Suhrawardy)²⁸⁹ after a debate of only two and half hours. Abul Hashim later claimed that he and Maulana Hasrat Mohani, who wanted to speak in that meeting, were not asked to come to the dais by Jinnah as they intended to oppose the 'Plan' in the Council. Jinnah not only became successful in his mission of 'Pakistan' as majority of the Council members approved the partition proposal (because of their 'three fears' as mentioned by Abul Hashim)²⁹⁰ but also he was able to mould Suhrawardy (who strongly advocated for a United, Independent and Sovereign Bengal) and to bring Suhrawardy into his confidence. Suhrawardy, immediately after the meeting, made a press release stating that "Dacca is now in Pakistan".²⁹¹ On the other hand, the Congress Working Committee in its meeting held on 14 June, also took the decision in favour of 'three partitions' – partition of India, partition of Bengal and partition of Punjab. The last Joint-sitting of the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly (except the European members) was held on 20 June 1947 under the British Rule to take a decision on the burning issue of the partition of Bengal. Mr. Nurul Amin chaired the afternoon session (3 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.) which was attended by 219 members out of which 90 members voted in favour of the existing Constituent Assembly (i.e. to remain with India) and 126 members voted in favour of a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. to join Pakistan).²⁹² Fazlul Huq deliberately kept himself away from joining this session of the House and

remained absent at the time of voting. The three Communist members of the House, namely, Jyoti Basu, Ratanlal Brahmin and Rup Narayan Roy abstained from voting.²⁹³ This was followed by a separate session (3.35 p.m. to 4.15 p.m. and presided over by Mr. Nurul Amin) of the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly representing the Muslim majority districts (East Bengal) which was attended by 140 members. At the time of voting, 35 members voted in favour of partition of Bengal and 106 members voted against partition and 107 (as against 34) members stood in favour of joining a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. Pakistan) as a whole.²⁹⁴ On the other hand, the representatives of the Hindu majority areas (i.e. the Western part of Bengal), voted for the partition of the province by a majority of 37 votes (by 58 to 21 votes).²⁹⁵ Udaychand Mahatab, the Maharajadhiraj of Burdwan presided over this meeting in which all the three Communist M.L.A.s voted in favour of partition. It should be mentioned here that four Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s (along with the Muslim members), voted against partition and stood in favour of joining a new Constituent Assembly.²⁹⁶

It was quite surprising that Fazlul Huq who moved the Lahore Resolution (which proposed for the establishment of 'Independent States' comprising the Muslim majority areas in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India), who always stood for, fought for and dreamt for Bengal, remained quite inactive and kept himself almost silent when the movement for United Independent Bengal was in full swing and deliberately remained absent from the joint-sitting of the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and also did not take part in voting on the issue of the partition of Bengal. At this critical juncture, he should have to play a very bold, concrete, constructive and decisive role in protecting Bengal and the Bengalis which he did not. Of late, Fazlul Huq whole-heartedly raised his voice against the partition when the fate of Bengal and the Bengalis had already been decided. Fazlul Huq gave a press statement on 26 July 1947 wherein he said: "I am one of the very few Indians who condemn all that has happened in Indian politics during the last two years and I say publicly that I condemn the circumstances which have led to the unfortunate division of the province. I would be the last man to accentuate communal feeling between Muslims and non-Muslims".²⁹⁷ When the partition of Bengal became unavoidable, a large number of panic-stricken Hindus started to migrate from East Bengal to West Bengal. This prompted Fazlul Huq to go to his own district Barisal where he

addressed a crowded public meeting at Aswini Kumar Hall on 1 August 1947 and appealed the Hindus not to leave Barisal and urged both the Hindus and Muslims not to indulge in fratricidal war. Almost all the leading newspapers published his long speech and likely the *Hindusthan Standard* reported: "... He emphatically said that there would be no disturbance in Barisal. Mr. Huq said that he was pained to learn that Hindus were leaving Barisal being panicky as Pakistan was going to be established. He earnestly requested the Hindus not to be panicky and not to leave homes... Now that Pakistan was achieved, Muslims were to shoulder greater responsibility for protecting minorities in Pakistan. So Muslims should not do or say any such thing which would wound Hindu feelings.... Relationship between Hindus and Muslims was so interwoven that Muslims could never live without Hindus..... To make Pakistan a success, Muslims should not indulge in fratricidal strife but should always protect their Hindu brethren..... Pakistan belonged to both Muslims and Hindus and Hindustan belonged to Hindus and Muslims".²⁹⁸ He further added: "I am old in age as also in political life. I say if any Muslim wounds Hindu feelings in Pakistan, he would be committing wrong against religion. I assure my full protection to Barisal Hindus. I told before the Boundary Commission that it was impossible to divide Bengal which is one. Of course it would be divided, but I hope division would not be lasting.... Let Muslim leaders of Barisal immediately dispel panic from the minds of Hindu minorities declaring that they would be responsible if any wrong be done to Hindus in Barisal. If Pakistan meant any oppression on Hindus then I would say Pakistan was political bluff".²⁹⁹ Fazlul Huq went further: "If it is necessary to save lives and properties of Hindus, I shall not hesitate to offer myself to sacrifice my life for defending those whom I have always regarded as my brothers inhabiting in the same land and inspired by the same ideas".³⁰⁰ It is an irony of history that Fazlul Huq who moved the Pakistan Resolution at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, just after seven years and at the fag end of his political career in undivided Bengal, had to face the hard reality and to mourn for the tragic partition of Bengal.



Map 4: West Bengal and East Pakistan (1947): The Radcliffe Line

At last Mountbatten's 'June 3 Plan' came into effect and the people of Bengal as well as the rest of the Indians had no other option but to accept the 'division of hearts' and to swallow the 'bitter pill' (though it was very 'sweetie' to almost all the Muslims) of partition. India was bifurcated on the basis religion and on 14 August 1947, Pakistan, a separate 'homeland' for the Muslims, was proclaimed and formed on the ruins of Hindu-Muslim amity. Next day (i.e. on 15 August), the colonial rule in India came to an end; it made its 'tryst with destiny' and achieved the most coveted independence. But the jubilation did not last long as Mountbatten's 'imperialist sword' struck severest blows at Bengal and Punjab. Bengal which was partitioned for the first time in 1905, was once again, partitioned in 1947 and divided into two halves- East Bengal and West Bengal. East Bengal (where the Muslims were in majority) joined Pakistan and West Bengal (which had a Hindu-majority population), remained within the boundaries of India. The majority of the Bengali Muslims who supported the second partition of Bengal (mainly to get rid of the Hindu 'domination' and to place themselves in an advantageous position), rallied round the 'Pakistan' movement and settled in the eastern part of the newly created state of Pakistan, just within a few years, became frustrated and they had to face maltreatment as 'East Pakistan' (renamed in 1955) virtually came under the political domination, socio-economic exploitation and cultural subjugation of the West Pakistanis. The conflict between the two wings of Pakistan on the questions of identities, interests, language and culture finally paved the way for the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. It is a tragedy of history that the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, inspite of their common geography, economy, language and culture, were to accept partition in 1947 and were asked to live in two different countries for which they had not only paid the price but also their successors, the next generations, are still bearing the wounds of this bifurcation and have been paying the price for it.

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240. Burrows to Wavell, 19 March 1947, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 201.

241. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 April 1947.
242. *Ibid.*
- 242a. *Ibid.*, 6 April 1947.
243. Burrows to Mountbatten, 11 April 1947, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim (eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 204.
244. *Ibid.*
245. *The Statesman*, 1 May 1947, p. 5.
- 245a. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
246. *The Nation*, Calcutta, 19 March 1950, p. 4; see also, *Star of India*, 15 March 1947, p. 6.
247. *Hindusthan Standard*, (Calcutta), 25 March 1947.
- 247a. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 April 1947, p. 4; see also, Amalendu De, *Swadhin Bangabhumi Gathaner Parikalpana: Prayash O Parinati* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 2003 (2nd Edn.), p. 18.
248. N. Mansergh (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. X, pp. 585-586.
249. *The Statesman*, 23 April 1947, p. 3.
250. *Ibid.*, 9 April 1947, p. 1.
251. *Ibid.*, 28 April 1947, p. 1.
252. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
253. *Star of India*, 30 April 1947, p. 2; see also, Abul Hashim, *op.cit.*, pp. 139-143.
254. *The Statesman*, 23 April 1947.
255. *Ibid.*, 26 April 1947.
256. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1947, pp. 1, 7.
257. *Ibid.*
258. *Star of India*, 5 May 1947, p. 2.
259. *The Statesman*, 11 May 1947, pp. 1, 9.
260. Durga Das (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 39.
261. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

262. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
263. Abul Hashim, *op.cit.*, pp. 170-171; for details of the draft Constitution of United Bengal, see, Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 336-337.
264. Sarat Chandra Bose, *I Warned my Countrymen*, Calcutta, 1968, p. 185.
265. Quoted in Kalipada Biswas, *op.cit.*, p. 236.
266. Badruddin Umar, *Bangabhangha O Sampradayik Rajniti* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1987, p. 80.
267. Kalipada Biswas, *op.cit.*, p. 241.
268. Bhowani Sen, *Sangramer Pathe Bangla* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1946, pp. 8-9.
- 268a. Quoted in Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *op.cit.*, pp. 335-336.
269. Satyabrata Dutta, *op.cit.*, p. 194; see also, Pyarelal, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 187.
270. *Star of India*, 29 May 1947.
271. *The Statesman*, 29 May 1947, p. 5; see also, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 May 1947.
272. Cable to Lord Listowel by Sir Jadunath Sarkar and others, in *The Statesman*, 8 May 1947, p. 8.
273. *Minutes of Viceroy's 9th Miscellaneous Meeting*, 1 May 1947, cited in N. Mansergh (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. X, pp. 507-513.
274. *Ibid.*
275. *Ibid.*
276. *Minutes of Governors' Conference (Second Day)*, 16 April 1947, cited in N. Mansergh (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. X, pp. 269-279.
277. *Ibid.*
278. N. Mansergh (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. X, p. 472.
279. *Ibid.*, pp. 511, 539.
280. *Ibid.*, p. 554.
281. *Ibid.*, p. 586.
282. *Ibid.*, pp. 615, 714.

283. *Ibid.*, p. 657.
284. *Ibid.*, pp. 732, 735.
285. *Ibid.*, p. 807.
286. Sarat Chandra Bose, *op.cit.*, p. 195.
287. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-199.
288. Abul Hashim, *op.cit.*, p. 159.
289. *Idem*, *Amar Jiban O Bibhagpurba Bangladesher Rajniti* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1974, pp. 182-183.
290. On 9 June 1947 in the afternoon, Abul Hashim made a press release: "The decision of the Council of the Muslim League is the result of three fears. First, Habitual fear of Mr. Jinnah; secondly, fear of an uncertain future; and, thirdly, fear of their uncertain status in Pakistan if they incurred the displeasure of Mr. Jinnah". *Millat*, 13 June 1947; see also, Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, p. 160.
291. Abul Hashim, *op.cit.*, pp. 182-183.
292. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Friday, 20 June 1947; see also, Dr. Reena Bhaduri (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 246-252.
293. *Ibid.*
294. *Ibid.*, see also, Gautam Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.*, p. 214.
295. *Ibid.*
296. *Ibid.*
297. *Star of India*, 26 July 1947, p. 6; see also, *Hindusthan Standard*, 27 July 1947.
298. *Hindusthan Standard*, 3 August 1947; see also, *The Statesman*, 4 August 1947.
299. *Ibid.*
300. *Ibid.*