

**A.K. FAZLUL HUQ AND BENGAL POLITICS  
BETWEEN THE TWO PARTITIONS (1905-1947):  
CURRENTS AND CROSS-CURRENTS**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED**

**To the**

**University of North Bengal**

**For**

**The Award of**

**Doctor of Philosophy in History**

**By**

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# Abstract

Over the last few decades, a good number of scholars and intellectuals have been paying much attention to the study of Bengal and contemporary politics from various perspectives. This trend of studying Bengal politics has not only enriched our knowledge of this region but also highlighted many sides of Indian history so far untouched. Some remarkable research works were undertaken on great political personalities of undivided Bengal like Surendra Nath Banerjea, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, Chitta Ranjan Das, Subhas Chandra Bose, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin and so on and so forth. But it is a great tragedy of history that Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq (1873-1962), popularly known as *Sher-e-Bangla* (Tiger of Bengal) or ‘Hak Saheb’ who was one of the doyens of Bengal, who by his own capacity, controlled, dominated, moulded and shaped Bengal politics for almost three decades and successfully gave a new dimension to provincial politics by mobilizing the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), by leading the praja movement and forming a political party exclusively for them called the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and raising the slogan *Dal-Bhat* (rice and pulse) for the masses (which gave him dividends in the Bengal Legislative Assembly Elections of 1937), who was never defeated in any election in between 1913 and 1954 (which was an exceptional record in the history of South-East Asia), who became the first democratically elected Premier of Bengal in 1937 and led two successive Coalition Ministries (1937-1943), has to a great extent failed to attract the attention of the intellectual world. Although very few researches in this part of Bengal (i.e. West Bengal) vis-a-vis India were executed on him and his political career, all these works almost failed to represent and analyze the man and his shifting political activities (from provincial to national politics and vice-versa), his fight and compromise with the League leadership, particularly with Jinnah, his contrasts, ambiguities, his volatile temperament, his vacillating political stance and the inherent political currents and cross-currents operating in Bengal vis-a-vis India and within the Muslim League – the currents which helped Fazlul Huq to become the Premier of Bengal in 1937 and to move the Lahore Resolution (commonly known as the Pakistan Resolution) in 1940 and the cross-currents which paved the way for his expulsion from the Muslim League in December 1941, forced him to resign from the

post of the Premier in March 1943 and ultimately turned him into a 'tragic hero' before the second partition of Bengal (1947).

Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq who was born in a landed aristocratic family in Barisal (Eastern Bengal), was a very fascinating, charismatic, popular and at the same time, an enigmatic and controversial character in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a successful lawyer cum politician, a solid *bhumiputra* (son of the soil) who was proud to be a Bengali as well as a Muslim. He supported the partition of Bengal (1905) and was one of the founder- members of the All-India Muslim League (1906). He expressed his resentment at the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and came into close contact with Nawab Salimullah of Dacca and his communal politics. Having denied of a higher Government service, Fazlul Huq actively joined politics in 1912 and soon ascended the political ladder. He got himself elected in the by-election of the Dacca Division seat (where majority of the voters were Hindus) in the Bengal Legislative Council by defeating Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra and was almost uninterruptedly associated with the Bengal Legislature till 1947, except for two years (1934-1936) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Being elected in the Bengal Legislative Council, Fazlul Huq delivered firing speeches giving emphasis on the spread of education particularly for the Muslims and establishment of educational institutions exclusively for them. Soon he came out of his narrow, communal outlook, stood for the Hindu-Muslim unity and was instrumental in drafting the historic Lucknow Pact (1916) which was Huq's a stepping stone to all- India politics. Fazlul Huq not only became the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the Joint Secretary of the Muslim League (1913-1916) and became the President of the League (1916-1921) but also he joined the Congress in 1917, became its Joint –Secretary and a year later, he served this organization as General Secretary. As he was a diehard anti- imperialist, Huq protested against the Rowlatt Bill and came forward to support the Khilafat- Non-Cooperation Movement. But when Gandhiji adopted the boycott programme, Fazlul Huq strongly opposed to it on the questions of education of the Muslim youth and of participation in the Council elections. As he contested in the December 1920 – January 1921 Council elections, he was formally expelled from the Muslim League. He also resigned from the Congress and joined the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party and as its candidate, contested in the Council elections (which was held in November 1923)

and got himself elected. When C.R. Das refused to form the ministry, Fazlul Huq along with his eight Muslim followers left the Swarajya Party, joined the 'Ministerial Party' and accepted the office of the Minister of Education but had to resign within six months. Thereafter he decided to take up the cause of the toiling masses, he mixed with them freely, spoke with them in their common language (which they can easily understand) and raised his voice against the oppressive zamindars. For safeguarding the interests of the *krishaks* and *prajas*, Fazlul Huq formed the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and contested the elections of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937 and got an unbelievable success. He was successful in getting the support of the Muslim League and became the first Premier (under the Government of India Act, 1935) of Bengal and formed the Praja- League Coalition Ministry which continued upto December 1941. Thereafter he formed the Progressive Coalition Ministry comprising heterogeneous groups like the KPP, Forward Bloc Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, Independent Scheduled Caste etc. and headed the Ministry till March 1943. When Fazlul Huq was in power, he took different initiatives, passed different Acts to ameliorate the condition of the weaker section of the society, formed the Debt Reconciliation Boards to enable the debtors to get back their lands from the exploitive usurers and laid the foundation of different schools and colleges particularly for the Muslim girls. But he did not confine himself within the boundaries of Bengal and often shifted from provincial to national politics. Meanwhile he rejoined the Muslim League in September 1937 and his religious identity guided him to move the Lahore Resolution in 1940. On the question of joining in the Defence Council, Fazlul Huq entered into a clash with Jinnah who took disciplinary action against him and expelled him from the League in December 1941 which lasted for almost five years. He had to face the initial phase of the great Bengal Famine of 1943 and was forced to resign from the Premiership in March 1943. His dilemma, his ambivalence and his vacillating political stances created confusion within the KPP and his followers who gradually left him and rallied behind Jinnah and his Pakistan movement. Though he was elected from two seats in the Assembly Elections of 1946, his KPP got a tremendous setback, won only four seats and turned almost into a 'microscopic minority'. In search of fortune, Fazlul Huq again joined the League but failed to win the confidence of the League Supremo and turned into a frustrated man. Though at the fag end of his political career in undivided Bengal he opposed to the partition of India and tried to protect Hindu- Muslim unity in Barisal, he did not spontaneously raise his

voice and whole-heartedly make campaign in favour of United Independent Bengal and finally left from Calcutta not towards Karachi but towards Dacca where he started a new political struggle.

Against this backdrop, an earnest attempt has been made to make an in-depth study on A.K. Fazlul Huq and undergo a research work on him entitled “A.K. Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics Between the two Partitions (1905-1947): Currents and Cross-Currents” to highlight in proper historical and political perspectives, the role of Fazlul Huq in the political dynamics of Bengal. The proposed study endeavours to disclose many facets of his political life so far untouched, to investigate some of the perennial problems and questions that figured prominently in the life and activities of Fazlul Huq for example, the land question, peasant politics, indebted peasantry of Bengal etc., to put forward his ambiguities and contrasts, to highlight different shades and volatile stances of his colourful political career, to interpret and reassess Huq’s political activities against the backdrop of contemporary Bengal and national politics and the various political forces, currents and cross- currents operating there and above all, to make an impartial judgement on his life and activities.

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# Preface

Bengal, the first Indian province which was conquered and annexed by the British in the second half of the eighteenth century and which was the soil of renaissance and reformation and the ‘nerve-centre’ of militant nationalism, was always in the forefront of India’s struggle for independence and it played a pivotal role in all-India politics and in shaping a new political map of the entire subcontinent. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it not only saw the genesis of different political organizations and several socio-economic and political movements but also produced legendary social reformers and religious thinkers, eminent literati, distinguished academicians and scientists, renowned film-makers, theatre personalities, actors and actresses, illustrious painters, singers, lyricists and musicians, recognized sportsmen and above all, innumerable number of freedom fighters and very prominent and dignified political personalities. In the list of a galaxy of Bengali politicians, Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) was an exceptional one. Being born in a landed aristocratic family and having an elitist background, he took up the cause of the poor and destitute, the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), mobilized them and led the Praja Movement, formed a political organization called the ‘Krishak Praja Party’ (KPP) to ameliorate their living conditions, demanded for the abolition of the Zamindari system, raised the slogan of *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses) for the common people and stood in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity which altogether helped him a lot to win in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 and to be the first Premier of Bengal. It should be mentioned here that as a political leader, Fazlul Huq was never defeated in any election in between 1913 and 1954 which was an exceptional record in the history of South Asia. As the head of the Praja-League Coalition Ministry, his remarkable achievement was the formation of the *Rin Salishi* (Debt Settlement) Boards to free the peasants from the exploitation of the usurers. He also advocated for the promotion of education particularly among the Muslims, urged the Muslim girls to come forward to take education and founded so many educational institutions and hostels for them. But Fazlul Huq was enigmatic, inconsistent, volatile and opportunist which prompted him to waver between the Muslim League, the Congress and his own-made Krishak Praja Party. He not only reached the top of the political ladder at the state level but also wanted to imprint his footmarks in national politics which

often drifted him from provincial to national politics and vice-versa. Fazlul Huq who was basically secular and stood in favour of communal peace and harmony, suddenly after being the Premier, he was guided by communal outlook and self-interest, changed his colour and conviction, sacrificed his ideals and principles and earnestly tried to defend and promote the interests of his own community (i.e. the Muslims) in Bengal as well as in India which led him to move the so-called 'Pakistan Resolution' at Lahore in 1940 which ultimately became an unanimous demand of the Indian Muslims led by Jinnah. But his honeymoon with the Muslim League did not last long and he was expelled from the League by the League Supremo, Jinnah. This prompted Fazlul Huq to form the Progressive Coalition Party and its Ministry which also did not last long as it was dismissed by John Herbert, the then Bengal Governor. Thereafter, there was a rapid rise of the Muslim League in Bengal in place of the KPP and it was able to form the Ministry in 1946. The KPP was absolutely turned into a mere signboard and its beloved and popular leader Fazlul Huq, inspite of his personal success in the Assembly Elections of 1946, lost his prominence and acceptance in Bengal politics and was turned into a tragic hero. Though he was a true Bengali and a strong spokesman of Bengal's unity, progress and advancement as a whole, remained completely aloof from the United Independent Bengal movement and finally failed to prevent the partition of the province for the second time in 1947. It is against this backdrop, a humble attempt has been made to make an in-depth study on Fazlul Huq to analyze many facets of his colourful and eventful political career, his emergence in Bengal politics, the underlying mystery of his coming to power in Bengal in 1937 and his running of the two consecutive Coalition Ministries, to explore his ambiguities, dilemma, political opportunism, his vacillating political stances, his compromise and contest with the League and its Supremo Jinnah and his role at the time of final partition. Nevertheless, the present research intends to project Fazlul Huq as a meaningful political force in Bengal vis-a-vis India and tries to make an impartial assessment of his life and political activities between the two partitions (1905-1947).

My first and foremost indebtedness in carrying out and completing this study entitled "A.K. Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics Between the two Partitions (1905-1947): Currents and Cross- Currents" is to my esteemed teacher and supervisor Dr. Ratna Roy Sanyal, retired Professor and ex-Head of the Department of History, University of North Bengal, who spent much of her invaluable time in guiding my

work at every stage with great interest and bore all the burdens of going through all the chapters of my thesis. Without her proper, efficient and helpful guidance, constructive suggestions and constant encouragement, it would never have been possible for me to complete my thesis and I find no suitable words to express and record my gratitude to her.

I am extremely grateful to Prof. Ichhimuddin Sarkar, my respected teacher at the Department of History, University of North Bengal who took keen interest at the initial stage of my research and provided me suggestions for its further improvement. Along with him, I must express my gratitude to all my ex-teachers and present faculty members of the Department of History, University of North Bengal who encouraged me in my research work. Here I should record my indebtedness to Prof. B.K. Sarkar, Head, Department of History, University of North Bengal and retired Prof. Ananda Gopal Ghosh and Prof. Anita Bagchi of the same Department and University who extended me all possible help and assistance and offered valuable suggestions to enrich my work.

I further acknowledge with gratitude and convey my sincere thanks to the staff of various libraries for the help and cooperation that I have received from them during the course of my research, notably, the National Library, Calcutta, West Bengal Legislative Assembly Library, Calcutta, the Bangladesh High Commission Library, Calcutta, the Statesman House, Calcutta, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library, Calcutta, the Muslim Institute, Calcutta, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Departmental Seminar Library and the Central Library, University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur, Darjeeling, A.B.N. Seal College Library, Coochbehar and Maulana Azad College Library, Kolkata. I am very much grateful and thankful to the staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi and West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta for their continuous help and assistance.

I also acknowledge my debt to all those scholars and politicians, dead or alive, whose works I have consulted. I should and I must acknowledge my indebtedness to my father late P.N. Bhattacharya, my mother Smt. Kalpana Bhattacharya, my beloved brothers and sisters, my close relatives especially to my maternal uncle Shri S.B. Chakraborty, my father-in-law Shri R.K. Chatterjee and my mother-in-law Smt.

Manju Chatterjee for their blessings, constant support and encouragement in my work.

I must remain ever grateful to my wife Dr. Mahua Chatterjee who always took keen interest in my research, always backed me and motivated me to complete the work at an earliest, bore all the burdens of the family and provided me the most congenial environment at home.

And finally, I am thankful to Shri Pradip Singh for his sincere and meticulous typing of the manuscript.

Kolkata

**Dhananjoy Bhattacharjee**

December 2017

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## *Abbreviations*

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIML	All India Muslim League
ARP	Air Raid Precaution
BLAP	Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings
BLCP	Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings
BMCA	Bengal Muslim Council Association
BMLPB	Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board
BPCC	Bengal Provincial Congress Committee
BPHM	Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha
BPML	Bengal Provincial Muslim League
CNMA	Central National Muhammadan Association
CP	Communist Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPP	Council Praja Party
CR	Confidential Reports
CWC	Congress Working Committee
EP	Emarat Party
GB	Government of Bengal
GFR	Governor's Fortnightly Report
GI H Pol F No	Government of India, Home Political, File Number
HMG	His Majesty's Government

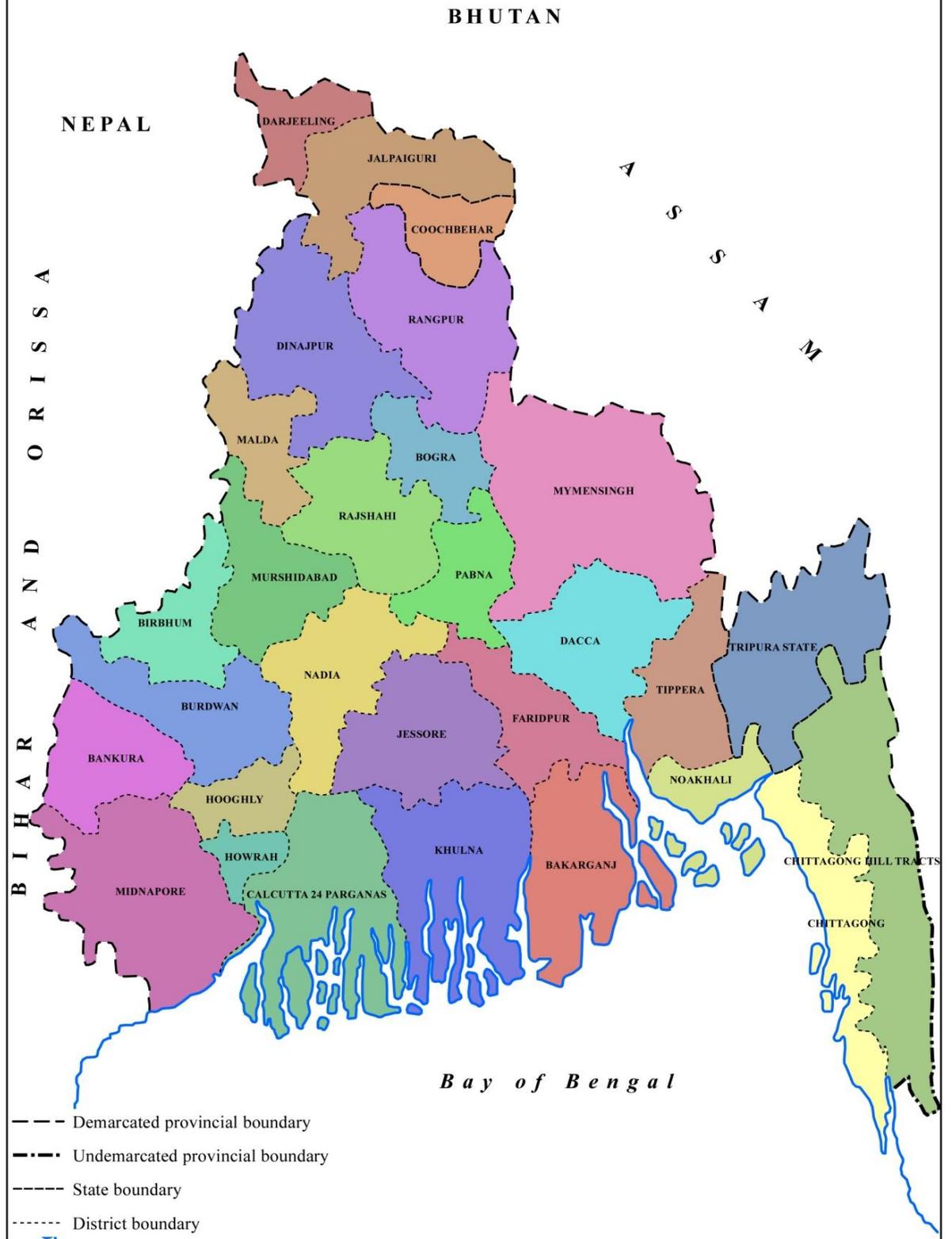
IAR	Indian Annual Register
IMA	Indian Moslem Association
INA	Indian National Army
JUH	Jamiat-ul –Ulema –i –Hind
KPP	Krishak Praja Party
KPPB	Krishak Praja Parliamentary Board
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
MPB	Muslim Parliamentary Board
NAI	National Archives of India
NBPKS	Nikhil Banga Praja Krishak Samity
NBPS	Nikhil Banga Praja Samity
NM	Nationalist Muslim
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
PS	Police Station
RDP	Radical Democratic Party
SP	Superintendent of Police
SR	Secret Reports
TKS	Tippera Krishak Samity
UCP	United Council Party
UMP	United Muslim Party
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives

## *Glossary*

<i>Abwab</i>	Miscellaneous arbitrary, unauthorized exaction above the formal rent
<i>Akhand Hindustan</i>	United India
<i>Akhand Pakistan</i>	United Pakistan
<i>Anjuman</i>	Association
<i>Ashraf</i>	Muslim nobility having non-Bengali / non-Indian origin and converts from the upper caste Hindus
<i>Atrap</i>	Muslim commoners and converts from the lower caste Hindus
<i>Baidya /Vaidya</i>	Upper caste Hindu
<i>Bania</i>	Trading community and money-lending Caste
<i>Bargadar</i>	Sharecropper
<i>Bhadralok</i>	Gentleman
<i>Bhagchashi</i>	Sharecropper
<i>Bhat</i>	Rice
<i>Bhumiputra</i>	Son of the soil
<i>Boycott</i>	Renunciation
<i>Chash</i>	Cultivation
<i>Chashi</i>	Cultivator
<i>Chaukidar</i>	Watchman
<i>Dal</i>	Pulse
<i>Dal-Bhat</i>	Rice and pulse, signifying minimum requirement for living
<i>Dewan</i>	Revenue collector / Manager
<i>Futwa</i>	Religious order or injunction
<i>Goonda</i>	Hoodlum / Hooligan
<i>Hartal</i>	Strike
<i>Hat</i>	Local marketing place
<i>Ijaradar</i>	Leaseholder
<i>Imam</i>	The person who leads the prayer of the Muslims
<i>Jehad</i>	Holy war
<i>Jotedar</i>	Substantial peasant / Tenure-holder

<i>Kayastha</i>	Upper caste Hindu
<i>Krishak</i>	Peasant
<i>Lakh</i>	Hundred thousand
<i>Madrassah</i>	Traditional institute for Islamic education
<i>Mahajan</i>	Moneylender
<i>Mahallah</i>	Locality
<i>Maktab</i>	Centre for studying Islamic theology for the children
<i>Maulana</i>	Islamic scholar
<i>Maulvi</i>	Muslim theologian
<i>Maund</i>	Measure of weight equivalent to 40 Kilograms
<i>Mofussil</i>	Non-metropolitan area
<i>Mollah /Mullah</i>	Learned person among the Muslims
<i>Nazar- Salami</i>	Gifts / presents / transfer fee given particularly to the landlord
<i>Praja</i>	Tenant
<i>Purba</i>	East / Eastern
<i>Ramazan</i>	Tenth lunar month of the Islamic calendar
<i>Ryot</i>	Peasant / cultivator
<i>Sadar</i>	Headquarter
<i>Saheb</i>	European
<i>Salami</i>	Transfer fee given to the landlord
<i>Samiti</i>	Association
<i>Sher-e-Bangla</i>	Tiger of Bengal
<i>Sannyas</i>	Retirement (from political activities)
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Indigenous, native origin
<i>Talukdar/ Taluqdar</i>	Rent-receiving small landlord
<i>Thana</i>	Police station
<i>Tol</i>	Traditional place of education for the Hindus
<i>Ulema</i>	Person expert in Islamic religious canon
<i>Zamindar</i>	Landlord
<i>Zilla</i>	District

# Bengal Districts



Map1: Bengal Districts

# Introduction

Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) popularly known as *Sher-e-Bangla* or ‘Hak Saheb’ was a seasoned statesman, a very charismatic, influential and incessantly active figure in Bengal politics in the first half of the twentieth century. It was he who by his own capacity, to a great extent, controlled, guided, dominated, moulded and shaped Bengal politics for almost three decades and gave a new dimension to provincial politics by mobilizing the peasants and tenants and forming a political party (known as the Krishak Praja Party or the KPP) for their cause. His feel for the masses, his understanding of their problems, his earnest effort for the betterment of their living conditions made him very popular among the down-trodden people which altogether paved the way for getting havoc success in the elections of 1937 and his coming to power in Bengal. Fazlul Huq was perhaps, the most widely acclaimed and accepted but at the same time one of the most discussed, debated, controversial and unpredictable Chief Ministers (then known as the Premiers under the Government of India Act, 1935) of undivided Bengal. As the Premier of Bengal, he not only made his existence felt in provincial politics but also he left his impression and registered his voice in national politics particularly in all-India Muslim politics. But this highly-rated political personality went into a rivalry with the ‘League Supremo’ (i.e. M.A. Jinnah), entered into a confrontation with the H.E. the Governor of Bengal (J.A. Herbert), lost his Premiership and his Krishak Praja Party faced a debacle in the elections of 1946. Fazlul Huq ultimately turned into a tragic figure in Bengal politics before the second partition of the province in 1947 and sank into oblivion within a few years after his death.

The proposed study with the title *A.K Fazlul Huq and Bengal Politics Between the two Partitions (1905-1947): Currents and Cross-Currents* attempts to review and explore certain aspects of Bengal politics centering Fazlul Huq with reference to his life, mission, vision, his identity with the poor masses particularly with the Bengal peasantry and his shifting political activities from provincial to national levels and vice-versa. It also tries to focus on his vacillating political stances as he oscillated between the Muslim League, the Indian National Congress and his own made Krishak

Praja Party. The proposed study intends to bring out in surface the underlying truth behind his contrastive, volatile attitude and activities and also to make a rational, unbiased, thorough and critical assessment of this great personality as well as his political steps and activities. Although a good number of books were written on the life, career and activities of Fazlul Huq, unfortunately most of them are either eulogies or incomplete or biased and the majority of these works fail to help us in impartially judging the man, his mind and his political activities, perfectly representing the time and thus to a great extent, do not satisfy our thirst for knowledge. The proposed study takes this responsibility to make an honest attempt to focus into all these aspects. Although a very few books on Bengal politics and society were written in the first half of the twentieth century (for example, Sir M. Azizul Huque, former Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and former Vice – Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, wrote the book entitled *The Man Behind The Plough* in 1939, Fazlul Huq portrayed the then Bengal scenario in his own *Bengal To-day* in 1944 and Santipriya Basu vividly depicted the life of the Bengal peasant in the Bengali book entitled *Banglar Chasi* which came out in 1944), a large number of publications centering Fazlul Huq and contemporary Bengal politics came to the surface particularly during the second half of the twentieth century. But in most of these books, the authors on a large scale made no critical and impartial assessment of this political activist of Bengal and in majority of these books, the focus was not absolutely given on Fazlul Huq and his politics. Since 1962, a good number of research works were done on the life, career and political activities of Fazlul Huq. In that year, two important books were published: B.D. Habibullah's *Sher-e-Bangla* (in Bengali, Barishal) and Khondokar Abdul Khalek's *Ek Shatabdi* (in Bengali, Dacca) both of which only highlighted Fazlul Huq's eventful political activities. Four years later (i.e. in 1966), A.S.M. Abdur Rab had written a biography of Huq, entitled, *Life and Achievements of A.K. Fazlul Huq* wherein the author only appreciated the activities of Huq Saheb without making any critical assessment. He wrote another biography entitled *Sahid Suhrawardy* (in Bengali, Dacca, 1968) which mainly highlighted Suhrawardy and his political activities. But probably the most classical work of that time was Kalipada Biswas's *Yukta Banglar Shesh Adhyay* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1966) in which he carefully and aptly analyzed the political developments during the last decade of undivided Bengal. Shila Sen and Kamala Sarkar too selected the same period of Bengal politics to make an in- depth study and wrote the books

entitled *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947* (New Delhi, 1976) and *Bengal Politics 1937-1947* (Calcutta, 1990) respectively, wherein they tried their best to understand the Muslim mind in the context of changing political scenario of Bengal during the period mentioned above. A very important feather to the study of Bengal politics was added by J.H. Broomfield in the book entitled *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal* (California, 1968) in which the author put much emphasis on the conflicting attitudes of the political elites of Bengal (from 1906-'47) and concentrated more on the Hindu politics between 1912 and 1927. Humayun Kabir made an extensive research on Muslim politics and the outcome was *Muslim Politics 1906-47 and Other Essays* (Calcutta, 1969) in which he explained the growing popularity of the Muslim League in Bengal and how Fazlul Huq was an instrumental to it and how he was 'forced into the arms of Muslim League'. Similarly Bhola Chatterjee concentrated on Bengal politics particularly in the 1930s and highlighted its different aspects in his book entitled *Aspects of Bengal Politics in the 1930s* (Calcutta, 1969). Kazi Ahmed Kamal made an intensive study on the three very prominent politicians of Bengal and also brought out their inside stories in his book entitled *Politicians and Inside Stories: A Glimpse Mainly into the Lives of Fazlul Huq, Shaheed Suhrawardy and Moulana Bhashani* (Dacca, 1970) but did not fully concentrate on Fazlul Huq and his Praja movement. Kamruddin Ahmad took social history as his area of research and the outcome was the book entitled *A Social History of Bengal* (Dacca, 1970) which provides us different aspects of the then Bengali society. In 1974 from New Delhi, L.A. Gordon wrote *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement (1876-1940)* which mainly dealt with the Hindu politics and put more weightage on the nationalist movement and contemporary Bengal politics upto 1940. His another important contribution to Bengal politics was his great work entitled *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi, 1990) in which he made focus primarily on Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose and concentrated on their politics against the British.

In the seventies of the twentieth century, two important political diaries were written by two very eminent political personalities of Bengal. Abul Mansur Ahmed in his *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (in Bengali, Dacca, 1968) and Abul Hashim in his book entitled *In Retrospection* (Dacca, 1974) tried to narrate the then political developments in Bengal and also brought to light the controversial political

character of Fazlul Huq. As they were the eyewitnesses of contemporary Bengal politics and side by side strong political activists of undivided Bengal, their writings, reminiscences provide us very valuable information to judge Fazlul Huq and his different political activities. In the meantime, Humaira Momen wrote a book entitled *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937* (Dacca, 1972) wherein the author concentrated more on the activities of Fazlul Huq and his *Krishak Praja Party* and its success in the elections of 1937 but he did not go further. Sumit Sarkar made an extensive research work on the aftermath of the partition of Bengal (1905) and the outcome was *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973) wherein he explained the genesis of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal and brought to light its different trends and its socio-economic and cultural impact on the contemporary Bengali society. His finishing point is almost the starting point of my desired research but serves as a very useful background. Kenneth McPherson's *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta 1918-36* (Wiesbaden, 1974) dealt (as the title primarily suggests) with the urban politics of the Muslims in a metropolitan city like Calcutta. On the other hand, Hossainur Rahaman analyzed the Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal between the two partitions in his book entitled *Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal, 1905-1947* (Bombay, 1974). In 1974 Amalendu De wrote two pioneering works entitled *Bangali Buddhijibi O Bichhinnatabad* (in Bengali, Calcutta) and *Roots Of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta). Next year, his another extensive research work came to light entitled *Swadhin Bangabhumi Gathaner Parikalpana: Prayash O Parinati* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1975) wherein he highlighted on the scheme of 'Independent Bengal' and mainly concentrated on the events that were taken place in between January-20<sup>th</sup> June, 1947. In 1976 Bangladesh Itihas Samity published a very important book on Fazlul Huq entitled *Fazlul Huq speaks in Council, 1913-1916* which mainly dealt with the speeches given by Fazlul Huq in the Legislative Council between 1913 and 1916 but it provides us important information on his thought and action. In *The Muslim Society and Politics in Bengal, 1757-1947* (Dacca, 1978), Mohammad Abdur Rahim tried to highlight the then Bengali Muslim society and politics and he did not concentrate solely on Fazlul Huq and his political activities. In 1980, S.M. Azizul Huq Shahjahan, an active supporter and admirer of Fazlul Huq, wrote *Shatabdir Kanthaswar, Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali) in which the author only highlighted Mr. Huq's life and achievements and unearthed some of his unpublished

speeches and correspondence. In *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (New Delhi, 1981), Rafiuddin Ahmed dealt with the sources of Muslim separatism in Bengal which went beyond politics and ended where my research is going to be started. On the other hand, Enayetur Rahim concentrated on the Government of India Act, 1935 with special reference to provincial autonomy in his book entitled *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal, 1937- 1943* (Dacca, 1981). In 1984, several outstanding research works were published on Bengal and its electoral politics. For example, Gautam Chattopadhyay's *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle (1862-1947)*, dealt with the complex but highly significant issue of the relationship between Bengal electoral politics and freedom struggle and the focus was not solely on Fazlul Huq and his politics. Gitasree Bandyopadhyay in her *Constraints in Bengal Politics (1921-1941): Gandhian Leadership* (Calcutta, 1984) made an analytical study of the issues that raised controversies lasting over two decades, between the nationalist leaders of Bengal on the one hand and Gandhiji on the other and did not pay any attention to Fazlul Huq and his *Praja Movement*. Partha Chatterjee in his *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question* (Calcutta, 1984) made a comprehensive analysis of the changes in the agrarian structure of Bengal that were taken place in the first half of the twentieth century and analyzed the connection between agrarian relations and politics in Bengal. Rajat Kanta Ray in his *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875-1927* (Calcutta, 1984) made a detailed and exhaustive study of the complex socio-economic relationship between the centre and the periphery – between Calcutta and its hinterland. Jayanti Maitra in her *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1855-1906* (Calcutta, 1984) only examined the first phase of the Muslim separatism in Bengal. In the book entitled *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1985) Ayesha Jalal added a new dimension to the study of Jinnah and his politics and brought into light the relationship between Jinnah and Fazlul Huq without making any critical assessment of Huq's vacillating political stances. Similarly, Stanley Wolpert wrote *Jinnah of Pakistan* (New Delhi, 1985) where he put more emphasis on Jinnah and discussed Fazlul Huq's confrontation with Jinnah from a new angle. Sugata Bose made a careful research on agrarian Bengal which resulted in writing the book entitled *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics 1919-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1986). He pointed out a very interesting fact that until the early decades of the twentieth century, the peasantry of East Bengal (who were predominantly Muslims)

had a 'symbiotic relationship' with the predominantly Hindu landlords, moneylenders and traders but the prolonged depression of the 1930s completely changed 'the balance of class power in the peasant's favour'. Badruddin Umar stated similarly in his book entitled *Banga-bhanga O Sampradayik Rajniti* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1987) that the partition of Bengal in 1947 'became possible because of the presence of certain non-antagonistic contradictions in the country which were converted into antagonistic contradictions by the British rulers'. Tanika Sarkar in her *Bengal 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest* (New Delhi, 1987) highlighted mainly the protest movement in Bengal during the aforesaid period and did not fully concentrate on Fazlul Huq and his peasant politics. Similarly Bazlur Rahaman Khan in his *Politics in Bengal, 1927-1936* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987), concentrated only on the course of Bengal politics with special emphasis on the peasant politics and praja movement during the period mentioned above but he did not go further. Harun-or-Rashid in his *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987) carefully explained the emergence of Bangladesh and mainly concentrated on the decline of the Krishak Praja Party, the tensions within the leadership of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and the move for an Independent Greater Bengal, floated by the Suhrawardy-Hashim faction in the late 1940s. He wrote, 'there was existing a sub-national dimension among the Bengali Muslims' (p. 344) and according to him, the creation of Bangladesh was 'the partial fulfillment of the 1940s dream of an Independent Greater Bengal' (p. 346). Rajmohan Gandhi also made a 'dispassionate analysis of the making of Indian Muslims' psyche' through his biographical sketches of eight prominent Muslims (Fazlul Huq was one of them) in his book entitled *Understanding The Muslim Mind* (New Delhi, 1987).

After making a detailed study on the life and activities of Fazlul Huq, Amalendu De wrote *Pakistan Prastab O Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1989) in which he carefully analyzed the controversy between Fazlul Huq and Jinnah, pointed out the latter's 'Two-Nation theory' and exclusively focused on the Lahore Resolution (1940), popularly known as the 'Pakistan Resolution' (Prastab) which was moved by Fazlul Huq himself. Prof. De, to some extent, was sympathetic towards Fazlul Huq and remained almost silent on his inner contradictions and his unpredictable and shifting political moves. Around this time, Pradip Kumar Lahiri

tried to understand the Bengali Muslim mind and thought in his book entitled *Bengali Muslim Thought (1818-1947): Its Liberal and Rational Trends* (Calcutta, 1989). Sekhar Bandyopadhyay analyzed whether caste played a very important factor in Bengal politics and the British attitude towards it in his *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872-1937* (Calcutta, 1990). Chandiprasad Sarkar in his *The Bengali Muslims: A Study in their Politicization, 1912-1929* (Calcutta, 1991) highlighted the growth and development of the autonomous character of the Bengali Muslims along with their long and laborious search for their dual identity-not only as Muslims but as Bengalis as well. Similarly Saokata Ara Hosena highlighted Bengal society and politics in her *Politics and Society in Bengal, 1921-1936* (Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1991). Suranjan Das in his *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Delhi, 1991) made only communal riots (between the two partitions), as his focal point of research and as a result, Fazlul Huq and his Praja Movement were not taken into his consideration. Soumitra De in his book entitled *Nationalism and Separatism in Bengal: A Study of India's Partition* (Har Anand Publication, 1992) made an in-depth analysis of Bengal politics with an emphasis on cultural nationalism and separatist politics prior to the partition of India. Jahanara Begum in her book entitled *The Last Decade of Undivided Bengal: Parties, Politics & Personalities* (Calcutta, 1994) analyzed only the important issues like land, labour, detinue question, the Hindu-Muslim communal problem, the great famine of 1943 etc., different legislations thereof and reflections and reactions to them inside and outside the House. But she concentrated mainly on the events that were taken place in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the same year, Taj-ul-Islam Hashmi's *Peasant Utopia: The Communalisation of Class Politics in East – Bengal, 1920-1947* (Dacca, 1994) revealed the peasant questions, class character and rural politics along with the activities of the different political parties but did not make any critical analysis on the divisions and schisms of the peasant parties. Soumitra Sinha's *The Quest For Modernity and The Bengali Muslims, 1921-1947* (Calcutta, 1995), tried to investigate and explore whether there was any quest for modernity among the Bengali Muslims before the attainment of independence. In the list of research works on Bengal and Bengal politics, Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge, 1995) and Tazeen M. Murshid's *The Sacred and The Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977* (Calcutta, 1995) deserve special mention. But both of them remained silent on Fazlul Huq's ambiguities and the issue that had there been a favorable situation if Mr. Huq was given due weightage

and honour in contemporary Bengal politics. In her research work Joya Chatterji made her observation that ‘communalism in Bengal was essentially a Muslim phenomenon’ and that ‘a parallel Hindu communalism did not emerge’ (according to her, it was built up in Bengal from the 1930s), ‘or that if it did, it was too limited and peripheral to have contributed in any significant way to the conflicts that led to Pakistan’ (p. 152).

Similarly scholars from both India and abroad, took keen interest to study Bengal politics somehow or other connected with Fazlul Huq or his Krishak Praja Party. Thus *Sher-e -Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali, Dhaka, 1997) by Sirajuddin Ahmed and *Fazlul Huq: Jiban O Rajniti* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 2001) by Saccitananda Banerjee, had come down to us and covered various sides of the life and activities of Fazlul Huq but both these works did not properly highlight his ambiguous, inconsistent and volatile character and activities. Likewise, Manzur Ahsan in his thesis entitled *Fazlul Huq: Spokesman For The Bengal Peasantry Under The Colonial Regime* (Aligarh, 2000) highlighted Fazlul Huq’s activities mainly in the economic sphere and his involvement with the Bengal peasantry but he did not make any critical analysis on his political motives, his plan of action, his ambiguities, the mystery of his success in the Elections of 1937 and the author failed more or less to identify the issues which led to the gradual decline of Huq’s political hold over Bengal within a few years after his Premiership. Suniti Kumar Ghosh in his book entitled *Bangla Bibhajaner Arthaniti- Rajniti* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 2001) analyzed the partition of Bengal as well as India, in 1947 and tried to mark the people who were responsible for both of these partitions and gave focus on their vested interests. On the other hand, Srilata Chatterjee mainly concentrated on the Bengal politics led by the Congress between the two World Wars in her book entitled *Congress Politics in Bengal 1919-1939* (London, 2002). In *Bangasanghar Ebong, 1946-1950* (in Bengali, Calcutta, 2002), Sukharanjan Sengupta highlighted the roles of H.S. Suhrawardy and Fazlul Huq in the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946 and analyzed the Noakhali Riot (October 1946), the transfer of power in 1947 and the communal riot in East Bengal in 1950. He aptly narrated the events that were taken place in Bengal in between 1946 and 1950 but the political activities of Fazlul Huq prior to 1946 remained completely untouched. Likely Rakesh Batabyal in his book entitled *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47* (New Delhi, 2005) mainly concentrated on the

emergence of communalism in between the great Bengal Famine of 1943 and the hatred communal riot that was taken place at Noakhali in 1946. In this context Avik Kumar Dey's *Nirmal Kumar Basu: Satchallisher Diary* (in Bengali, Kolkata, 2009) and Sandip Bandyopadhyay's *Itihashe Dike Phire: Chhechallisher Danga* (in Bengali, Kolkata, 2010) deserve special mention. Both these books were almost political diaries and the authors mainly concentrated on the Calcutta Riots (1946) and the incidents that happened in Bengal prior to the final division and partition of India in 1947. Interestingly, Suniti Kumar Ghosh in his book entitled *The Tragic Partition of Bengal* (Kolkata, 2010) made detailed analysis of the traumatic experience of the partition of Bengal in 1947 but did not duly consider Fazlul Huq's political activities as a whole and his fight for the Bengal peasantry. Special mention also should be made to the research work done by Samindra Mohan Biswas. He in his book entitled *Sher-E-Bangla Fazlul Huq (1906-1947): In the Cross-Currents of Provincial and National Politics of India* (Kolkata, 2011) portrayed the life and activities of Fazlul Huq, his contradictions and the shifts in his political career. But in his study, he did not make any reference to the scheme of a 'united Independent Bengal' and the response of Fazlul Huq towards this scheme. In his research, he did not properly highlight the land question, the genesis of the Praja movement and its culmination in the formation of the Krishak Praja Party, the role of Fazlul Huq in the KPP's success in the Elections of 1937 and also in its gradual decline. Very recently noted historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in his book entitled *The Defining Moments in Bengal 1920-1947* (OUP, New Delhi, 2014) tried to explore 'some of the constitutive elements in the life and mind of Bengal in the twentieth century' and closely examined the momentous changes that took place in the economy, politics, society and cultural life of Bengal in between 1920 and 1947. In his analysis, he made reference to Fazlul Huq, his Krishak Praja Party, Peasant Movements and the Left, Muslim community and the politics of the Middle – Class, the scheme of 'United Independent Bengal' etc. but his research work was not primarily based on Fazlul Huq and his political activities and his role in provincial vis-à-vis national politics.

Side by side, a huge number of books or research works were published on the partition of India and the making of Pakistan or the transfer of power. Here mention should be made of: 1) Choudhury Khaliqzaman's *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961); 2) Penderel Moon's *Divide and Quit (1961)* and 3) *The Partition Omnibus* (New

Delhi, 2002); 4) Khalid B.Sayeed's *Pakistan: The Formative Phase (1857-1948)*, OUP, 1968; 5) S.S. Pirzada's *Foundations of Pakistan: All- India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, Vol. II 1924-1947 (Karachi,1970); 6)R.J. Moore's *Churchill, Cripps, and India: 1939-45* (Oxford, 1979) and his 7) *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Oxford, 1983); 8) David Page's *Prelude to Partition* (Oxford, 1982); 9) Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, 1959); 10) David Gilmartin's *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (New Delhi, 1989); 11) Mushirul Hasan's *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (New Delhi, 1993); 12) V.P. Menon's *Transfer of Power in India* (Hyderabad, 1993); 13) Sucheta Mahajan's *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* (New Delhi, 2000); 14) Amrik Singh's (ed.) *The Partition in Retrospect* (New Delhi, 2000); 15) D.N. Panigrahi's *India's Partition: The Story of Imperialism in Retreat* (London & New York, 2004), & his 16) *The Partition Omnibus* (New Delhi, 2007); 17) Narendra Singh Sarila's *The Shadow of the Great Game: The Unfold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi, 2005); 18) Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Delhi, 2007); 19) Satish Saberwal's *Spirals of Contention: Why India was Partitioned in 1947* (New Delhi, 2008); 20) Neeti Nair's *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Ranikhet, 2011); 21) Kaushik Roy's (ed.) *Partition of India, Why 1947* (New Delhi, 2012) and so on and so forth. There may be more useful and important works on the theme of partition of India than these but in all these books the authors have analyzed the issue of partition from an all-India perspective rather than that of Bengal and as a result, Fazlul Huq or Bengal politics was not their focal point of discussion rather it came to them as a case study.

Having gone through all the above mentioned books and research works, it can be said without any doubt that most of these works did not impartially explain or properly highlight Fazlul Huq and his political activities between the two partitions of Bengal (1905-1947), his involvement with the *krishaks* and *prajas*, his role in the Praja movement which led to the formation of the KPP and the factors of his success and failure in the provincial vis-à-vis national politics. Most of these works did not properly assess his fight for the indebted peasantry of Bengal and his contribution in the field of Debt Settlement, his politics of *Dal –Bhat* which gave him (and his party KPP) immense popularity and success in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 and

its gradual decline in the later years and at the same time, did not fully throw light on his contrasts, ambiguities, inconsistency and his volatile character and activities. Although a very few research works were carried out in this part of Bengal (West Bengal) vis-à-vis India absolutely on Fazlul Huq but most of them failed to critically analyze the man and his political activities, to explain whether he was guided by whims or 'political opportunism' and whether he was very power-hungry for which Fazlul Huq on several occasions, made compromises with different political groups or organizations which led to his gradual loss of self-made image and his credibility. At the same time, most of these works also did not properly reveal the truth that how far he was 'secular' and to what extent, he played the 'communal card' whenever and wherever needed in building of his political career and to remain in power. The present study endeavours to cover all these issues so far untouched, unattended or overlooked. It is also to be seen that to what extent, Fazlul Huq in most of the cases, enjoyed the freedom to take all his decisions, whether he was under any compulsion of coalition politics or more importantly, whether he was at the mercy of the highest bidders (within the Muslim League) who tried to 'use' and 'utilize' Huq's popular image for the fulfillment of their vested interests or party-demands showing almost no respect for this man, his plan of action and the promises which he kept before the common people of Bengal. So a fresh look into all these aspects of Fazlul Huq is certainly needed to explore and investigate properly and impartially Fazlul Huq's shifting political activities as he often drifted from provincial to national politics and the vice-versa along with his vacillating political stance and course of action and finally the 'currents' which helped him to come to power in Bengal and the 'cross-currents' which 'dethroned' him from power-politics within the League and also at the regional and national levels. Along with these, it is the aim of the present study to project Fazlul Huq as a meaningful, potential and incessantly active political force in the regional and national arena during the period under consideration and make an impartial assessment of his life and political activities in the cross-currents of regional and national politics between the two partitions of Bengal (1905-1947).

# 1

## **A.K. Fazlul Huq's 'Rise to Power' in Bengal Politics**

Bengal and the Bengalis at the very beginning of the twentieth century, were in the forefront not only in the field of introducing new philosophy, applying new methodology and generating new political ideas and consciousness among the masses but also they were playing the prominent role in launching the anti- British movements, mainly under the banner of the Indian National Congress and Bengal at that time, was thought-out to be the 'nerve centre of Indian nationalism'. Not only that, Bengal along with Punjab and Maharashtra had also become great centres of 'militant nationalism' or 'revolutionary terrorism'. The first half of the twentieth century was considered to be much eventful in the history of Bengal as well as India with regard to the socio-economic and political changes that had occurred, influenced and completely changed the socio-political scenario of this country. The 1905 was the milestone which indicated a major turning point and momentous event not only in the history and politics of undivided Bengal but also of India. The first partition of Bengal in 1905 and its annulment in 1911, had transformed Bengal into an epicenter of Indian politics. The foundation of the All – India Muslim League (as a result of the Simla deputation of 1 October 1906 to the Viceroy Lord Minto II under the leadership of Aga Khan) in the Dacca Educational Conference on 30 December 1906 under the leadership of Nawab Salimullah of Dacca (presently Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh) to safeguard the political rights and interests of the Muslims, to preach loyalty to the British and to further the cause of inter-communal amity was, of course, another fundamental political change which brought a section of Muslim community of Bengal to a position of active politics not only at the provincial level but also at the national level. The Presidency of Bengal (which included in 1866, apart from Bengal proper, the whole of Bihar, Orissa and Assam) had an area of 1,89,000 square miles and a population (in 1901) of 78.50 million<sup>1</sup> and the British administrators had the opinion that it was almost impossible for them to govern such a vast province. Naturally different suggestions and proposals were frequently given for easing the

burden on its Lieutenant – Governor. But there were important political considerations as rightly pointed out by Prof. Sumit Sarkar in his classical work entitled *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903 – 1908*, which were by no means secondary. It was Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, who had submitted a report to Curzon, the then Viceroy on 28 March 1903 in which he for the first time proposed to separate Chittagong Division, Dacca and Mymensingh from Bengal which were “a hot bed of the purely Bengal movement.....” and needed “strong personal government”. In his note Fraser pointed out: “I believe that Dacca and Mymensingh would give far less trouble if they were under Assam. I also believe that East Bengal would not be so painfully prominent a factor in Bengal administration if this transfer were made”.<sup>2</sup> Herbert Hope Risley, the then Home Secretary, put similar kind of arguments in two notes of 7 February 1904 and 6 December 1904: “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in different ways..... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule”.<sup>3</sup> Administrative convenience was the pretext but the political objective of the colonial administration was to disrupt the nationalist opposition led by the Hindu middle classes and to weaken this ‘politically articulate’ race and also the Congress which was manipulated from Calcutta by its ‘best wirepullers and ... frothy orators’. The political motive was clearly stated by Curzon on 17 February 1904: “The Bengalis, who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out, and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future”.<sup>4</sup> So the antidote to Bengali *bhadralok* from capturing power was to encourage the development of other communities and in this case, it was the Muslims who gained the attention and won the confidence of the colonial rulers. This imperialist strategy and design to build up a wall of division between the Hindus and the Muslims was also mentioned by Curzon in his speech at Dacca on 18 February 1904: partition scheme “would invest the Muhammadans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman viceroys and

kings.....”<sup>5</sup> and thus the card of ‘divide and rule’ was delicately and deliberately applied by him and his colleagues.

The new province would consist of Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi (excluding Darjeeling) Divisions, Hill Tippera, Malda and Assam and would cover an area of 1, 06,540 square miles with a population of 31 million comprising of 18 million Muslims and 12 million Hindus. It was to be called ‘Eastern Bengal and Assam’ with its capital at Dacca and subsidiary headquarters at Chittagong. The truncated province of Bengal was to comprise Calcutta and eleven districts of West Bengal, the district of Darjeeling, as also the whole Bihar and Orissa (including Sambalpur and the five Oriya-speaking areas) and would be left with an area of 1, 41,580 square miles and a population of 54 million, of which 42 million would be Hindus and 9 million Muslims.<sup>6</sup> Curzon prepared the final draft regarding the partition of Bengal and sent it to England on 2 February 1905. On 9 June Broderick, the Secretary of States, gave his approval and the Government of India promulgated their final decision in a Resolution dated 19 July 1905 and the partition of Bengal officially came into effect on 16 October 1905.

The majority of the Muslims, a section of the Muslim Press (the *Muslim Chronicle*, the *Mohammedan Literary Society* etc), the traditional and reformist groups (like the Faraizi, Wahabi and Taiyumi), supported the partition of Bengal and hoped that the new province would provide them an incentive to ‘unite into a compact body and form an association to voice their own views and aspirations relating to social and political matters’ which gave birth to the Mohammedan Provincial Union on 16 October 1905 with Salimullah as its patron and then ultimately the Muslim League in Dacca on 30 December 1906 (which was in favour of the partition). But there was a group of liberal Muslims (who were the supporters of the Indian National Congress), came forward to render their support to the anti-partition agitation. The prominent members among this section of the Muslims were Khwaza Atiqullah, Abdur Rasul, Khan Bahadur Muhammad Yusuf, Mujibur Rahman, A.H. Ghuznavi, Ismail Hossain Shiraji, Muhammad Gholam Hossain, Maulvi Liaqat Hussain, Syed Hafizur Rahman Chowdhury of Bogra, Abul Kasem of Burdwan etc. who inspired the Muslims to join the anti-partition agitation.

As huge number of people of Bengal were not ready to accept the partition, its official announcement set off a mighty upsurge which brought the people and the political leaders of different shades of opinion together to raise their voice against this decision. Leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjea (who was one of the front-rank leaders of the anti-partition agitation and as nicknamed ‘Surrender Not’) along with journalists like Krishna Kumar Mitra, editor of the *Sanjivani* (13 July 1905) urged the people of Bengal to boycott British goods and to take a solemn vow to use *Swadeshi* (indigenous) goods. S.N. Banerjea made an appeal to the people of Bengal ‘to abstain from the purchase of British manufacturers so long as Partition Resolution is not withdrawn, as a protest against the indifference of the British public in regard to Indian affairs and the consequent disregard of Indian public opinion by the present Government’.<sup>7</sup> In a meeting held at Calcutta Town Hall on 7 August 1905 (hailed as the birthday of Indian nationalism), a formal boycott resolution was passed, which marked the beginning of the *Swadeshi* movement. The day of partition was observed as a day of mourning and *arandhan* (non-cooking) in almost all the houses of Bengal. A *hartal* was called in Calcutta and Surendra Nath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose addressed to a huge gathering of seventy thousand people. On the suggestion of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore (who composed the famous song *Banglar Mati, Banglar Jal* at that point of time), the day was further observed as the *Rakhi Bandhan Day* as a symbol of unity and brotherhood among different religious communities. At the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1906, Surendra Nath Banerjea stated: “So long as the partition is not reversed or modified, the Bengali speaking community will never be satisfied..... and that, no matter what concessions may be granted in other directions, they will not conciliate our people or allay their prevailing excitement”.<sup>8</sup> He along with Bepin Chandra Pal, Aswini Kumar Dutta, Aurobindo Ghosh, Ramendrasundar Trivedi and the like sought to make the anti-partition movement as broad based as possible and soon the *Boycott* and *Swadeshi* movements (inspite of their limitations), got large scale mass support (particularly among the Hindus) all over Bengal which ultimately unnerved the British authority. Not only that, these movements posed a great danger to Manchester cotton textile industry. So the new Viceroy Lord Hardinge II (November 1910 – April 1916) in a secret despatch recommended certain changes in the administration of India which resulted in the announcement of the annulment of the partition of Bengal. It was annulled on 12 December 1911 by King George V at his Coronation

Darbar in Delhi. The date chosen for the formal ending of the partition and reunification of Bengal was 1 April 1912 and Lord Carmichael was selected as the first Governor of reunified Bengal. There were other administrative decisions. The most important of which was the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi – a measure which ‘marked the end of Bengali dominance in national politics of India’.<sup>9</sup>

The Hindus welcomed the Government’s decision and they were naturally happy at the annulment of the partition of Bengal. But it was a severe shock to the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam who thought that the partition would enhance the economic and educational progress of their region. Following the annulment of the partition of Bengal, the Eastern Bengal and Assam Muslim League (EBAML, formed in July 1908) and the Calcutta based West Bengal Muslim League (WBML, formed on 21 January 1909) were amalgamated into the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) as the provincial branch of the All India Muslim League (AIML) on 2 March 1912 with Nawab Salimullah as president and Nawab Ali Chaudhury and Zahid Suhrawardy as secretaries. Nawab Salimullah, the elected president of the BPML, called on a meeting of the Muslim leaders of Bengal at Dacca on 30 December 1911. Resolutions were passed at the meeting expressing deep sense of regret and disappointment at the annulment of the partition in utter disregard of the Muslim feelings and interests. He in his Presidential address at the Muslim League session held at Calcutta on 3 March 1912, considered the annulment as a ‘ready concession to an utterly seditious agitation led by the Muslims who remained loyal to the British Government for a long time’. But he appreciated the Government’s decision of setting up a University at Dacca and persuaded for special facilities for the Muslims in education and government services. In the concluding part of his address, Nawab Salimullah announced his decision to retire from active politics on the ground of his ill-health and he ultimately died in 1914.

The partition of Bengal and its annulment strained the relations between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. Nirad C. Choudhuri in his book entitled *The Autobiography of an unknown Indian* categorically gave an account of the deep hatred of the Hindus towards the Muslims after the partition. He observed that “it left a permanent legacy of estrangement between the two communities and that a cold dislike for the Muslims settled down in our hearts, putting an end to all real intimacy

and friendship”.<sup>10</sup> This manifested itself in the streets, schools and market places but above all, it formed an abiding place in the minds of the people. The young educated and professional Muslims who saw the failure of the loyalist approach of their aristocratic elders who were then in the forefront of Muslim politics, understood the fact that they must follow a bold and effective policy of political agitation, if they wanted to improve the lot of their own. Great Britain’s support to Italy’s invasion of Tripoli in 1911, the Balkan War (in October 1912) against the Ottoman Empire and the Russian aggression in Persia embittered the feelings of the Muslims in India. They were also disappointed by the vacillating policy of the British Government regarding the proposed Muslim University of Aligarh. On the other hand, the educated Muslims of Bengal (who lost their faith on both the ‘orthodox’ and ‘loyalist’ Muslim leaders), discarded their submissive attitude towards the British Government and stood for a separate identity of the Bengali Muslims. They also wanted to cooperate with the Congress in the struggle for self-government. Muhsin-ul-Mulk, an aristocratic leader, also saw the danger of this new trend in Muslim politics of Bengal. He wrote: “By this decision (annulment of partition) the government displayed improper indifference to the Muslims and the result is that some educated Muslims have begun to say that it is not in Muslim interest to keep aloof from the Hindus. They suggested that we should say good bye to the Muslim League and join the Indian National Congress”.<sup>11</sup> Around this time, A.K. Fazlul Huq, a young politician of ‘a new kind’, with indomitable courage, charismatic personality and independent spirit emerged in Bengal and began to represent the ideas, hopes and aspirations of the younger generation of the Muslim community of Bengal. The Balkan war and the Cawnpore Mosque incident (in which a serious riot broke out in August 1913 following the rumours that portion of a mosque was being demolished there by the municipality to make way for a new road which prompted Fazlul Huq to make a personal visit to the site) brought Mr. Huq and a group of lawyers and journalist politicians into the forefront of Bengal Muslim politics.

Abul Kashem Fazlul Huq, popularly known as *Sher-e-Bengla* or *Hak Saheb*, was born on 26 October 1873, at his maternal uncle’s house at Saturia (contrarily at his ancestral house at Chakhar, a village 14 miles away from Barisal town), a developed and prosperous village in the district of Bakerganj (presently in Bangladesh). He was born in an affluent, educated and cultured family and he was

the only son of Muhammad Wazid (who was a reputed civil and criminal lawyer of the Barisal Bar) and Saidunnissa Khatun. Fazlul Huq started his preliminary studies in Arabic and Persian at home and also got admitted at a local *Madrassah*. He received his early education from Himayat Hussain Chowdhury and Maulana Kashgar – the two eminent and sincere teachers of their time. Later he took admission to Barisal Zilla School and from there he passed the Entrance Examination in 1890 in First Division. Fazlul Huq then moved to Calcutta and took admission in the Presidency College under Dacca Division where from he passed the F.A. Examination in 1892 and B.A. Examination with First Class having triple Honours in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics from the same college in 1894. Some of his classmates were Bhupendra Nath Mitra, Brajalal Mitra, Charuchandra Ghosh, Dwarikanath Mitra, Manmatha Mukherjee and Prabhas Chandra Mitra – all outstanding Presidencians of that time. He was the first Muslim student who did his post-graduation in Mathematics from the University of Calcutta and was awarded First Class in 1896. His formal education was completed with a BL degree in 1897 from the University Law College, Calcutta and significantly he was the second Muslim in the Indian subcontinent to obtain a Law degree.<sup>12</sup> After the completion of his studies, Fazlul Huq chose legal practice as his profession and got himself enrolled as an Advocate in the Calcutta High Court in 1900. Not only that, he started his legal practice as an apprentice under Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. But the death of his father (in 1901), compelled him to move towards Barisal, his hometown where he started his practice. While living in Barisal, Fazlul Huq came into contact with a number of poor, illiterate, backward and down-trodden people especially the Muslim peasants and tenants whose innocence, backwardness, unemployment and economic degradation brought a great change in his life and he began to take interest in different socio-economic and political problems of the time. In Barisal he also met with Aswini Kumar Dutt in 1901 and was elected as a Commissioner in the Barisal Municipal election and also won the election in the Barisal Zilla Board. The success in these elections was a turning point in his life and thereafter Fazlul Huq never looked back and marked his footprints in the political canvas of Bengal and also in the literary field (he himself edited a Bengali weekly, *Balak* and jointly edited a Bengali monthly, *Bharat Suhrid* (1900-'03) to promote communal harmony among the masses). Apart from his legal practice, Fazlul Huq served as a part-time lecturer (in Mathematics) of Raj Chandra College (in Barisal) in between 1903 and 1904.

Like many Muslims, Fazlul Huq was a strong supporter of the partition of Bengal (1905) on the ground that it would be ‘a much-needed opportunity for the Muslims to obtain their due share of state patronage’.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, he extended his support to Nawab Salimullah in establishing the Mohammedan Provincial Union in 1905 and the Nawab invited Fazlul Huq, the promising young advocate to join the anti-*Swadeshi* movement for the greater interest of the Muslim community to which the latter duly responded. His mastery of several languages made him a popular figure in the political arena of Bengal and Fazlul Huq, inspite of his *Ashraf* (who were descendants of foreigners and converts from the higher caste Hindus) background, became successful in captivating the hearts of the people of rural Bengal who mostly belonged to *Ajlaf* or *Atrap* (lower class Mohammedans and converts from the lower caste Hindus) community and tried to maintain a close touch with them, to feel for them, to fight for them – all these ultimately helped him to emerge as a successful politician<sup>14</sup>. Not only that, Nawab Salimullah also sent Fazlul Huq as his special representative to the Muslim leaders of India in connection with his grand scheme of establishing completely a Muslim political organization on an all-India basis. With this objective Nawab Salimullah requested Mohsin-ul-Mulk to convene the All India Mohammedan Educational Conference at Dacca on 30 December 1906 in which Fazlul Huq played a very crucial role and became successful in proving his efficiency and organizational capacity. The Conference resolved to launch the ‘All-India Muslim League’ and the organizing capacity of Mr. Huq resulted in his appointment one of the General Secretaries of the Drafting Committee of the All-India Muslim League and finally he was elected as its joint secretary. Thus it can be said without any doubt that Fazlul Huq became one of the founder members of the All-India Muslim League<sup>15</sup>. He then decided to dedicate his life for the cause of the Muslims but very soon he changed his mind to fulfill his father’s wish and his wife’s (he married Kurshid Talat Begum, the daughter of Nawab Muhammad Khan Bhadur and granddaughter of Nawab Abdul Latif, C.I.E.) dream. As their wish, Fazlul Huq wanted to join in the government service and his name was recommended by Nawab Salimullah to be appointed Deputy Magistrate which he did in 1906. Later on, he was transferred to Jamalpur where he had to face a communal riot which he very effectively and tactfully handled, suppressed and restored peace in the locality. Thereafter, he was transferred to Madaripur where he was offered the post of Assistant Registrar of Rural Cooperative Societies in the new province of Eastern

Bengal and Assam<sup>16</sup> which he accepted in 1908 and continued it upto 1912. But to his utter surprise, Fazlul Huq was not promoted to the post of Registrar of the Cooperative Societies. Disappointed and disgruntled Huq then decided to resign from the post and thereafter he joined the Calcutta High Court as a junior to Asutosh Mookerjee (later Sir Asutosh Mookerjee) and got himself established in legal profession. But politics was beckoning him and he finally decided to enter into active politics which he initiated under the guidance of Sir Khwaja Salimullah and Nawab Ali Chowdhury.

The opportunity came in 1913 when election was held to elect a member to the Bengal Legislative Council from the Dacca Division Constituency. Fazlul Huq agreed to contest the election at the request of Aswini Kumar Dutt, a prominent leader of the *Swadeshi* age. In the election, he fought against Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra in that empty seat. At that time there was no system of adult suffrage. Those who had the ability to pay taxes and cesses, were given the right to vote. The partition of Bengal and its annulment embittered the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims and it continued for a long time. No other Muslim candidate excepting Fazlul Huq agreed to contest in the election from that constituency which had a majority of Hindu population.<sup>17</sup> He took the challenge and captivated the hearts of his Hindu voters as he became successful in gaining the support of Aswini Kumar Dutt who had deep respect towards Fazlul Huq's father Kazi Muhammad Wazid (1843-1901). So he did not have to face much problem to proceed in that critical communal environment<sup>18</sup> and get large scale support from his Hindu voters. The voters of the Dacca Division Constituency were highly convinced by his extraordinary eloquence and sincerity. He declared in his election campaign that he would try his best to improve the condition of the Bengalis and fight for their betterment, prosperity and happiness. He also highlighted the cause of self-respect, age-old traditions and rich cultural heritage of the Bengalis. All these helped him a lot to convince his voters and Fazlul Huq ultimately became successful in defeating the strong Hindu candidate and got elected to the Bengal Legislative Council. Since then he had been associated with the Bengal Legislature till the partition of India (1947), except for two years (1934-36) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. In 1913 Fazlul Huq was not only elected to the Bengal Legislative Council, he also became the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim

League and Joint Secretary of the All India Muslim League and continued in these posts till 1916. He then served as the President of the All India Muslim League from 1916 to 1921. In the meantime, he also became the Joint Secretary of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1917 and served this organization as its General Secretary in 1918-1919. All these paved the way for the emergence of Fazlul Huq in the political arena of Bengal vis-à-vis India.

He distinguished himself as a man of independent spirit and made his impression and reputation by his strong advocacy of the Muslim interests and his severe criticism of the British Government's injustices to them. His mode of thinking, his way of expression, his ideas and speeches were totally different from the loyalist approach of his elderly Muslim leaders. His first and most influential speech in the Budget session of the Council won the hearts of millions of Muslims in India as he said: "It seems to me that officials make fundamental mistake with regard to the claims of the Mohammadans on the Govt. whether it would be the question of state patronage, grant of political right, or privileges or expenditure from provincial revenue for promoting Mohammadan education, or other matters of special interest to the community..... If the officials will not meet the demand in full, there is certain to be discontentment in the community, whether the discontent would be worth the consideration of the government is a different question".<sup>19</sup> In his speech Fazlul Huq argued that the Muslims should be given special educational facilities as a compensation for the annulment of the partition of Bengal. He categorically stated: "I would only remind the officials that they are in honour bound to render adequate compensation to the Muhammadan community for all the grievous wrong inflicted on them by the unceremonious annulment of the partition".<sup>20</sup> He highly condemned the government for delaying the establishment of the proposed Dacca University and the Muhammadan College at Dacca. He observed: "We have had enough of resolutions, these well-meaning promises and unredeemed pledges which did no more good to the Muhammadan community than did the settled fact of partition".<sup>21</sup> He also drew the attention of the Government by saying: "Not only is the Muhammadan College at Dacca a stern necessity and an act of bare justice to our community, but I maintain that the time has come for the establishment of a first grade college of Arts for the Mohammadans in Calcutta ..... that there is an urgent need for increased hostel accommodation for Muhammadan students is universally accepted..... The

provision for teaching of Arabic and Persian in government aided schools is hopelessly inadequate”.<sup>22</sup> Regarding inadequate representation of the Muslims in the Government services, Huq further pointed out: “.....it is also necessary that our community should be adequately represented in the various branches of the public service, for otherwise, our voice in the councils of Govt. would be very ineffectual and ineffective. It is, therefore, inevitable that we should fight for a proper share of public appointments for the young men of our community; it is also very necessary that we should press our claims strongly”.<sup>23</sup> He at the same time, earned reputation and popularity amongst a section of the Muslim intellectuals for his advocacy for Indianisation of Public Services which he placed before the Royal Commission of Public Services (1913). In his presidential address at the first session of the Bengal Presidency League (after the annulment of the partition of Bengal), held at Dacca on 13 April 1914, Fazlul Huq uttered: “I can assure the officials that the Muslim community of Bengal can well survive the effects of even the most unsympathetic administrative measures, and they will also survive the injustice done to them by the annulment of the partition. If now I refer to the annulment I do so simply to emphasise the fact that even lapse of time can not reconcile us to a measure which has been so utterly repugnant to the sense of self-respect of our community”.<sup>24</sup>

The entry of Fazlul Huq in Bengal politics ushered in a new phase in the political life of the Muslims of this region. He advocated the hope, desires and aspirations of the educated middle class and the cause of the down-trodden peasantry and the tenants. Primarily a leader of the Muslim community and a strong pleader of their causes, he also realized the fact that the future of the Muslims of Bengal would lay in an alliance with the Hindus against the common enemy, i.e. the British. He thought that a political understanding with the Hindus ensuring adequate safeguards in the constitution for the Muslims would strengthen the freedom movement and force the British to concede power. It would then be shared by both the communities according to the agreed scheme.<sup>25</sup> Also a section of the Muslim youths including Huq, who had been earlier hostile to the Indian National Congress,<sup>26</sup> began to come closer towards the Congress at the initiative of Jinnah and Mohammad Ali who wanted to establish a colonial self-government in India in close cooperation with the Congress.<sup>27</sup> In Bengal, Fazlul Huq made an appeal to the Hindus to forgive the Muslims and

behave like brothers. He said: "Our quarrel is not with Hindus..... but with officials. We wish to settle our account with them".<sup>28</sup> Being a member of the All India Muslim League and the Secretary of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, Fazlul Huq also joined the All-India National Congress and presided over the conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress held at Midnapore in 1914.<sup>29</sup> This new political strategy of Fazlul Huq and his associates created a favourable atmosphere for a political understanding, collaboration and alliance between the Muslims and Hindus which came to a reality by the Lucknow Pact of 1916. In order to win the confidence of the Muslims for the acceptance of the Lucknow Pact, he proclaimed: "Hindus and Muslims should stand united and use every constitutional and legitimate means to effect the transfer of power ..... India, has, I believe, turned a corner..... The Promised Land is within sight".<sup>30</sup>

By the Lucknow Pact, the Indian National Congress accepted the separate electorates with reservation of seats. Provincial autonomy was the basis of the scheme. Provincial Legislatures were to be enlarged and four-fifths ( $\frac{4}{5}$ th) of their members were to be elected. The Muslims gained weightage in the Central Legislature and in the Legislatures of provinces where they were in minority. The Hindus were given weightage in Bengal and the Punjab. To give the benefit of weightage to the Muslim minority provinces, Fazlul Huq and other delegates from Bengal accepted 40% of the Council seats for the Muslims of Bengal (previously it was 11.3%) and sacrificed 14% seats in the province where they formed 54% of the total population. The Muslims of the Punjab agreed to 50% representation, sacrificing only 5% of their seats in the Punjab Legislature. In return, the Muslims of minority provinces got weightage: Bombay with 20% Muslim population 33% seats, U.P. with 14% Muslim population 30% seats, Bihar & Orissa with 13% Muslim population 29% seats; Madras with 7% Muslim population 15% seats, and C.P. with 4% Muslim population 15% seats.<sup>31</sup> But according to Prof. J. H. Broomfield, the figure was slightly different which is reflected in the Table given below:

**Table I.1: Distribution of Seats in the Provincial Legislature for the Muslims by the Lucknow Pact (1916)**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Provinces</b>	<b>Muslim % of population</b>	<b>% of total Legislative Seats for Muslims</b>	<b>% of (3) of (2)</b>
Bengal	52.6	40.0	76
Bihar & Orissa	10.5	25.0	238
Bombay	20.4	33.3	163
C.P	4.3	15.0	349
Madras	6.5	15.0	231
Punjab	54.8	50.0	91
U.P	14.0	50.0	214

Source: J. H. Broomfield, 'The Forgotten Majority: The Bengal Muslims And September 1918' in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, p. 222.

But a section of the Muslim leaders (Loyalists) of Bengal severely criticized Fazlul Huq and his associates for selling out their community to the Hindus and also for allowing the Muslim majority of the province to be reduced into a minority in the Provincial Legislature and it was reflected in the annual session of the Provincial Muslim League, held at Barisal on 8 April 1917. A few members of the B.P.M.L. (Bengal Presidency Muslim League) including its President Nawab Ali Chowdhury who refused to accept the Lucknow Pact, left the organization and became the President of the Central National Mohammedan Association (C.N.M.A.), a platform for 'effective protection of Muslim interest'. Nawab Ali Chowdhury firmly believed that "Hitherto the whole history of India.....is a history of a continued antagonism of the two communities", hence no question of collaboration with the Hindus. Some Muslim leaders of Bengal formed a new political organization called Indian Moslem Association (I.M.A.). According to J.H. Broomfield, "The Lucknow Pact thus led to a crisis in Muslim politics in Bengal".<sup>32</sup> In this situation, Fazlul Huq and other supporters of the Lucknow Pact suggested modification demanding 50% seats for Muslims in the Bengal Legislative Council.<sup>33</sup> The C.N.M.A. and the B.P.M.L. made strong demands and deputation to Montagu and Chelmsford and also to the Bengal Government for 50% seats to the Muslims in the Provincial Legislature.<sup>34</sup> But in

reality, the Muslims were given 35% representation (39 seats out of 113 elected seats) in the Bengal Legislative Council by the Government of India Act, 1919. The Hindus were given 46 seats, the zamindars-5, Calcutta University-1, European Community-5, European Traders-11, Anglo-Indians-2 and Indian Traders were given 4 seats.<sup>34a</sup> The distribution of seats under the 1919 Act is clearly reflected in the Table given below:

**Table I.2: The Distribution of Elected Seats in the Bengal Legislative Council under the 1919 Act**

Different Categories	Seats
Muhammadan Urban	06
Muhammadan Rural	33
Non- Muhammadan Urban	11
Non- Muhammadan Rural	35
Calcutta University	01
Landholders	05
Europeans	05
European Trade and Commerce	11
Indian Trade and Commerce	04
Anglo-Indians	02
Total elected members	113
Nominated and Ex-Officio	26 (22+4)

Source: Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, pp. 53-54.

In the meantime, the Home Rule Movement for attaining self-government in India was launched under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant. In Bengal, C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq, Bipin Chandra Pal and the like joined the movement. Also around this time, a very significant change occurred in international relations which had a great impact in national politics. On the onset of the First World War, Great Britain supported the claims of the Balkan States against Turkey which created great repercussions in India and the Pan-Islamic Muslim leaders like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Abul Kalam Azad and the Ali Brothers (namely Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali) became very much anxious about the future of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>35</sup> Fazlul Huq strongly condemned and criticized the imperialist design of the European powers on Turkey and the British Government's indifference towards the sentiment of the Indian

Muslims. This was fairly reflected in his Presidential address at the Delhi session of the Muslim League held on 30 December 1918.<sup>36</sup> In his Presidential address, he also upheld a tragic picture of India's poverty, backwardness and economic dislocation. He was deeply influenced by R.C. Dutt's ideas and took information and data from his books and tried to understand and analyze India's economic condition and the root cause of its backwardness and hindrance. He came to the conclusion that the prime cause of India's poverty was the British rule which was clearly reflected in his Presidential address: "I believe we are now in a position to offer a complete answer to Lord George Hamilton, on the basis of the test laid down by him. We have seen that India is now chronically famine stricken and that these famines are really due to the abject poverty of the Indian people. We have also seen that this poverty has been directly due to the fact that under British Rule sources of national wealth in India have been gradually narrowed and that unjust charges on the Indian people have drained away all available wealth in the country. India therefore has materially retrograded in material prosperity under British Rule, in consequence of the policy hitherto pursued by our British Rulers..... In dealing with the present economic condition of the country, I have not said anything new, nor have I been able to put forward any novel arguments in support of the proposition that the present system of Indian Administration has been productive of the most baneful results. It has been said of the ancient Roman Empire that it sucked the orange off its provinces dry and left only the rind to its subjects. The Economic History of India shows that a similar process has unfortunately been going on in this country under British Rule and our Rulers have not only sucked the Indian orange juiceless, but the chances are that if they are not pulled up in time, even the rind will not be left over for the Indian people".<sup>37</sup>

In his opinion, India could achieve her independence with the establishment of a full responsible government in the country. But Fazlul Huq did not agree with the view that the attainment of full-fledged independence and the establishment of a responsible government would actually ensure the domination of the Hindus over the Muslims and they would feel insecure with the transfer of power from the British to the Hindus. He thought that the Hindus were not traditional enemies of the Muslims. The people of these two communities had become fanatic and communal because of lack of education, economic backwardness and other factors. So he realized the need of proper education which would enable them to become liberal, progressive, tolerant

and sympathetic in their outlook and then they would trust each other and no longer be engaged in bloody communal and fratricidal wars. In his Presidential address at the session of the All-India Muslim League held in December 1918, Fazlul Huq said: “On the question of Hindu-Muslim relations I consider it as a gross libel on both communities to say that the Hindu is the natural enemy of the Mussalman. Those who hinge their case on the unfortunate incidents like the Arrah riots and similar disturbances at once betray the weakness of their arguments. These disturbances are due to the fanaticism and ill conceived religious fervour of these sections of the two communities who, from want of education and other causes, have not learnt to be tolerant of the feelings and sentiments of others. We must look to a liberal spread of education and to all that education brings in train, to effect that broadening of view and to inspire our people with that spirit of mutual toleration and forbearance which alone can put an effective quietus to such disturbance. No one has ever heard of a riot between educated Hindus and educated Mussalmans, sectional differences between the lower orders must always exist and riots between different sections of one and the same community are also not unknown, these are amongst the numerous ill incidental to human life, which only give opportunities for leaders of men to discharge one of the highest duties to society by bringing their erring brethren to the paths of reason. As regards the oppressions of Hindu landlords, money-lenders, lawyers and others, I do not think that the Mahomedan representatives of these sections of society are less merciful to their respective victims; the relation between a landlord and his tenant, between a money-lender and his debtor, between a lawyer and his client are merely personal and individual and are seldom affected by communal consideration. I know of instances of actual oppressions by Mahomedan landlords and money-lenders of Mahomedan tenants and debtors which can hardly be surpassed by any authentic records of oppressions, by any members of non-Moslem communities. These oppressions, again, can only be effectively minimized, for they can not be completely wiped out of society, by the spread of education amongst the masses, which will give them the necessary resisting power”.<sup>38</sup>

In his Presidential address, Fazlul Huq not only put emphasis on the spread of liberal education but also gave due importance to Hindu-Muslim relations and unity. He rightly understood that the Hindus and Muslims should go, live and work together for their own needs. He urged his Muslim brothers and sisters that they should keep

harmony and friendship with other communities otherwise they would become weak and remain very much detached from the mainstream of the national movement. He said: "We can not render any real services to our country unless we are prepared to rise above petty selfish considerations and if need be to sacrifice self at the glorious altar of duty. All the different communities must learn to outvie one another coming forward to serve the motherland, and it will be glorious day for our community if in this race for the honours of unselfish patriotism Islam can win her way to the forefront of the noble band of Indian patriots".<sup>39</sup> Arguing for self government and Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Fazlul Huq uttered: "We should strive for that complete freedom which is the goal of our ambitions". He gave notice to the vanity and pride of the British rulers and advised them to take lesson from history, saying, "Empires have risen and fallen on the soil of India, leaving no trace behind, and even so will one day be the fate of the British Indian Empire". He also condemned the repressive Indian Press Act (1917), Arms Act and Defence of India Act and accordingly the Muslim League passed resolutions demanding the repeal of these Acts, advocating the right of self determination, and appealing to the government to respect the integrity of Turkey and sentiment of the Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

The ruthless and unsympathetic attitude of the British rulers to the emotions and sentiments of the Muslims on the question of Turkey's integrity brought the India National Congress and the Muslim League in the same platform. Meanwhile, the Viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford had appointed a Committee (the Sedition or Rowlatt Committee) under the presidentship of Sydney Rowlatt to investigate the nature and extent of revolutionary activities and to suggest legislation, if necessary, to deal effectively with them. The Rowlatt Committee, which submitted its Report in April 1918, recommended special legislation, both punitive and preventive in nature. Fazlul Huq in a public meeting held at the College Square (Calcutta) on 2 February 1919, expressed his opinion that the Rowlatt Act, if given into effect to, would, suppress the fundamental rights of the Indians and pave the way for political death of the freedom fighters. So he made an appeal to all the people and political leaders to keep aside their differences and spontaneously fight against this repressive Act. As soon as the British Government introduced the two Bills on 6 February 1919, Gandhiji decided to launch a Satyagraha on 6 April 1919. The anti-Rowlatt Act agitation became severe in Punjab and the British authorities mobilized large number

of armed forces to crush the agitation. General Michael O'Dwyer ordered his troops to fire on a meeting held at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar on 13 April 1919, which massacred several hundreds of men, women and children. The Congress set up an Enquiry Committee with Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq and Tyabji. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place at a time when the Indian Muslims were boldly agitated over the pan-Islamic *Khilafat* issue which originated as a result of Turkey's participation in the First World War on behalf of Germany (as an ally) against Great Britain. The Sultan of Turkey, ruler of the vast Ottoman Empire, was the Caliph or *Khalifa* of the Islamic world. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was dismembered and the Sultan of Turkey was deprived of all real authorities. The Muslims of India strongly condemned this act of Britain and started a countrywide movement to exert pressure on Britain to change its policy towards Turkey. This movement came to be known as the Khilafat Movement which was launched in September 1919 and got its strength and momentum as soon as Gandhiji extended his support towards it. He was elected as the President of the All India Khilafat Conference met in Delhi on 24 November 1919. It resolved to boycott victory celebrations, English goods and adopt non-cooperation with the government if their demands about the *Khilafat* were not accepted. The Amritsar session of the Indian National Congress, held in December 1919, gave a great fillip to the *Khilafat* agitation and Gandhiji felt that the movement provided an opportunity to unite the Hindus and Muslims that might not come again for a hundred years.

The Khilafat Committee in its meeting at Bombay on 28 May 1920 adopted Gandhiji's resolution of Non-Cooperation Movement. The Congress, the Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee held special sessions in Calcutta in September 1920 and adopted the resolution of Non-Cooperation in their meeting. The Muslim League session under the presidentship of Dr. M.A. Ansari also accepted the objective of *Swaraj*. The Khilafat Committee meeting also adopted programmes of boycott of Courts and educational institutions. Gandhiji, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Muhammad Ali and the Ali Brothers were the prominent leaders of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements which were combined into a common struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against the British. But later Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fazlul Huq and Sir Muhammad Shafi did not agree with the Non-Cooperation Programme and Jinnah and Fazlul Huq opposed the non-cooperation resolution on boycott of Councils

and educational institutions at the Nagpur Session of the Congress (December 1920) without any success. Fazlul Huq supported the Non-Cooperation so far as the boycott of British goods and titles were concerned, but he did not agree with the idea of boycotting schools and colleges by students which would go against the interests of the Muslims because if the Muslim boys and girls would boycott educational institutions, they would not have any future and they would become more backward, poor and illiterate and they would suffer an incalculable loss. In a letter to Sarat Chandra Bose dated 22 February 1921, Fazlul Huq dissociated himself from the Congress programme of Non-Cooperation<sup>41</sup> and he along with Jinnah left the Congress.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, going against the League's stand Mr. Huq, Abul Kashem, Abdul Karim, Azizul Haque, Tazimuddin Ahmad and other prominent leaders of the BPML, decided to contest the Council election which was held in December 1920-January 1921. Fazlul Huq was elected to the Council but he was formally expelled from the League in 1921. Very soon, the *Khilafat* question also lost its relevance as the people of Turkey rose up under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Pasha in November 1922 who abolished the institution of the Caliph and there set up a secular republican government. Though there were differences of opinion and temporary alienation between the Indian National Congress and Muslim League leaders on the issue of Non-Cooperation programme, the spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding between the Hindus and Muslims was continued and strengthened in Bengal when liberal minded politician Chitta Ranjan Das entered into an agreement and understanding with Fazlul Huq and H.S. Suhrawardy. This agreement came to be known as the 'Bengal Pact' (December 1923).

After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement by the Congress Working Committee on 12 February 1922 as a result of the Chauri Chaura incident (held on 5 February 1922), the Congress was left without any political programme. The Party was also going through an ideological crisis and ultimately it suffered a split at Gaya and it was divided into two groups – the 'No-Changers (Rajaji, Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Ansari, K.R. Ayenger etc.) and the 'Pro-Changers' (C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sardar Vithalbhai Patel and the like). C. R. Das, the most respected Hindu leader of Bengal and his younger political associates, such as J.M. Sen Gupta, Subhas Chandra Bose and others strongly advocated for the entry into the Legislatures and decided to

contest the elections in November 1923 organized under the Government of India Act, 1919, and thus gained entry into the Legislature. C.R. Das also got support of Motilal Nehru in this respect. But due to the great influence of Gandhiji on the All-India Congress and Bengal Provincial Congress, C.R. Das failed to carry through his proposal at the Gaya session of the Congress, held in December 1922 although he was at that time the President of both All-India Congress and Bengal Provincial Congress. With Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das formed the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party, commonly known as the Swarajya Party on 31 December 1922 of which C.R. Das was elected as the President and Motilal Nehru as one of its Secretaries. On that day, C.R. Das informed the All-India Congress Committee of his action and tendered his resignation from the Congress Presidency. Soon the Swarajists acquired majority in the Bengal Provincial Congress and C.R. Das resumed its Presidency with Subhas Chandra Bose as its Secretary.<sup>43</sup>

C.R. Das understood the reality that the obstructionist policy of the Swarajya Party would not become successful unless he got the moral support of the Muslim members who formed a substantial group in the Bengal Legislative Council. He held discussions with Fazlul Huq (who also joined the Swarajya Party), H.S. Suhrawardy and other Muslim leaders of Bengal finally came into an agreement with them which was known as the 'Bengal Pact' - the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal politics. The Pact resolved that: ".....in order to establish the real foundation of self government in this province, it is necessary to bring about a pact between the Hindus and Mohammadans of Bengal dealing with the rights of each community when the foundation of self government is secured. Representation in the Bengal Legislative Council was to be on the population basis and through separate electorates. In local bodies, the majority community in each district was to have 60 per cent seats and the minority community 40 per cent. Fifty-five per cent of government posts were to be reserved for the Muslims, and until that percentage was reached the community might support upto 80 per cent of all recruits. The Mohammadans satisfying the least test should be preferred until the above percentage was attained; and after that according to the proportion of 55 and 45, the former to the Mohammadans, and the latter to the non-Mohammadans, subject to this that for the intervening years a small percentage of posts, say 20 per cent, should go to the Hindus. No resolution affecting the religion of any community was to be passed by

the Legislative Council without the consent of three-quarters of the elected representatives of that community. There was to be no music in procession before mosques, and cow-slaughter was not to be interfered with".<sup>44</sup> As a result of the Bengal Pact, the Muslim became hopeful that they, along with the Swarajists, would compel the British government to fulfill their demands.

In the Bengal Legislative Council election held in November 1923, the Swarajya Party got a resounding victory capturing 75% Hindu seats (36 seats out of 47) and 50% Muslim seats (21 seats out of a total of 39 seats). The Swarajists also won 45 out of 106 elective seats in the Central Legislative Assembly, besides securing the support of independents led by Jinnah and the liberals. C.R. Das became the leader of the largest single Party with 46 members, out of 139 in the Provincial Legislature<sup>45</sup> and formed the Swarajya Council Party with himself as President and J.M. Sen Gupta and Abdur Rashid Khan as its joint Secretaries. As the Swarajya Party opposed the Dyarchy system introduced by the Government of India Act 1919, C.R. Das refused the offer of Lord Lytton II, the then Governor of Bengal to form the ministry.<sup>46</sup> Fazlul Huq had different opinion on the issue of accepting ministerial office. He left the Swarajya Party with his eight (8) Muslim followers and accepted the office of the Minister of Education in January 1924. As Education Minister, he exerted pressure on the government to allocate funds to set up the Islamia College in Calcutta and also for the Madrasahs. It was because of his endeavour, a large number of primary schools were established and the total number of Muslim students rose from 880374 to 1139949 (the increase was 29.4%) at the primary level. However, their percentage declined at the secondary level between 1921-22 and 1926-27. On the other hand, their number in the Colleges and Universities increased from 2175 to 3419 between 1921-22 and 1926-27 and in professional colleges, the number of Muslim students rose from 440 to 886, for which credit must be given to the Dacca University (with its Muslim Hall) and the Calcutta Islamia College.<sup>47</sup> But Fazlul Huq and other ministers like Surendranath Mallick and A.K. Ghaznavi had faced a lot of problems in their offices because of the Swarajists opposition in the Legislature. The Ministers including Sir Abdur Rahim, a member of the Governor's Executive Council, tried their best to prove their majority in the Legislature, but did not succeed. Being defeated (68-66 votes) on the salaries demand of ministers in August, Fazlul Huq and his followers had to resign from the ministry<sup>48</sup> which was a great moral

victory of the Swarajya Party. Meanwhile, the Swarajya Party won the election of the Calcutta Corporation (held in March 1924) by capturing three-quarter of seats. Of the fifteen (15) Muslim seats, it secured ten (10). C.R. Das was elected as the Mayor of the Calcutta Corporation and H.S. Suhrawardy was nominated as the Deputy Mayor. Subhash Chandra Bose was appointed the Chief Executive Officer while Abdur Rashid Khan became the Deputy Executive Officer and Akram Khan an Alderman. On the basis of the Bengal Pact, the Muslims were given jobs in the Calcutta Corporation and 25 Muslims were appointed in that office.<sup>49</sup>

There was no unanimity about the Bengal Pact among the Hindus and the leading Hindu journals severely criticized the Bengal Pact as an 'electioneering device', 'an offer of bribe....to his Mohammedan supporters', and 'a monstrous understanding' with the Muslims and accused that 'C.R. Das has sold Bengal to the Muslim community'.<sup>50</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Malaviya of the Hindu Mahasabha organized several protest meetings in Calcutta against the Bengal Pact. Gandhiji also believed that "a Pact not possible at this stage". At the Cocanada session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1923, the Congress leaders refused to recognize any separate provincial agreement on the communal question. The non-Swarajist Muslim leaders took this opportunity to destroy the faith of pro-Swarajist Muslim leaders in the Bengal Pact. Musharraf Hussain, a leading zamindar and member of the Legislative Council, moved a resolution in Bengal Legislature in March 1924 for the immediate implementation of the provisions of the Bengal Pact. The Pro-Swarajist Muslim leaders did not like the connection between the terrorists and some Swarajists. So C.R. Das faced great difficulty to keep the Swarajists together. He showed the strength of the Party on 23 March 1925, when the demand for salaries of the newly appointed ministers, Nawab Ali Choudhuri and Manmathanath Roy Choudhuri was raised in the Legislature. The Swarajists rejected the salary demand with the support of Independent Nationalists and Fazlul Huq and his followers by a majority of only six votes.<sup>51</sup> But the death of C.R. Das on 16 June 1925 gave a deep blow to the Bengal Pact and weakened the Swarajists. It was a major setback to them and the death of C.R. Das was followed by a bitter succession war, in which J.M. Sen Gupta ousted Birendranath Sasmal in 1927 but was challenged and ousted by Subhas Chandra Bose. Subhas Chandra Bose introduced some radical programmes in the Swarajya Party which were not supported and accepted by the

Muslim Swarajists and they ultimately severed themselves from the Swarajya Party.<sup>52</sup> The Swarajists finally walked out of the Legislature in 1930 and by that time, their sun had set.

Meanwhile the other political parties in Bengal were struggling and there was total chaos, confusion, distrust and disorder in Bengal politics. The Congress suffered a split with the emergence of the Swarajya Party (which also lost its momentum after the death of C.R. Das). The Bengal Provincial Muslim League was then practically defunct and dead. But the different political parties had to reorganize themselves and prepare election strategy and mobilize the masses as the elections were scheduled to be held in 1926. As a result, on March 29, 1926 Abdur Rahim formed an anti-Hindu, pro-government party called the Bengal Muslim Party.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, twenty-eight prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal like Fazlul Huq, Mujibur Rahman, H.S. Suhrawardy, Ashrafuddin Choudhury, Abdur Rashid Khan, Akram Khan etc. met on 27 May 1926 with an intention of launching a new political party of their own, called the United Muslim Council Party.<sup>54</sup> Within a few months (in October 1926), Suhrawardy, Mujibur Rahman and others defected from Fazlul Huq's, announced the formation of a new body named the Independent Muslim Party to safeguard the Muslim rights and interests. In the elections of 1926, the Swarajists lost their hold over the Muslim voters of Bengal on account of their intra-party rivalry and won only one seat out of the 39 seats reserved for the Muslims which indicated the fact that the Muslim voters cast their votes not in favour of the Swarajist candidates and it helped a lot to the non-Swarajists to capture those seats. The prominent elected candidates were Sarat Chandra Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose, J.M. Sen Gupta, N.R. Sarkar, Nausher Ali, B.C. Roy, K.S. Roy, Nazimuddin, Hossain Suhrawardy etc.<sup>55</sup> As in the elections of 1926, not a single party was able to get an absolute majority in the Bengal Legislative Council, there was no other alternative but to form a coalition ministry. This prompted A.K. Ghuznavi, the leader of the Muslim Legislative Association to come into an understanding with Byomkesh Chakraborty, the leader of the Bengal Congress and ultimately they became successful in forming a coalition ministry. The Muslim Press and the Muslim intellectuals were not at all happy with this coalition ministry and the political leaders like Fazlul Huq severely criticized the ministry. Not only that, Huq mobilized the students and organized protest meetings demanding the resignation of the coalition ministry.<sup>56</sup> On 25 August 1927 the Swarajist leader Dr.

B.C. Roy placed a no confidence motion against Byomkesh Chakraborty and A .K. Ghuznavi for their inefficiency, political opportunism and mal- administration. Ultimately the no confidence motions against A.K. Ghuznavi (who got 62 votes and 66 votes went against him) and B. Chakraborty (who received 57 votes in his favour and 68 votes were cast against him) were passed and both the ministers were compelled to resign.<sup>57</sup> So the coalition ministry lasted for only seven months and the people who assembled outside the Town Hall, expressed their joy and happiness and celebrated the occasion.<sup>58</sup> Soon thereafter, Khan Bahadur Musharaff Hossain formed another coalition ministry in alliance with P.C. Mitter which lasted for only nine months.<sup>59</sup> In December 1929 Kumar S.S. Roy joined hands with Khan Bahadur G.M. Faruqi to form a coalition ministry but it was, too short-lived as Kumar S.S. Roy tendered his resignation within a few days.<sup>60</sup> Then the Muslim leaders understood the fact that ‘dyarchy’, in the face of the Swarajists’ opposition, was completely unworkable in Bengal.

On the other hand, the All-India Muslim League leaders met at Delhi on March 20, 1927 to draft some proposals which are known as the Delhi proposals. They proposed the introduction of joint electorates with certain conditions, such as retention of statutory Muslim majorities in Bengal and Punjab Legislatures, separation of Sind from Bombay, reforms in North-West Frontier Province, one-third Muslim representation in the Central Legislature and assignment of seats in the Provincial Legislatures to each community on the basis of population. The League faced a split on the question of joint electorates and Mian Muhammad Shafi and some other Muslim leaders remained strict to the demand of separate electorates for the Muslims. Meanwhile, in November 1927 the British Government decided to appoint a Statutory Commission (consisting of only White members) under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon to consider the question of granting further constitutional reforms for India. The Indian National Congress at its Madras session held in December 1927, decided to boycott the Simon Commission “at every stage, everywhere and in every form” as it had predicted that the Commission would not satisfy its demands. On the other hand, M.A. Jinnah, who emerged as a promising leader of the All-India Muslim League in 1924, also criticized the composition of the Commission and urged the League members to boycott the Simon Commission and give up their demand for separate electorates in the greater interest of the country. The All-India Muslim

League Conference held in December 1927, endorsed Jinnah's views. But a faction of the League members led by Mian Muhammad Shafi, refused to go with Jinnah's wishes and decided to cooperate with the Simon Commission convincing it to grant separate electorates for the Muslims.<sup>61</sup> On this question, Fazlul Huq did not support Jinnah's opinion and went in favour of Mian Muhammad Shafi simply on the ground of separate electorates for the Muslims. At that time the Bengal Muslim leaders were divided into three categories over the question of electorate. First, those who were in favour of separate electorates at all costs and they included, among others, Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury, A. K. Ghuznavi and Sir Abdur Rahim. Second, those who were the exponents of joint electorates and they included the nationalist Muslim leaders like Abdul Karim, Mujibur Rahman and Akram Khan (who controlled the BPML). The third group consisted of Fazlul Huq and others who believed that only through separate electorates adequate and effective representation could be secured for the backward Muslim community.

In Bengal, the Muslim leaders organized several meetings at district levels urging the Muslim Councilors to defeat the Government motion for the appointment of a Council Sub-Committee to assist the Simon Commission. But when the motion was put to vote in the Council on 9 July 1928, surprisingly it was found that 32 Council members including Fazlul Huq, voted in favour of the motion. Fazlul Huq had to defend his action arguing that had he not done so, the Muslim interests would have been endangered by the mischievous activities of the Hindu Mahasabha<sup>62</sup> (which was founded in 1915<sup>63</sup> at the Haridwar Kumbh Mela). By defending his action, Huq stated: ".....we stand for equal rights. We are against (Hindu) domination".<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, a complete *hartal* (strike) was observed in Bombay and other cities on 3 February 1928, the day the Simon Commission landed in Bombay and under the patronage of the Indian National Congress, it was greeted with the slogans like "Go Back Simon". When the Congress gave a call to boycott the Simon Commission, Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, gave a challenge to the Indian political leaders to frame a Constitution to which all parties would agree. The Indian leaders took the challenge and convened the All-Parties' Conference in Delhi in February 1928 in which the decision was taken to appoint a committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to draft the proposed Constitution. The Nehru

Report was published in August 1928 and recommended Dominion Status with parliamentary government for India, provincial autonomy with residuary powers at the Centre, separation of Sind, provincial status to North-West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P.), joint electorates with adult suffrage and reservation of seats in the Legislature for religious minorities for a period of ten years.<sup>65</sup> The Calcutta session of the Congress held in December 1928, approved the Nehru Report and gave an ultimatum on the British Government to accept the Nehru Report on or before 31 December 1929. Similarly, in his address at the Calcutta session of the AIML held in December 1928, Abdul Karim, the Vice President of the BPML, described the Nehru Report as ‘a good basis for final deliberation and an effective presentation of (Hindu-Muslim) .....joint demand’.<sup>66</sup> Mujibur Rahaman’s *The Musalman* and Akram Khan’s *Muhammadi* started campaigning in favour of the Report which made it clear that Muslims in East Bengal had nothing to fear from joint electorates.<sup>67</sup> So the BPML (unlike the AIML) continued pleading for joint electorates in Bengal and opposed to communal representation. But the Report was criticized by Ali Brothers, M.A. Jinnah and Fazlul Huq. Mr. Huq totally rejected the Report as his amendment motion for accepting separate electorates was turned down by the Council. On the question of female franchise, he was in favour of keeping the names of the females on the voters’ list,<sup>68</sup> no matter whether they cast their votes or not at that time and realized the fact that the Muslim women being more backward than the Hindu women, would have to engage themselves in observing ‘Purdah’ and “would be reluctant to go to the polling booths”.<sup>69</sup> In the meantime, Jinnah outmanoeuvred by the Shafi group, demanded separate electorates and reservation of one-third of the seats in the Central Legislature. But the All-Parties Convention held in Calcutta in December 1928, refused to acknowledge the communal award which ultimately aggravated the communal tension. Jinnah, ‘the sole spokesman’ of the Muslim League, therefore convened a Muslim League Council meeting in January 1929 and formulated a list of demands which came to be known as the ‘Fourteen Points’. They included: (i) separate electorates for the Muslims; (ii) federation; (iii) provincial autonomy with residuary powers in the provinces; (iv) adequate representation in services; (v) full religious liberty etc.<sup>70</sup> The main aim of Jinnah’s ‘Fourteen Points’ was to make a profitable bargain with the Congress or to reject the Nehru Report. Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, was not satisfied with the Report as it demanded Dominion Status for India instead of complete independence.<sup>71</sup> As the Government

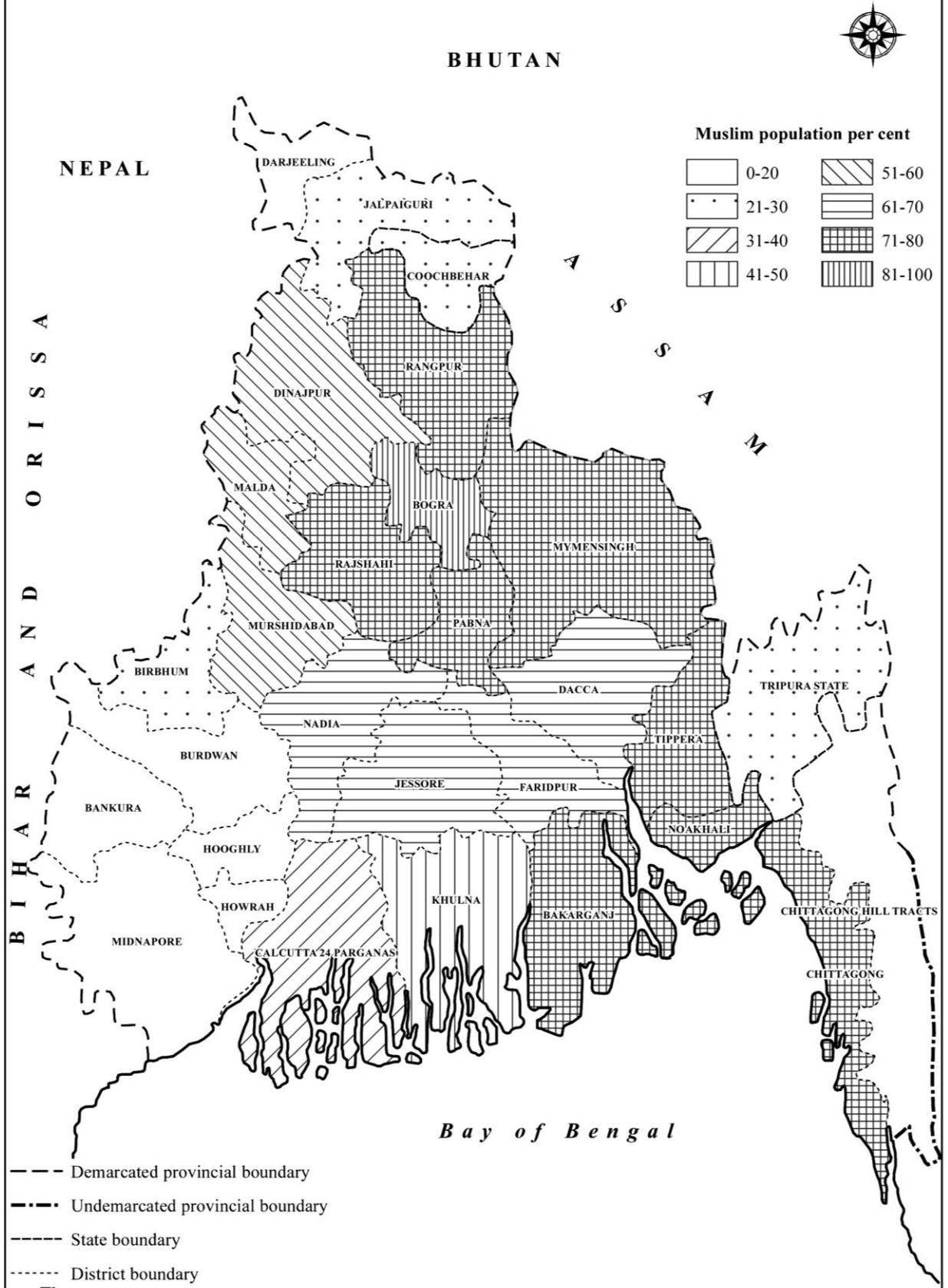
did not accept the Nehru Report, the Congress passed the *Poorna Swaraj* (complete independence) Resolution at its Lahore session (31 December 1929).

On the other hand, as a result of the collapse of the two successive coalition ministries in Bengal (there were six ministries in between 1927 and 1936 and each one was headed by a Muslim Premier), the Governor guided by constitutional obligation and morality, dissolved the Bengal Legislative Council in May 1929<sup>72</sup> and conducted fresh elections in the first week of June 1929. But the election results were not at all satisfactory to any political party (only the Congress increased its strength to some extent). Finally when the results came to light, it was found that out of the total strength of 39 seats reserved for the Muslims, the Bengal Muslim League and the Independent Muslim Party of Fazlul Huq each secured 11 seats,<sup>73</sup> while the remaining 17 seats were captured by the Muslim Legislative Association of A.K. Ghuznavi.<sup>74</sup> As the Simon Commission's recommendations were rejected by all political parties, the British Government therefore proposed for a Round Table Conference of Indian leaders to discuss and settle the constitutional problems. The First Round Table Conference was held in London from 12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931. It was attended by 57 delegates from British India, 16 from Native States and 15 representatives of the British Government. Sir Muhammad Shafi, the Aga Khan, M.A. Jinnah, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Fazlul Huq and others represented the Muslims of India. In the First Round Table Conference, Fazlul Huq gave a firing speech arguing for separate electorates and provincial autonomy.<sup>75</sup> As there was no settlement and agreement over the communal issues, the Conference came to nothing. So the Second Round Table Conference was held in London in September 1931. Although the INC did not participate in the First Round Table Conference, this time it was attended by Gandhiji as the sole representative of the Congress. This Round Table Conference also came into a deadlock on the question of communal representation. As a result on 16 August 1932, the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald announced his 'Communal Award' fixing the number of seats for each community in the Legislature on the basis of separate electorates. According to this Award, the Muslim, Sikh and European voters would elect their candidates by voting in separate communal electorates. In Bengal, the Muslims were given 48.4% of the seats (as against their population strength of nearly 55%) and Hindus were allotted 39.2% of the seats (as against they constituted 43% of the population) and Europeans were given 10%.<sup>76</sup> The Award increased Muslim representation from 39 seats (in an

Assembly of 139 members under the Act of 1919) to 121 seats (including 2 seats for Muslim women and 2 for Universities) in an Assembly of 250 members under the Government of India Act, 1935. As a result of the Communal Award, the composition of the Bengal Legislature was as follows: “Of the 250 seats in the Bengal Legislature 78, of which 30 were reserved for Scheduled Castes, were general with total Hindu population, including Scheduled Castes, 21, 570,407 (Scheduled Castes being 9,124,925); 117 Muslim with total population 27,497,624; 3 Anglo-Indian with total population 27,573; 11 European with total population 20,895; and 2 Indian Christian with total population 1,29,134. Besides, 39 seats were given to representatives of special interests: 5 women (2 general, 2 Muslims, 1 Anglo-Indian), 2 University (Calcutta and Dacca), 5 landholders, 8 Labour and 19 Commerce and Industry (14 European, 4 General and 1 Muslim Commerce)”.<sup>77</sup> In the editorial of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, it was written: “One must frankly confess, it has not fallen to our lot for a long time to come across such a preposterous document as reached our hand last evening..... in Bengal out of 250 members of the Legislature only 80 were allotted for Hindus”.<sup>78</sup> Even Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore presiding over a protest meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall said: “ The Hindus have been singled out for reduction in their representation even below their normal population strength by weightage being cast against them”.<sup>79</sup> Gandhiji also strongly opposed to the idea of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes (officially described as Scheduled Castes) and declared that he would resist it with his life. As a result the ‘Poona Pact’ was signed between Gandhiji and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes League on 25 September 1932, by which a common electorate of all the Hindus was agreed upon, subject to two conditions: firstly, 148 seats in different Provincial Legislatures were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes in place of 71 as provided in the Communal Award; secondly, 18 per cent of the seats in the Central Legislature were to be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

The Communal Award evoked mixed reactions from different corners including the Muslim politicians of Bengal. Although the Muslim community was given preferential treatment by this Award, there was a group of Muslim politicians who wanted more than the Award actually offered. On 17 August 1932, immediately after the announcement of this Award, Fazlul Huq completely denounced it in this

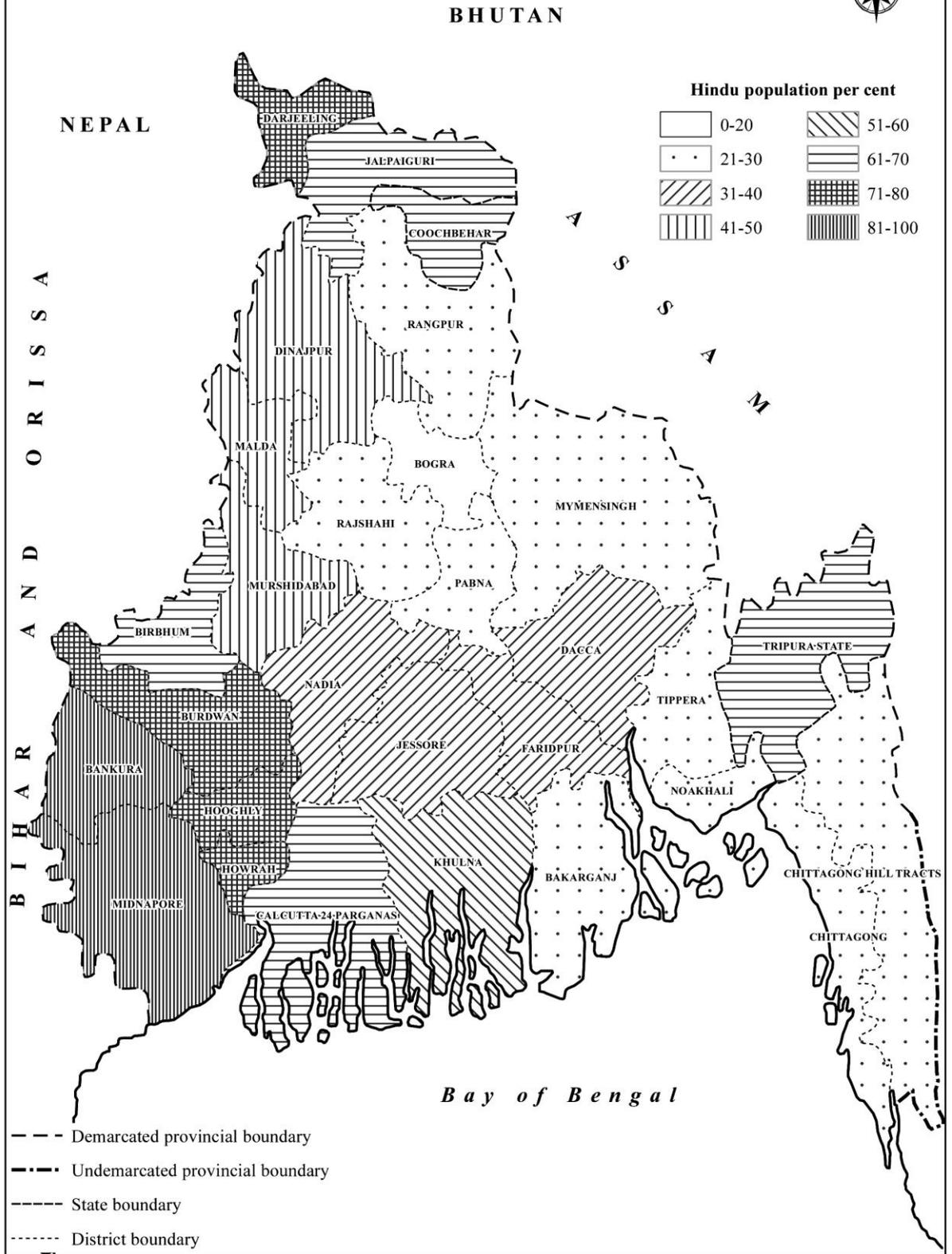
## Distribution of Muslim Population by District (Number of Muslims per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)



Map 2: Distribution of Muslim Population by District (Number of Muslims per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)

fashion: “The much- advertised communal award....will....take the breath of the country away....it has not fallen to our lot for a long time to come across such a preposterous document....the worst suspicions of the nationalists have been confirmed by what has transpired....if the new constitution of India embodies this communal settlement....(Macdonald) may rest assured that all that is good and true in the country will refuse to touch it even with a pair of tongs”.<sup>80</sup> But surprisingly the very next day (i.e. on 18 August 1932), Mr. Huq completely changed his earlier stand and he along with H.S. Suhrawardy, Abul Kasem, Azizul Huque, Tamizuddin Khan and Musharraf Hossain made a joint- petition which confessed: “We have read the Award with mingled feelings. While we appreciate that it is a distinct advance on the present situation it is disappointing to note that the unanswerable claims of the Musalmans of Bengal to majority representation in the provincial legislature have not been recognised. With the Musalmans in the position of a permanent minority in six provinces and of practically political insignificance in the Central Legislature, it was only just and fair that the claims of the Musulmans [*sic*] of Bengal to a majority representation...should not have been ignored. We however appreciate the difficulties of the situation”.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, A.K. Ghuznavi, a very wealthy zamindar from Tangail who hoped that the Award would give the Muslims a clear statutory majority, was totally disappointed with the Award and compared it with the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911. According to him, the Muslims of Bengal were ‘bitterly reminded of their betrayal in December 1911 by His Majesty’s Government’.<sup>82</sup> Although the Muslim community of Bengal failed to obtain a statutory majority in the Assembly under the Communal Award, their position was much better than the Lucknow Pact (1916). However, the BPML in a statement urged the Hindus and Muslims to ‘combat reactionary forces’ and put forward its assessment: “.....The Communal Award is thoroughly unsatisfactory and unacceptable and detrimental to the best interests of India and particularly to the Muslims of Bengal, as it is calculated to give a death-blow to the democratic aspirations of the Indians and also put the Muslims of Bengal in a statutory minority”.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, there was a group of Muslim politicians who believed that ‘separate electorates and reservation of seats were no longer necessary to safeguard Muslim representation in the Assembly.

## Distribution of Hindu Population by District (Number of Hindus per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)



Map 3: Distribution of Hindu Population by District (Number of Hindus per hundred of the total population, Census of 1931)

On the contrary, they were confident that Muslims could stand their ground in open contest and that they would, through joint electorates, eventually be able to translate the growing prosperity and numerical preponderance of their community into provincial power...they pressed, instead, for universal manhood suffrage, which would give members of their community many more votes'.<sup>84</sup> The Hindu leaders on the other hand, strongly reacted against this Award as they apprehended the prospect of 'Muslim rule' in Bengal. The Caste Hindu members of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha launched vigorous campaign against the Communal Award as 'it had threatened their stronghold on Bengal politics by raising Muslim seats in the Assembly'.<sup>85</sup> The Hindu Mahasabha leaders, who were in the forefront of the protest movement, were N.N. Sircar, B.C. Chatterjee, Bhai Paramananda, Pandit Malaviya, Chintamani, Moonjee and the like. Not only that in 1934, the disgruntled leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha formed the Congress Nationalist Party to fight against the 'Muslim Raj'.<sup>86</sup> Also the Congress Press in Bengal joined the anti-Award campaign. Even the nationalist Muslims inside and outside the BPML, began to believe in the fact that the Hindus went against the Award not because it retained the system of separate electorates but because it allotted to the Muslim community a number of more seats than earlier. So all these created complexities and vitiated Bengal politics as religious separatism and communal tension rose up in different parts of the province and the parting between the two communities (Hindus and Muslims) was seemingly complete. This led Fazlul Huq to declare in October 1933: 'I am prepared to be hanged if I can not demonstrate to the satisfaction of any judge that the Hindus of Bengal constitute the very personification of communalism based on intense selfishness'.<sup>87</sup> While the Hindus strongly denounced the Award, the majority of the Muslims gradually felt the urgency to come forward in its defence. Thus the Communal Award of 1932 became a bone of contention between the Hindu and Muslim politicians and deeply rooted separatism and communalism in Bengal politics. Dejected Fazlul Huq then turned his attention to local politics and decided to render his services to the Calcutta Corporation to which he was elected Mayor (with the Congress support) in April 1935. But in late December 1935, a controversy arose over an issue of earmarking 25 per cent of the jobs of the Calcutta Corporation for the Muslims. The Hindu members of the Calcutta Corporation strongly raised protests against this proposal and refused to accept it. This resulted in the resignation of all the 15 Muslim Councilors, including Fazlul Huq, the Mayor.<sup>88</sup>

Mr. Huq was then completely dejected for political polarization, in terms of division between the Hindus and Muslims and thereafter he seriously decided to take up wholeheartedly the cause of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), to mobilize them, to build up a common political platform for raising their demands and ameliorating their living conditions and finally to capitalize their support for his political gains. He took this challenge and was quite successful in his mission which ultimately opened a new chapter in Bengal politics.

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## 2

### **Fazlul Huq, Peasant Politics and the Formation of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP)**

In all parts of India, the greater portion of the total population is, and always has been, dependent on the land for its existence and subsistence. During the colonial rule, this was absolutely true in the case of Bengal as a whole and particularly so of its eastern districts. In this connection, it should be mentioned here that the Muslim masses even greater number than the Hindus, were more concentrated in agriculture which is clearly been reflected in the Bengal Census of 1881: “.....while the husbandmen among the Hindus are only 49.28 per cent, the ratio among the Muslims is 62.81 per cent”.<sup>1</sup> The picture was almost the same throughout the nineteenth century and continued till the first half of the twentieth century. In the different districts of Bengal, while the majority of the peasants were Muslims, the Hindus were mainly the landowning classes. The Census of 1901 shows that the Muslims formed a larger portion of agricultural population and they were mostly tenants rather than landlords. In every 10,000 Muslims, no less than 7,316 were cultivators, but in the case of the Hindus, the figure was 5,555 amongst the same number (i.e. 10,000) of Hindu population. But the proportion of landholders was only 170 in 10,000 in the case of Muslims as against 217 in the same number of Hindus.<sup>2</sup> In the district of Bogra which was situated in the Rajshahi Division, the Muslims formed more than 80% of the total population. But even in this heavily Muslim populated district, “the Zamindars are mostly Hindus .....”<sup>3</sup> and there were only five (5) Muslim zamindars of importance. To cite another instance, in the district of Rajshahi where the Muslims formed about 78% of the population in the year 1911, there were only two (2) recognized and influential Muslim zamindars.<sup>4</sup> But there were big Hindu zamindars such as those of Nator, Dighapatia, Putia, Tahirpur and Dubalhati. Similarly, in Mymensingh, the largest district in the province of Bengal, the Muslims constituted three – quarters ( $\frac{3}{4}$ <sup>th</sup>) of the population. Although the general masses of this district were Muslims, the landowners here again mainly consisted of Hindu Brahmin and

Kayastha families. It is true that there were some big Muslim zamindars, such as Pannis of Karatia, A.K. Ghuznavi, Musharraf Hossain, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri and Sayyid Ahmad Hossain Chaudhury and there were also some Muslim taluqdars and rent-free proprietors. But in general, the Muslim zamindars of Bengal were not very prosperous. Their 'obscurity and poverty' were largely due to their failure in the payment of their land revenue in proper date and time and the sub-division of their estates among male and female heirs according to the Muslim Law of Succession. Also on several occasions, the Muslim zamindars brought allegations that they were cheated by their Hindu employees.

The different land revenue reforms introduced by the Nawabs of Bengal especially the *Malzamini* system introduced by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan (1717-1727) in 1722 heavily affected the poor peasants (as the rate of the land revenue was very excessive) and 'allowed and even encouraged the agglomeration of large stretches of territory under big zamindars dignified with the title of Raja' such as those of Bishnupur and Chandradwip which were governed by ancient Hindu princes and they ruled as autonomous chieftains under the Mughal rule.<sup>5</sup> Some other Rajas such as those of Rajshahi, Burdwan and Nadia were 'revenue farmers and officials of the Mughal government who turned their revenue collecting jurisdictions into immense hereditary *zamindaris* under the active patronage of the *nizamat*'.<sup>6</sup> Not only that, during the rule of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, the Hindus were appointed in higher offices in the revenue and accounts departments whereas their counterparts, the Muslims were not appointed in those departments and the majority of them were the lower ryots. When the British established their control over Bengal after the battle of Plassey (1757) and particularly after the grant of *Diwani* (1765), there were 15 big zamindaris which paid 60 per cent of the land revenue of the province and constituted nearly half of its parganas.<sup>7</sup> These zamindars or taluqdars mostly belonged to high-ranking literati of Brahmins (priests), Kayasthas (scribes), Vaidyas (physicians), Saiyads (aristocratic Muslims) and Maulvis (learned Muslims). Besides these zamindars and taluqdars, a class of rich peasants called *jotedars* (originally the term meant simply 'a raiyat or subject who held his *jote* or cultivable plot on a direct lease from the *zamindar*, i.e., a subject who was not an under-raiyat') came into existence in the then Bengali society who constituted a dominant class of village landholders and belonged to respectable agricultural castes like the Sadgops, Aguris and Kaivartas

in West Bengal and Sheikh Muslims in East Bengal and their holdings might run from 50 to 6000 acres of land.<sup>8</sup> In the six eastern districts of Bengal, i.e., Bakarganj, Faridpore, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna, there were also a large number of Namasudra<sup>8a</sup> cultivators who enjoyed, as Prof. Sugata Bose has shown, the ‘chasi or peasant status’, holding *jotes* or cultivable lands, owning the implements of agriculture and having solid titles to their homesteads.<sup>8b</sup> These *jotedars*, through the credit mechanism, enjoyed the command over the village labour force and the sharecroppers, having ‘plough but lacking seed and food, cultivated for a half share with grain loans advanced by the *jotedars*’. On the other hand, the agricultural labourers, having no land and means of production except their working capacity, ‘pledged their labour to the *jotedars* for a few rupees of loan’ and subsequently became ‘bonded labourers in the course of their perpetual borrowings’.<sup>9</sup> For example, during his survey of the district of Dinajpur, Francis Buchanan Hamilton found that only 6 per cent of the cultivating population enjoyed 36.5 per cent of the land leased by the *rai-yats* from the *zamindars*, whereas, 52.1 per cent of the agricultural workforce did not possess any land at all and worked either as sharecroppers or as agricultural labourers under the rich peasant- landlords.<sup>9a</sup> The picture was almost the same throughout Bengal and several land revenue experiments, reforms and land revenue settlements were introduced by the British administrators after 1765 in this part of the country (particularly the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis which came into effect on 22 March 1793 and gave the zamindars ‘full proprietary rights over the estates’), which ultimately stimulated sub-infeudation and posed serious threat to the rural population of Bengal (particularly East Bengal) and adversely affected both the Muslim zamindars (most of whom failed to pay the fixed amount of land revenue to the Government according to the ‘Sunset Law’) and also most of the Muslim peasants who were overburdened with excessive, unfixed amount of land revenue and *abwabs* payable to the zamindars) and had been suffering from inhuman torture, exploitation, expulsion and seizure of lands by the zamindars (who were mostly Hindus) under Regulations VII and V of 1799 and 1812. Taking advantage of the Permanent Settlement, the neo-rich urban Bengali Hindus purchased large tracts of land and became mostly ‘absentee’ zamindars. As a result, during the eighteenth century, nine-tenths of Bengali zamindars were Hindu. Not only that, in Bengal, the banking was also monopolized by the Hindus.<sup>10</sup> At that time the division between the oppressor and the oppressed coincided mainly with the religious division of the

population of Bengal. It has been rightly pointed out by the Subaltern scholar Prof. Partha Chatterjee that the ‘Muslim rent-receivers, where they did exist, were considered part of peasant community where as Hindu zamindars and talukdars were not’.<sup>11</sup> In the case of East Bengal as most of the zamindars were upper caste Hindus and most of the peasants and tenants were Muslims and lower caste Hindus (Namasudras or the depressed class), the relations between the landlords and the tenants easily took a communal or caste complexion.<sup>11a</sup> Thus East Bengal became a fertile ground for breeding separatism and communalism which was clearly observed and reflected during the time of the first partition of Bengal (1905).

The first partition of Bengal which came into effect on 16 October 1905, gave a serious blow to Bengal’s agrarian society where economic and political interests were mixed up with religious issues. The political motive of Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy (January 1899 – November 1905), was the separation of Calcutta, the centre of middle – class Hindu influence from the Muslim-majority districts in East Bengal and ‘to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule’. The most influential leaders of the *Swadeshi* movement and the anti-partition agitation were the Hindu zamindars who feared that after partition, the zamindaris might be abolished in the Muslim-proja dominated eastern Bengal. It can be said that “the petty zamindar class of high caste Hindus became the spear-head of the *Swadeshi* movement in East Bengal was the clue to the ultimate failure of the movement, for their interests set them apart from the mass of Muslim cultivators in general and the leading body of large Muslim *jotedars* in particular. The social peculiarity of East Bengal which fed the growing political conflict in the province was that the *zamindars* and taluqdars in the area were mostly high caste Hindus, while the large *jotedars* under them were almost invariably Muslims of peasant stock”.<sup>12</sup> The loyalty of the Muslims to the British rule was taken for granted and the British Government at that time, formulated a deliberate policy of rallying the Muslims against the Hindus. Viceroy Lord Minto II (November 1906 – November 1910), also took a pro-Muslim policy and it was he who rewarded a Knighthood to Nawab Salimullah of Dacca in 1906 for his pro-British attitude and his constant support towards the different policies and programmes of the British Government. Not only that, Lord Minto II further vitiated the political environment by recognizing the Muslim claim to separate electorates for the Legislatures which was ultimately fulfilled by the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.

These political developments though incurred great repercussion in the Bengali society and sowed the seeds of separatism between the Hindus and the Muslims, these generated hopes and aspirations amongst the Muslim community and gave indulgence to think out their own destiny and own plan of action. Mutual dependence, mutual trust, mutual respect and above all, communal harmony was gradually becoming extinct. The *Mihir-O-Sudhakar*, a paper published from Calcutta and owned by a Muslim zamindar, Nawab Ali Chaudhury, accused the Hindu zamindars for their oppression against the Muslim tenants in between 1905 and 1908 and as a result, the paper gained popularity and its circulation increased a lot. In November 1906 a Muhammadan Vigilance Committee was formed in Calcutta in order to prevent ill-treatment of the Muslim tenants by the Hindu zamindars. The first political organization of the Muslims which came into being after the partition of Bengal was called Mohammedan Provincial Union with the objective of “uniting the Mohammedans of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam into a compact body and representing to the government the views and aspirations of Muslims in social and political matters” and Nawab Salimullah of Dacca was elected as its Patron.<sup>13</sup> This ultimately paved the way for the formation of All-India Muslim League in December 1906 and Fazlul Huq was one of its founder-members. Meanwhile, in the district of Mymensingh, the followers of Nawab Salimullah raised two issues: i) demand for reduction of rent and ii) refusal to cultivate land owned by the Hindu zamindars. A communal pamphlet entitled *Nawab Saheber Bichar* (Judgement of the Nawab of Dacca) was widely circulated and the pamphlets (in Bengali) like *Swajati Andolan* and *Lal Istahar* made an appeal to the Muslims to boycott the Hindus totally. All these resulted in serious attacks on the Hindus in between 1906 and 1907 at various parts of Mymensingh and there were many incidents of murder, rape, forcible conversion, loot and destruction of private property. All these were not confined within the boundary of Mymensingh but similar type of activities also occurred in the Tippera, Rajshahi and Pabna in 1907.<sup>14</sup> At that time, the Muslim *jotedar* class in East Bengal attempted to capture union boards and local boards from the high caste Hindus who monopolized these local self-governing bodies<sup>15</sup> and with them joined the urban Muslim service and professional class which later made a determined effort for capturing political power in Bengal as a whole.<sup>16</sup> The Muslim peasants too had their grievances against the Hindu moneylenders as they were compelled to borrow from the mahajans at an exorbitant

rate of interest. At first the peasant's land was mortgaged who in turn, failed to repay the loan (with interest), found no other alternative but to give up his hopes to get back his own land and subsequently found himself transformed into a landless rural labour. Renowned scholar Prof. B.B. Chaudhuri described this trend as a stark 'process of depeasantization' in Bengal and Bihar in between 1885 and 1947. During this period Prof. Chaudhuri revealed in his research that the occupancy tenants were reduced to share croppers and agricultural labourers as a result of rural debt.<sup>17</sup> Rural indebtedness was originated in the then Bengali society as a result of the extension of the cultivation of jute instead of paddy, the subsistence crop. As the price fell below its production cost, the ryots did not enjoy the profit from the sale of jute and they were bound to take loan or debt from the moneylenders who were mainly the Sahas and Marwaris. The rate of interest sometimes rose up to 20% per month. Added to this, these moneylenders often forced the ryots to sell their crops only to them at a much cheaper rate than the existing price in the market. These Mahajans also imposed *Isvara-Vritti*, i.e. contributions for the maintenance of Hindu deities. There was another allegation against these Sahas and Mahajans that they never cleared the accounts of the poor peasants whose debt, as a result, ran from year's end to year's end and finally ended in the seizure, mortgage or sale of the debtors' lands. So these Hindu Mahajans especially the Sahas became the special targets of attack (mainly by the Muslims) between 1906 and 1907.

Under these circumstances, a psychological change was taken place among the Muslim peasants of Bengal which had rightly been pointed out by Prof. Sufia Ahmed, a Bangladeshi scholar of repute. According to her: "the Muslim peasant had begun to think of his problems as peculiar to his own community".<sup>18</sup> She further continued: "This followed from the growth of communal feeling and political agitation, which made the Muslim ryot to see a universal economic pressure in communal terms. It was a Hindu zamindar who was rack-renting him, pushing Swadeshi down his throat, interfering with his sacrifice of cattle at Id, and it was a Hindu Mahajan who was foreclosing on his cattle and implements when he could not pay the exorbitant interest upon his loans. The Mymensingh riots of 1906, unlike the Pabna ryots of 1873, had this new political or communal flavour".<sup>19</sup> This 'political or communal flavour' was originated in Bengal during 1905-'12 due to the policy pursued by the British Government and also because of the loyalist attitude of a large section of the Muslim

aristocracy, the hunger for higher and lucrative official posts in the Government service among the new English educated Muslim middle class and above all, the propaganda of the maulvies whose fanaticism was stimulated and utilized by the urban Muslim leaders. But on the other hand, it was totally overshadowed and overlooked that the Hindu tenants were also rack-rented by the Hindu zamindars and exploited by the Hindu Mahajans and that the Muslim tenants were ransacked by the Muslim zamindars as well. At that time agrarian grievances and land relations were judged primarily in the context of communal differences. The Muslim ryot considered that he was a victim of exploitation simply because he was a Muslim by religion. This separatist outlook and ideology was deliberately pampered, nurtured and popularized by the Muslim politicians and maulvies and it gained a solid base among the Muslim masses of Bengal particularly during the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

The then political parties of Bengal came into the field to capitalize this situation and win over the hearts of the poor peasants by adopting a sympathetic attitude towards them. But in that process on the one hand, the poor peasants were often being used as pawns in the struggle between the Government and the Nationalist Congressites and on the other hand, between the zamindars (mostly Hindus) and the Muslim middle class. The British Government endeavoured to take full advantage of the conflict between the Hindu landed aristocracy and the Muslim middle class. Simultaneously the Government understood the fact that by strengthening, supporting and patronizing the peasantry and the Muslim middle class of Bengal, it would be easier for them to cripple the backbone of the Hindu nationalists who were presumed as the staunch enemies and critics of the Government. The Muslim middle class (mainly composed of the rich-peasants and petty landlords of Bengal), came forward to back the peasantry (mostly Muslims) not only because they whole heartedly wanted to redress their grievances and ameliorate their living conditions, but to a great extent, to 'use' them against their arch rivals, i.e. the Hindu zamindars of Bengal. Being 'sympathetic' towards the Bengal peasantry, the British Government on the other hand, proposed in 1914 to amend certain provisions of the Tenancy Act of 1885 in favour of the peasantry.<sup>20</sup> Not only that the Government also showed its interest in the formation of Peasant Associations (for the cause of the peasantry) and encouraged the Muslim politicians to come forward in that direction.<sup>21</sup> It resulted in the formation

of the Calcutta Agricultural Association in 1917 by A.K. Fazlul Huq who successfully mobilized the peasantry of Bengal under its banner.<sup>22</sup> He travelled many places particularly in East Bengal with an intention to awaken the rural masses against the oppression of the zamindars. Likely, the politicians who were mostly the *jotedars* or rich peasants of Bengal began to show their interest in the affairs of the peasantry although the *jotedars* belonged to the privileged section of the Bengali society and had their own class interest or the interest of their own. They formed their own organizations and the Bengal Jotedars' and Raiyats' Association (which was formed in Calcutta in 1920) was one of them.<sup>23</sup>

In order to increase the number of voters in Bengal from 9000 to 1500000, the bulk of whom would be cultivators who could pay a minimum of one rupee annually in cess, the British Government in 1919 proposed for the further extension of the suffrage.<sup>24</sup> The Hindu *bhadralok* (gentleman) class did not support this move and favour the cultivators and as rentier and landowning class, their interest was not the same (rather opposite) as that of the cultivators. So the Hindu *bhadralok* (gentleman) politicians including Kumar S.S. Roy and Surendra Nath Banerjea insisted on a restricted franchise based on property-qualification. At the same time, they became very anxious that further relaxations of the property-qualifications would enable and enfranchise the poor Muslim and Namasudra peasants of Bengal and apprehended that their votes would go against them. The Muslim politicians including Nawab Ali were demanding more reserved seats for the Muslims (50% of the total seats) in the Bengal Legislative Council<sup>25</sup> which ultimately frightened the Hindu *bhadralok* politicians. The Government of India Act, 1919 reserved 39 seats (6 in urban and 33 in rural areas mainly in the Dacca, Chittagong, Rajshahi divisions of East Bengal) for the Muslims out of 113 elected members<sup>26</sup> and increased the number of voters from 9000 to 10,21,418.<sup>27</sup> This Act enfranchised only a very small section of the peasantry who were quite well-to-do. In the elections (held in October 1920), 132 Muslim candidates contested for 39 seats reserved for them. From the rural constituencies of East and North Bengal, 19 Muslim candidates won in the elections out of whom 10 Muslim elected candidates declared themselves as the representatives of the peasantry.<sup>28</sup> Out of the 56 elected Hindu seats in the new Council of 1920, 43 were filled up by the members of the Indian Association and British Indian Association, two pro-zamindar organizations of India.<sup>29</sup> Most of these members were highly

educated, famous lawyers, big zamindars and to a great extent, pro-British. So after the elections of 1920, the peasantry (the majority of whom being deprived of the voting rights), could not have their proper representation in the Legislative Council. Meanwhile, the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movements (1919-1922) were launched and these two movements brought a great upsurge among the Bengal peasantry and they whole-heartedly supported the movements for their anti-British attitude, programme and propaganda. At that time, the peasantry began to consider the British as their sole-enemy instead of the indigenous zamindars and as a result, their first and foremost enemy went into the backstage.

But within a few years, this situation abruptly changed with the abandonment of the 'mass civil disobedience' in February 1922 and the peasant's main target of attack was once again shifted towards the zamindars of Bengal. When the Congress (which was considered as the Party of the 'haves') leadership (dominated by the zamindars and capitalists who did not favour any radical change in the land system by abolishing landlordism) was divided on the question of protecting the tenants from the oppression of the indigenous zamindars, the Muslim middle-class politicians of Bengal engaged themselves in mobilizing the peasantry and rousing consciousness among them. On 12 July 1920 from 6 Turn Street, Calcutta, a liberal, secular and mass-oriented newspaper named *Nabajug* (one-page evening daily and priced one paisa) was published by A.K. Fazlul Huq (its owner-cum-director) along with Kazi Nazrul Islam and Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad (who were the editors) and through it, raised the voice of protest against British imperialism. According to Muzaffar Ahmad (who was a founder member of the Communist Party of India), "Mr. Fazlul Huq was then known as a leftist leader".<sup>30</sup> Also he mentioned that Fazlul Huq used to encourage them to publish 'inflammatory' articles about the masses, especially the workers<sup>31</sup> and likely they published a leaflet, 'Respond to the call of the day' which highly enraged the Government. Out of vengeance, the Government ultimately decided to forfeit the security deposit of this paper.<sup>32</sup> Indomitable Fazlul Huq took up the land question as an important issue in order to consolidate his position among the rural masses, particularly among the Muslim peasants and began to organize several peasant meetings and rallies at different parts of Bengal which were also attended by the Namasudra peasants. One such rally was organized by Huq at Agoiljhara in Barisal in 1921.<sup>33</sup> Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi, Padmaraj Jain and other prominent

women Congress leaders tried to resist the Hindu peasants from joining the rally at Agoiljhara<sup>34</sup> which was ultimately attended by a large number of Muslim and Namasudra peasants who raised their voice against the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the zamindars and moneylenders.<sup>35</sup>

Fazlul Huq visited many places of East Bengal to come into close contact with the rural masses and to awaken them against the oppression of the zamindars and for that purpose many Praja Samities were set up at different corners. During the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement, local peasant associations or Krishak Samities were established at Nadia, Tippera, Noakhali and some other districts of Bengal.<sup>36</sup> Most of these samities and praja conferences, in those days, were convened and dominated by the middle-class Muslim leaders and attended by mostly Muslim peasants and these conferences were the outcome of the challenging attitude of the middle class people towards the influential landed gentry of Bengal.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, some secular and non-communal peasant organizations were also formed during the Khilafat Movement viz. the Raiyat Sabha of Barrister J.N. Roy of Calcutta (formed in 1920) and the Krishak Samity of Chuadanga formed in 1921 by an Italian missionary.<sup>38</sup> Side by side, peasant parties were also formed like the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan was set up in 1923 with Marxian ideology by Singaravelu and S.A. Dange. Although there were so many praja samities or Krishak Sabhas, the peasants mostly supported the Muslim praja or tenant organizations. Simply because the peasants were mostly Muslims and their common enemy was the Hindu zamindar and moneylender. At the same time, as they were mainly guided by communal considerations, the non-communal, secular peasant organizations did not have much impact on them. The Muslim '*jotedar* politicians' of Bengal came forward to capitalize this opportunity and began to highlight the grievances of the peasantry in the Legislative Council which was at that time, sharply divided between the 'Pro-Zamindar' and 'Pro-Raiyat' groups. The former was mostly consisted of the Hindu Congressites and the latter was controlled, led and dominated by the Muslim *jotedar* and middle-class members. Often Khan Bhadur Wasimuddin Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar Pahlowan, Syed Erfan Ali, Shah Abdur Rauf and sometimes A.K. Fazlul Huq and Sir Abdur Rahim used to speak in favour of the peasantry in the Legislative Council. For example, Syed Erfan Ali, a *jotedar* of Nadia, spoke against the British zamindars of that district who were unwilling to grant occupancy right to the *Utbandi* tenants. It

should be mentioned here that under the *Utbandi* system, lands were settled with the tenants for a short period during which they enjoyed no rights over those lands and the landlords, on the other hand, also did not grant any receipt to their tenants for the rent they had collected from them.<sup>39</sup> In that case, most of the Congress members of the Council were in favour of the zamindars and supported them which was not unnatural. But surprisingly, Fazlul Huq who later on floated the Praja Party in 1929, abstained from voting on the issue of granting occupancy right to the *Utbandi* tenants and Sir Abdur Rahim, the first President of the Praja Party, voted against the tenants.<sup>40</sup> Both of them did not support the *Utbandi* tenants largely because the zamindars involved here were not their political rivals, i.e. the Hindus, but belonged to the British community. It should be mentioned here that the Muslim Council-Members who were mostly rich peasants and urban middle-class people, desperately tried to curtail the power of the zamindars and often raised their voice against the zamindars. For example, in 1922 Abdul Jabbar Pahlowan, a big *jotedar* of Mymensingh and Khan Bhadur Wasimuddin Ahmed proposed to impose income tax on the income of the zamindars.<sup>41</sup> But as these Muslim Council members belonged to the *jotedar* or petty-landlord class<sup>42</sup> and were only interested in protecting their own class interest or personal interest, vehemently opposed the proposal to grant occupancy right to the *bargadars* or sharecroppers.

Here in this connection, it should be mentioned that the Bengal Tenancy Act (BT Act) of 1885 made an earnest attempt to control the greed, rapacity and cruelty of the zamindars and tenure holders and to provide protection to the tenants by giving them rights regarding security of tenure, fairness of rent, legal process for ejection and the like. The BT Act of 1885 did not determine the position of the sharecroppers but it stated that if someone cultivated the land of another person on the payment of rent either in cash or in kind or both, the former would be regarded as the tenant of the latter and thus the Act failed to satisfy a large number of *bhagchasi*, *bargadar* or the sharecroppers. In order to protect the sharecroppers and fulfill their demands, the Bengal Legislative Council appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Kerr to draft an amendment to the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 which brought a great stir among the pro-raiyat politicians of Bengal. But the pro-zamindar Congress and other organizations were very much keen to protect the interest of the landed gentry and landed aristocracy. The Committee laid down the principle that ‘produce-

paying cultivators who supplied their own seeds and cattle and themselves chose their crops, should be treated as tenants'<sup>43</sup> and the Government, through the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill (1923), proposed to grant occupancy right to the *bargadars* or sharecroppers who had neither legal nor customary rights on the land. But this proposal caused a tremendous uproar and discontentment among the zamindars, *jotedars* and tenure holders who thought that the Government was trying to give tenancy rights to those who had never been tenants and as a result, had no right to get that status. To prevent any untoward effect on their own estates and apprehending revolutionary changes, the zamindars evicted the *bargadars* from their holdings on a massive scale, so much so that vast proportion of agricultural land remained uncultivated for some time. The landowners not only ejected the *bargadars* but at the same time they organized strong 'protest meetings' against these provisions. One such meeting was held at Salap in Pabna district where a representation was made by Babu Debi Das Sanyal who argued that these provisions were 'sure to bring about the annihilation of the middle-class as also of the widows and orphans who earn their livelihood with great difficulties by the income of bhag-chas and cause a terrible social revolution as a logical corollary'. He further reminded the 'benign Government' which had always been 'putting down Bolshevism' that it was now 'but helping a social revolution like one witnessed in Russia by the spread of Bolshevik ideas consequent on the enactment of the said two clauses'.<sup>44</sup> The leading political parties like the Indian National Congress, the Swarajya Party and also the Muslim League strongly opposed to the proposal of granting of occupancy right to the *bargadars* because most of the leaders of these political organizations came from the petty-landlord families of Bengal. As the Bengal Provincial Congress was not in favour of bringing any radical change in the existing land structure by abolishing the zamindari system, its leaders failed to lead the peasants and win their confidence by rising above their vested class- interests. The Swarajists, on the other hand, were not only sympathetic towards the zamindars and highlighted their 'progressive role' in the national struggle, but also a considerable number of Bengal zamindars (belonged to the Swarajist fold), were elected to the Bengal Legislative Council with the Swarajist support. So they tried to satisfy both the zamindars and the tenants within the framework of the zamindari system. Prof. Sumit Sarkar wrote : "The Swarajists here bitterly opposed any proposal to give tenancy status to *bargadars*, and showed no sympathy at all for a number of Namasudra and Muslim *bargadar* movements in the

mid-1920s in districts like Mymensingh, Dacca, Pabna, Khulna and Nadia”.<sup>45</sup> Protests and opposition to this particular provision regarding the sharecroppers became so formidable that the Bengal Government at first issued a communiqué denying all its intentions of giving *bargadars* any tenancy right which they did not already possess, and then dropped all favourable provisions regarding *bargadars* from the Tenancy Bill introduced in the Bengal Council in 1925.<sup>46</sup> The Bill was then sent to the Select Committee whose members, ‘still not reassured, wrote into it a definite statement declaring that cultivators who paid in produce, whether a fixed proportion or a fixed quantity, were not tenants’.<sup>47</sup> In any case, the Government was not willing to proceed further with the matter and ultimately decided to withdraw the Bill.<sup>48</sup>

All these revealed the fact that there were three different groups of politicians in Bengal : the first group representing the zamindar – dominated Congress of Bengal who were against of making any major amendment (in favour of the *bargadars*) of the Tenancy Act and the Congress was categorized by the Praja leaders as nothing but a ‘Hindu institution’.<sup>49</sup> The second group consisted of the *jotedars* and the rising Muslim middle class people of Bengal who had conflicting class-interest with both the zamindars and the peasantry. They mainly belonged to the Muslim League and later the Praja Party, formed in 1929. The third group was composed of the non-communal middle and lower middle class people of Bengal who had liberal views and Marxian ideals and some of them belonged to the Congress and some showed their fidelity towards the Communist organizations. The liberal and Progressive Congressites later formed the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress in November 1925 in Calcutta. The prominent leaders of this Party were Qazi Nazrul Islam, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Kutbuddin Ahmad and Shamsuddin Husayan who supported the demand to give sole-ownership of the land to its tillers and eradicate class differences in the existing society. This Party was also known as the Labour-Tenant Swaraj Party and the *Langal* (a Bengali Weekly, Nazrul Islam was its chief director and Manibhusan Mukherjee was its editor) was the mouth-piece of this organization. Its first issue came to light on 25 December 1925<sup>50</sup> where Nazrul Islam’s two very famous poems *Samyabadi* (Communist) and *Krishaker Gan* (The Song of the Peasant) were published.

Before the foundation of the Labour Swaraj Party, the progressive and liberal politicians of Bengal organized a Praja Conference at Bogra on 7-8 February 1925 and took the resolution to form a permanent Praja Samity or Tenant Association. In presence of the leading Muslim politicians like Sir Abdur Rahim, Maulana Akram Khan, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Rajibuddin Tarafdar and the like, the All-Bengal Praja Samity was formed at Bogra.<sup>51</sup> The Samity started to mobilize the tenants and demonstrated the strength of the Praja movement in 1926. The Saha mahajans of Manikganj sub-division of the Dacca district, took possession of the mortgaged properties of the peasants who failed to pay their rent and other dues. The Praja leaders, such as Abdul Latif Biswas and others, as a mark of protest convened a Praja Conference at Ghiurhat in the Dacca district.<sup>52</sup> Fazlul Huq was asked to preside over this Conference which was attended by thousands of peasants who came from Dacca, Tangail, Pabna and the neighbouring areas. Here Mr. Huq gave a firing speech: “If I get opportunity, I shall by the Grace of Allah establish your rights, so that without zamindar’s permission you can construct buildings and tanks, alienate your land and arrange marriages of your children and are relieved of all illegal dues. I shall stop the pernicious usury and get release of your mortgaged land”. He advised the peasants not to cultivate the land of the Saha mahajans so long their lands were not released and the peasants quickly responded to his call.<sup>53</sup> This movement (lasted for about a year), finally compelled the Saha mahajans to return the seized properties to the original peasants.<sup>54</sup> This success highly inspired and motivated Fazlul Huq to address the Faridpore Convention (1927) demanding the protection of the raiyats’ interests.

After Bogra, the next Conference of the All Bengal Praja Samity or Nikhil Bangiya Proja Sammelan was held at Krishnanagar in Nadia on 6-7 February 1926 which was attended by Abdul Halim, Kutbuddin Ahmad, Shamsuddin Husayan, Samsuddin Ahmad, Soumendra Nath Tagore, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Dr. Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta, Atul Chandra Gupta, Nazrul Islam and the famous Communist leader of the then India “Comrade” Muzaffar Ahmad and Philip Spart, a well-known Communist leader of Britain. This Conference was presided over by Dr. N.C. Sen Gupta and there Nazrul Islam composed *Sramiker Gan* (The Song of the Labour) and sang it as the inaugural song of this Conference.<sup>55</sup> It supported the amendment of the Tenancy Act in favour of the peasants and the participants of the Conference decided to form the Peasants’ and Workers’ Party of Bengal.<sup>56</sup> This Party was later renamed

as the Workers' and Peasants' Party (W.P.P.) of Bengal in 1927 and in 1928 it came to be known as the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party<sup>57</sup> which intended to popularize and promote Marxian ideals among the peasants and working class people of India. This organization was solely guided by the decisions and instructions of the Communist Party of India and to the British Government, it was nothing but the Communist Party in disguise.<sup>58</sup> The Party decided to form separate local peasant organizations and as a result, many pro-communist peasant associations or Krishak Samities were set up at Tippera, Noakhali, Nadia and some other districts of Bengal. The Krishak Samities were directly under the control of the Communists and some of these Samities also used the red flag with hammer and sickle as their symbol. These Samities demanded drastic land and social reforms and side by side, launched anti-British campaign.<sup>59</sup> So the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Party under the leadership of Muzaffar Ahmad was a turning point in the history of the peasant movement in Bengal and the Party ushered new hopes and aspirations amongst the workers and peasants of Bengal. The WPP urged the peasants not to pay the taxes and rent and mobilized them to go on general strike. In Bengal, the Party popularized its aims, objectives and ideals through two Bengali weekly journals, viz. the *Langal* (the Plough) and the *Ganabani* (the Voice of the People). The WPP opposed the Congress, the Muslim League, the British Government and all other forces which came in the way of a peasant movement.<sup>60</sup> The Party strongly believed that the chief exploiting forces in Indian soil were the imperialist British administrators and along with them, the Indian capitalists and landlords – which were its targets of attack. So the Party was in favour of complete independence of the country from the yoke of British imperialism and wanted the appropriation of land without compensation.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand the landholders neither liked the word *Langal* as a title of a paper, nor did they welcome the Workers' and Peasants' Party and the Party gradually incurred the disappointment of both the British Government and local landlords. But in spite of its anti-zamindar attitude and pro-raiyat policies and programmes, the Workers' and Peasants' Party did not receive the full support of the Bengal peasantry who at that point of time, was more inclined to the communal and pro-British politicians rather than the Communists. Meanwhile, the peasants were so engrossed in their own problems that they failed to realize the danger of British imperialism and above all, they were not very much interested to relate their problems with that of the workers. They were also surprised to see the differences of opinion between the Communists

and the Swarajists on different issues and got frustrated and bewildered. Added to this, the views expressed in the *Ganabani* (edited by Muzaffar Ahmad), sharply differed from the views of the *Forward* (English daily) and the *Atmashakti* (Bengali weekly), the two important organs of the Swarajya Party. For example, Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad in his writings tried to analyze communal tension in Bengal and he came to the conclusion that the economic reasons were solely responsible for it. But in an article entitled “The Situation in East Bengal”, the *Forward* criticized the *Ganabani* for ascribing the communal problem “almost wholly to economic causes”<sup>62</sup> and challenged and disapproved Muzaffar Ahmad’s stand on the land and communal question. On this issue Nazrul Islam supported Muzaffar Ahmad and he wrote a long letter to the editor of the *Atmashakti* in which he strongly criticized the role of these two important organs of the Swarajya Party in understanding the burning issues relating to the Bengal peasantry. Indomitable Muzaffar Ahmad went ahead and clearly explained the impact of the land system on the Bengali life and raised the demand for the abolition of landlordism.<sup>63</sup>

At that time, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) also came forward to adopt a programme of village uplift by solving the land problem. At the Gauhati (presently Guwahati) session of the Indian National Congress (1926), the communists moved a resolution demanding complete independence for India along with a clause urging the abolition of the zamindari system which created a great sensation in the Congress circles. J.M. Sen Gupta, a veteran Congress leader, remarked: “Zamindars contribute money to the Congress, still they are to be destroyed!”<sup>64</sup> It was the attitude of most of the Congress members and as a result, the resolution was easily defeated by overwhelming votes. But at Gauhati, the Congress members took the decisions that the Congress shall: (e) take steps to improve the condition of agricultural tenants by introducing and supporting measures to secure fixity of tenure and other advantages with a view to ensure a speedy amelioration of the condition of the tenants; and (f) generally, protect the rights of labour, agricultural and industrial, and adjust on an equitable basis the relations between the landlords and tenants, capitalists and workmen.<sup>65</sup> The Muslim League on the other hand, though represented the landed gentry of North India, had to support the peasants of Bengal because it was easier for the Party to exploit their communal sentiment and apply the communal card against their Hindu zamindars. Again it should be kept in mind that

most of the workers and supporters of the Muslim League in Bengal belonged to the peasantry who had genuine grievances against the zamindars (mostly Hindus). In 1925, for the first time in history of the Muslim League, its leaders including Sir Abdur Rahim, spoke in favour of the peasantry at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Party at Aligarh. In his Presidential address, Sir Abdur Rahim severely criticized the Swarajya Party for its opposition to the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill of 1923 which intended to give some relief to the raiyats of Bengal. He also expressed the fact that the Select Committee concerning the Bill was composed of the landlords who would not do any good to the “dumb millions of cultivators” of whom the majority was composed of the Muslims.<sup>66</sup> His main argument was that the Bill should be supported as it was being opposed both by the pro- zamindar Swarajya Party and the Bengal Congress. Sir Abdur Rahim also targeted the *bhadralok* (gentleman) class as they supported the zamindars of Bengal.<sup>67</sup> Henceforth, the Muslim League tried its best to attract the Bengal peasantry towards the Party by rousing deep-rooted hatred, distrust and disbelief against the zamindar dominated and pro- zamindar organizations of Bengal. As a result in 1928, Azizul Haque, a leader of Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML), opposed the idea of granting further rights to the zamindars by the introduction of pre-emption and *Salami* which were extremely detrimental to the interest of the peasants. Furthermore, he urged the then Viceroy to withhold his consent to the Tenancy Bill until those harmful provisions were dropped from the Bill.<sup>68</sup> Though the League members criticized the zamindars of Bengal, they never spoke against the zamindari system and raised their voice for its abolition simply because many of the League members had landed interests in Bengal and elsewhere. It was because of this reason the Muslim League leaders abstained from organizing a peasant front to launch a peasant movement within Bengal or outside Bengal. The League members who spotted the agrarian problem and raised the agrarian questions in favour of the peasantry, were not very attacking, aggressive and possessive and had a soft and mild voice in their course of action. They represented the urban professional class and the *jotedars* and had conflicting class interests with that of the zamindars. Later on, this group came forward to form the Praja Party to mobilize the peasantry against the zamindars of Bengal. So it was no unusual that the League leaders belonging to the landed gentry, were not at all interested to associate themselves with the demands and interests of the peasantry. So in 1931, at the twenty-second session of the All- India Muslim League in Delhi, they took a

resolution disapproving the idea of launching the “no-rent” movement by the peasantry which according to them, would eventually upset the principles of private property and bring disorder, chaos and anarchy in the country <sup>69</sup> and actually pose a threat to their own vested interest. But at the same time, there were some pro-tenant and anti-zamindar leaders in the Muslim League also, including Hussain Imam who felt that the zamindars were “Blood Suckers” and he came forward to support the “no-rent” programme of the tenants.<sup>70</sup> Although the Muslim League as a Party, did not organize any peasant front and put emphasis on an agrarian movement for the abolition of the Zamindari system, yet its Bengal leaders had to adopt a pro-tenant attitude at least for the sake of politics because they were dependent on their support (to ensure their vote banks) in their own constituencies to get themselves elected in the Bengal Legislative Council.

The House was divided on communal lines in 1928 when a Bill (which was drafted by the Special Committee) to amend the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1925 was brought before the Bengal Legislative Council in response to the demands raised by the under-raiyats (of various categories like bargadars, karshadars, kurfa and dhankarari raiyats). The Special Committee accepted the position that “sharecroppers who paid a fixed proportion of the produce (the usual terms under which a *bhagchasi*, *bargadar* or *adhiar* cultivated the land) were not tenants. However, those who paid a fixed quantity of produce as rent were, according to the Bill, to be regarded as tenants”.<sup>71</sup> The Bill also said that those “*bargadars* or *adhiars* who had been admitted in a document by their landlords, or had been held by a civil court, to be tenants would also be similarly recognized as raiyats or underraiyats”.<sup>72</sup> However, the Bill prohibited the commutation of produce rents to money rent in order to prevent the *bargadars* from claiming the status of tenant.<sup>73</sup> The Bill also proposed that “under raiyats who had homesteads on their lands and had held them for twenty years, or who had been admitted in a document by their landlord to have a permanent and heritable right, would not be evicted from their holdings”.<sup>74</sup> Some of the provisions of the Bill were not at all liked by the landowners. When the Bill was introduced in the Council by Sri Provasch Chandra Mitter in August 1928, the East Bengal landholders under the presidentship of Nawab Habibullah of Dacca protested against the Bill on the ground that it took away the rights of the zamindars.<sup>75</sup> A few days later a Landholders’ Conference was presided over by Maharaja Pradyot Coomar Tagore and he sent a

strong memorandum to the Viceroy, the Governor of Bengal, the Secretary of State for India, the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and the Opposition Leader Lloyd George, strongly protesting against a couple of pro-tenant provisions in the Bill and expressing its deep concern at the proposal to give the tenants ‘the right of transferring their holdings’: “... the present occasion is most unsuitable to disturb the peace of a most influential class ... any such serious change of a settled policy is likely to be followed at no distant period by general discontent among a most loyal class of His Majesty’s subjects which is undesirable for good government in India and is likely to hasten an agrarian revolution. Agitation regarding this is being worked up by certain self-seeking agitators for political purposes as none of these agitators is an actual cultivator”.<sup>76</sup>

The class division and the communal cleavage came out sharply during the debate on the Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1928. All the Hindu members of the Bengal Council (including the Swarajists and non-Swarajists numbering 42 and 49 members respectively), voted in favour of the landlords, while the Muslim members (21 and 22 members respectively) with solitary exceptions, ‘showed a keen desire to further the interests of the ryots’ and voted in favour of the peasants and cultivators, “eighty percent”<sup>77</sup> of whom were Muslims. The Muslim Council members including Azizur Rahaman, Abul Kasem, Syed Abdur Rauf, Asimuddin Ahmad, Tamizuddin Khan, Syed Nausher Ali, Azizul Haque, Fazlul Huq, Nurul Huq Chaudhuri, Ekramul Huq, Syed Mohammad Atiqullah, Emaduddin Ahmed and the like, always supported the *bargadars* who were also partially supported by Khwaja Nazimuddin, Abdur Rahim, Muhammad Solaiman, Jitendralal Banerjee, K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, Rebati Mohan Sarkar etc. The Swarajists who went against the *bargadars*, were Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, Pramathanath Banerjea, Promotho Nath Banerjee, A.C. Banerjee, Sarat C. Basu, Subhas Chandra Bose, J.M. Das Gupta, Akhil Chandra Datta, Sris Chandra Nandy, Hem Chandra Naskar, Kumud Shankar Ray, Bidhan Chandra Roy, Kiran Sankar Roy, Sachindra Narayan Sanyal, Naliniranjan Sarkar, Ananda Mohan Poddar, Satish Chandra Sen and so on. The Swarajists were partially supported by Sashi Kanta Acharya Chaudhuri, Badridas Goenka, Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy, S.C. Bose, Abdus Sattar, Bhupendra Narayan Sinha etc. Occasionally some Muslim zamindars like A.K. Ghuznavi, Musharraf Hossain, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri etc. stood in favour of the Swarajists who also got the support of 37 members belonging to the

Official and European bloc.<sup>78</sup> It also exposed the role of the Congress at the time of passing the Amendment Bill (1928) in which the entire Congress bloc voted in favour of the said Bill to the detriment of the tenants' interests. This pro-zamindar attitude of the Congress completed the process of alienation of the ryots from the Party and since then the Congress never got back the support of the Bengal ryots<sup>79</sup> who were mostly Muslims. According to researcher Shaukat Ara Hussain, "The Muslim peasantry of Bengal became totally disillusioned with the Congress and at the same time they were aware of the ineffectiveness of the Muslim League to protect their interest....."<sup>80</sup> Not only that, the Bengali newspapers and journals like *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Mohammadi*, *Ganabani* etc. also expressed their opinion that some of the provisions of the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1928, were completely anti-tenant. Going ahead, the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* published an editorial criticizing the role of the Swarajists for joining their hands with the Government in passing the detrimental (for the tenants) B.T. Act of 1928.<sup>81</sup> The *Ganabani* of 23 August 1928 stated that Nalini Ranjan Sarker, the mouthpiece of the Swarajya Party, who had posed himself as a champion of the raiyats, commented that he would not tolerate any injustice to the zamindars.<sup>82</sup> Sir Abdur Rahim, a Muslim member, sharply criticized the Swarajists and stated: 'The majority of this Council in combination with the Swarajists, the most powerful party in the House, have already finished with the *bargadars*, the cultivators of land.....' J.M. Sen Gupta of the Congress (Swarajists) defended the Party stand and said: 'They would see that during their fight for freedom, and until this fight for freedom was over, the interests of the tenants and the interests of the zamindars should be so adjusted – so reasonably adjusted – as not to create a civil war in the country before freedom was gained'. Similarly Dr. B.C. Roy who later became the Chief Minister of West Bengal in 1948, defended the Congress Party's stand against the *bargadars* on the ground that "as a party it did not feel that it was time for drastic measures in favour of tenants; there should first be some adjustment outside the Council between zamindars and tenants".<sup>83</sup> As a result, the Muslims of Bengal lost their faith in the leadership of the Indian National Congress and most of the Muslim leaders realized the fact that the "Congress could now claim to represent merely the rich, the landed gentry and educated minority. It had still not earned the right to lead the workers and peasants".<sup>84</sup> Hence, Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan and many others left the Congress. Observing this situation, J.M. Sen Gupta remarked: ".....from today the Congress not only lost the trust of the Muslim Bengal but also

of the peasants and farmers as well”.<sup>85</sup> Abul Mansur Ahmed identified this episode ‘as the straw on the camel’s back’ and stated that “neither in terms of the Muslim interest nor of the Praja interest was it possible to rely on the Congress”.<sup>86</sup>

By that time, a constitutional crisis developed in Bengal because of the resignations of two successive ministries (1926-28), one led by Sir Abdur Rahim and the other by A.K. Ghuznavi – Chakrabarty coalition, sarcastically called by the Muslims as ‘Gaja-Chakra’ Ministry. In order to solve this political deadlock, the Governor of Bengal dissolved the legislature on 22 April 1929 and issued an official notification for general elections which ultimately were taken place in the first week of June 1929. The results of the elections showed that out of the total strength of 39 seats allotted to the Muslims, the Bengal Muslim League and the Independent Muslim Party of Fazlul Huq each secured 11 seats while the remaining 17 seats were captured by A.K. Ghuznavi’s Muslim Legislative Association. As no political party obtained an absolute majority in the Bengal Council, the Governor ran the government with some handpicked ministers. So the people, particularly the Muslims, were in search of a viable alternative. By 1929, the relationship between the Hindu-*bhadralok* class and the Muslim middle-class was not easy and both these classes of people could not trust and rely on each other. The former not only opposed the enfranchisement of the peasantry and the Amendment of the Tenancy Act (1928) in favour of the *bargadars*, but also they opposed to the Rural Primary Education Bill of 1929 which was first placed by Nawab Musharraf Hossain and later by the then Education Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin (on 11 August) and the Bill was finally sent to the Select Committee. The Zamindar Minister, Kumar Shib Shekhareswar Roy resigned from the ministry as a protest against the Rural Primary Education Bill of 1929 and he along with fifty other *bhadralok* members of the Council walked-out.<sup>87</sup> Although initially Fazlul Huq was not in favour of the Bill (as it would hamper the Hindu-Muslim relations and impose a huge taxation of 1 crore and 26 lakhs of rupees for getting primary education), later he changed his mind and voted in its favour and finally the Bill was passed on 26 August 1930.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, the Muslim politicians put forward the demand for the abolition of the ‘urban weightage’ and the extension of the peasant representation in the Bengal Legislative Council. But the pro-zamindar Hindu members of the Council again raised their objections against these demands. Added to this, in 1929, the Congress hurt the Muslim sentiment by striking another blow by annulling the Bengal Pact of

C.R. Das at Krishnanagar (in Nadia district) under the presidentship of Subhas Chandra Bose. Henceforth, the Muslim Congressites of Bengal, lost their faith over the Congress and could not depend on the Party which neither protected the Muslim interests nor the interests of the Bengal peasantry.<sup>89</sup> As a result, many disillusioned Muslim Congressites (like Tamizuddin Khan, Maulana Akram Khan and others), began to leave the Congress and sought to find out a favourable political organization and a feasible alternative to the Congress.

The total disillusion of the Muslims of Bengal towards the pro-zamindar Congress and Swarajya Party along with the inactive and 'lethargic' approach of the Muslim League to protect the interests of the peasantry, paved the way for the foundation of the Bengal Praja Samity or the Tenant Association in July 1929. Twenty-seven elected Muslim members of the Bengal Legislative Council representing the Muslim Legislators' Association, the Muslim League and the Bengal Muslim Party, met at a conference on 1 July 1929 with a view to remove their mutual differences and to organize and mobilize the Muslims of Bengal particularly the peasantry, under one umbrella for the protection of their interests. The Conference was held at the residence of the Convener, Sir Abdur Rahim at 92, Ripon Street, Calcutta and was presided over by Nawab Habibullah, the son of the late Nawab Salimullah of Dacca. Twenty-seven Muslim Councilors including Nawab Mosharaf Hossain, Altaf Ali, Abdul Karim, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Rezaur Rahaman, Sir Abdur Rahim, H.S. Suhrawardy, Azizul Huque and Fazlul Huq, attended the Conference.<sup>90</sup> In this Conference H.S. Suhrawardy, A.H. Ghuznavi, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Nawab Musharraf Hossain and so on proposed for the formation of a 'purely' Muslim organization called the United Muslim Party (UMP) or the Bengal Muslim Council Association (BMCA) to safeguard the interests of the Muslims.<sup>91</sup> But Fazlul Huq favoured a non-communal organization and he nursed and nurtured in his mind the resolution of the Faridpore Convention (1927) which resolved to protect the interests of all the raiyats. So he advocated for the formation of a United Council Party (UCP), better known as the Council Praja Party of Bengal or Bengal Praja (Tenants') Party to ameliorate the conditions of the peasants.<sup>92</sup> Out of the twenty-seven Muslim Councilors participating at the Conference, eighteen Councilors supported Fazlul Huq and signed the pledge to honour his decision of the formation of the Council Praja Party.<sup>93</sup> As a result, the Council Praja Party (CPP) was formally inaugurated on 4

July 1929 at the home of Abdur Raheem, a Delhi born, Urdu-speaking Calcutta merchant and MLC, with Fazlul Huq as its leader and Abdur Raheem himself as the deputy leader. Maulavi Tamizuddin Khan, MLC from Faridpur, was elected its Secretary and Khan Bahadur Mohammad Azizul Haque of Nadia (later Knighted), and Shah Abdul Hamid, MLC from Mymensingh East, were its Joint Secretaries.<sup>94</sup> Soon the Council Praja Party was further broadened through a meeting in Calcutta accommodating different categories of Muslim political leaders and it was renamed as Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (NBPS) or All Bengal Tenants' Association which within a short span, became very much popular for its slogan – 'Land to the tillers'. Sir Abdur Rahim and Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan were elected as its President and Secretary respectively. The Vice-Presidents of this organization were: Maulvi Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Karim, Fazlul Huq, Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun Suhrawardy and Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin. Shamsuddin Ahmad and Tamizuddin Ahmad Khan were elected as its Joint-Secretaries.<sup>95</sup> Among its office-bearers, while Sir Abdur Rahim, Akram Khan, Mujibur Rahman, Dr. Abdullah Al-Mamun Suhrawardy and Abdul Momin belonged to West Bengal, Fazlul Huq, Abdul Karim, Shamsuddin Ahmad and Tamizuddin represented East Bengal. Thus the organization had representatives from both halves of the province.

The Nikhil Banga Praja Samity was formed to safeguard the rights and interests of the Prajas (tenants) and the peasants irrespective of their caste, creed and religion<sup>96</sup> and for that purpose, the Samity would stand for concerted action in the Council.<sup>97</sup> The Praja Samity gave priority to Bengali interests as against those of the Centre. It tried to organize the masses on the basis of an economic programme and wanted to bring an agrarian revolution through parliamentary and constitutional methods.<sup>98</sup> Unlike the BPML and the BPCC, the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity was absolutely a regionally based organization without having any parent body outside. Although some of its office-bearers, namely Sir Abdur Rahim and Abdullah Suhrawardy were earlier very much vocal on communal lines, the Samity declared a non-communal programme. But it was predominantly a Muslim body (consisting of *jotedars* and urban professionals) and both its leadership and following were exclusively Muslim.<sup>99</sup> Even some Muslim landlords were very active on this platform. For example, Nawabzada Syed Hasan Ali of Dhonbari area of Mymensingh district not only joined the Samity but also extended significant financial support to the

organization. Not only that, with his financial assistance and sizable contribution, the Samity was able to purchase a press to launch its weekly organ the *Chashi* (Cultivator).<sup>100</sup> It can be precisely said that the Praja Samity directed its activities against the zamindars of Bengal and incidentally as the majority of the zamindars belonged to the Hindu community, the Samity became quite popular among all sections of the Muslim community. Most of the Praja leaders including Fazlul Huq, used the peasantry as a weapon to fight against the Hindu *bhadralok* and the non-Bengal leaders of the Muslim League and tried to capitalize the support of the peasants to get themselves elected in the Council. According to scholar Bazlur Rahman Khan, “The Proja Party may, perhaps, be thus looked upon as a political platform for a section of the Bengali Muslim middle class from which to attack both the caste Hindu and the traditional Muslim leadership and so to tilt the political balance in the province in their favour. The elite leadership of the party hardly had the aim of creating an egalitarian society in their mind. A social revolution was the last thing they would have wanted: it was not pursuing a new social utopia but intent upon reaping immediate political benefits of their stance by dislodging the incumbent leadership. Let us, however, not underestimate the difficult task of the Proja Party leaders had undertaken : they now needed to conciliate various classes of peasants, tenure holders and even to offer the Muslim landowners, a suitable alternative if they were successful to woo them”.<sup>101</sup>

The Great Depression of 1929-30, accelerated the rift between the two socially ‘opposite’ groups of Bengal – the zamindars and moneylenders on the one hand, and the peasants and tenants on the other. Due to recession in the prices both of the foodgrains and commercial crops, most of the peasants failed to pay their rents to the zamindars and interests (on debt) and other dues to the moneylenders and both the zamindars and moneylenders pressurized and heavily tortured the peasants and tenants for the realization of their dues. In order to get rid of the oppression, the tenants and peasants began to transfer their lands by sale or mortgage desperately in the districts of Noakhali, Tippera, Bogra, Mymensingh, Dacca and Pabna.<sup>102</sup> Surprisingly, the central leadership of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity remained a silent spectator of the situation. It neither stopped the peasants and tenants from the distress sale of lands nor did it launch a ‘no rent campaign’. As a result, the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity almost remained an ineffective body till 1932.<sup>103</sup> By that time, the

Samity asked the different district samities to seek its affiliation and “accordingly, all except the Tippera Krishak Samity merged with the provincial body”<sup>104</sup> and from then onwards the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity gradually turned into an active and purposeful organization. The Krishak Samities of Noakhali, Tippera, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Pabna and Bogra were very strong on the basis of their organization and supporters and the samities of Bakarganj, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Murshidabad also became active. Interestingly, all the above mentioned places were “Muslim majority districts- where Zamindars (landlords) and Mahajans (moneylenders), often the same persons, were predominantly Hindu”.<sup>105</sup> As the Congress and the Muslim League had allegedly represented the interests of the rentier classes, they paid very little attention to safeguard the economic interests of the peasants which finally paved the way for Fazlul Huq to capitalize the situation and address the problems of the peasants and tenants.

In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed which introduced provincial autonomy in British India and included separate electoral clause. The Act added a new dimension to the Muslim politics in Bengal as the seeds of communal electorate sown in it, slowly paved the way for the partition of India. In the same year, the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity had to face a set-back when its President Sir Abdur Rahim resigned from the Samity after being elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. He also contested for the Speaker’s post as a candidate of the Independent Party and defeated Mr. Sherwani, the Congress candidate. But at the time of his resignation, Sir Abdur Rahim recommended the name of Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen for the chairmanship of the Samity. The younger group of the Samity protested against this recommendation at a meeting held at the residence of Moulvi Abdul Karim and demanded fresh election of the President.<sup>106</sup> This led to a power struggle within the Samity and both Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin of Burdwan and Fazlul Huq were aspiring for the presidentship of the Samity and each of them had their own followers. Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan and other workers from West Bengal and urban leaders like H.S. Suhrawardy and Hasan Ispahani were supporting Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen, whereas, the workers from East Bengal began to support Fazlul Huq. Young activists like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Shamsuddin Ahmed and Syed Nausher Ali extended their support towards Fazlul Huq.<sup>107</sup> This power struggle and polarization within the Praja Samity led to bitter relationship not only between Maulana

Muhammad Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq but also between the delegates and workers from East Bengal and West Bengal. This factionalism and groupism within the organization had a tremendous negative impact on the activities of the Samity and severely affected its growth in mobilizing the masses and organizing a stronger mass movement. Ultimately in a Conference held in Mymensingh in 1935 (which was presided over by Fazlul Huq), Mr. Huq was elected the President of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity at the intervention of Abul Mansur Ahmed, the General Secretary of the Reception Committee of that Conference (though Fazlul Huq's candidature was objected on technical ground by Akram Khan but to no effect).<sup>108</sup> In spite of this schism, the Praja Samity proved its political strength in the elections of the Local Boards and District Boards in the year same (i.e.1935). The Praja Samity candidates were elected in large numbers in all the districts of Bengal. For example, in the district of Mymensingh, they captured 64 out of 72 seats in the Local Boards. The winning candidates of the Local Boards elected the members of the District Board. Thus the District Boards also came under the control of the Praja Samity.<sup>109</sup> According to Abul Mansur Ahmed, "the Praja Samity was, in 1935, a multi-party affair. It included in its ranks Congressmen and anti-Congress Muslim leaders, loyalists and nationalists. Muslims of all parties, leaders and workers were present within its fold".<sup>109a</sup>

The next conference of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity was held at Dacca on 11-12 July 1936<sup>110</sup> and Fazlul Huq was once again elected the President of the Samity due to abstention of Abdul Momen and Akram Khan.<sup>111</sup> In that Conference, there was a strong demand from a section of the members of the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (known as the 'Left wing' of the organization), to include within the Samity the real *krishaks* (peasants) and also to re-name the organization as Krishak Praja Party (Peasants' and Tenants' Party). Against this backdrop Fazlul Huq, along with his large East Bengal supporters, left the parent body and established the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and accordingly a resolution was taken in this Conference. The demands were accepted primarily to avoid further division in the organization at a time when the general elections were knocking at the door.<sup>112</sup> Another important reason of changing the nomenclature and inclusion of the *krishaks* (peasants) was to broaden the party "with the hope of wooing the rural votes whose number had then greatly increased".<sup>113</sup> The Nawab of Dhanbari and his son, Ansar Ali, installed a printing

press called the *Milan Prem* to launch the mouthpiece of the Krishak Praja Party, known as the *Chasi* (the Cultivator).<sup>114</sup> Sir Abdur Rahim became the President of the KPP; Fazlul Huq, Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Karim, Abdullah Suhrawardy and Abdul Momen were its Vice-Presidents; Mohammad Akram Khan became its Secretary and the Party's Joint Secretaries were Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan.<sup>115</sup> The KPP was almost entirely an East Bengal Party<sup>116</sup> and its leadership was mainly in the hands of the educated Muslim middle class who came from different walks of life. Significantly some of them, however, were neither *krishaks* (peasants) nor *prajas* (tenants). But few of them were *jotedars* who joined the KPP at the instance of Fazlul Huq.<sup>117</sup> Whatever may be the composition of the leadership of the Party, the formation of the Krishak Praja Party in July 1936 at Dacca, infused new hopes and aspirations among the real *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants) of Bengal who accepted it as a very strong alternative to the Congress or the Muslim League. So they rallied behind Fazlul Huq and the KPP and extended their all-round support towards the Party which was clearly reflected in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937.

## Notes and References:

1. Report on the Census of Bengal 1881, Vol. I, p. 179.
2. Report on the Census of India 1901, Vol.VI. p. 484. It is also cited in Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*, OUP, Bangladesh, 1974, p. 99.
3. J.N. Gupta, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer*, Bogra, p. 45.
4. The total population of the Rajshahi district in that year was 1,480,587, the Muslims numbered, 1,148,314 and Hindus 315,640. Report on the Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, Part II, p. 428. The names of the two Muslim Rais of Bagha and ii) Habibar Rahman Chaudhuri who had a residence in Niamatpur, a village in the Naogaon Sub-Division. See, O'Malley, L.S.S., *Bengal District Gazetteer: Rajshahi*, p. 174.
5. Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'Zamindars and Jotedars: a study of Rural Politics in Bengal', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, 1 (1975), p. 82.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
7. James Grant, *Analysis of the Finances of Bengal*, pp. 267-269; cited in Rajat & Ratna Ray, 'Zamindars and Jotedars: a study of Rural Politics in Bengal', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 9,1 (1975), p. 83.
8. Rajat & Ratna Ray, *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
- 8a. The Namasudras who were earlier known as the Chandalas or a lower grade of Sudras, constituted the 'second largest Hindu caste group in the British province of Bengal and the largest in its eastern parts'. According to the Census Report of 1911, as much as 77.94 per cent of the Namasudras were associated with agriculture, 1.15 per cent were in the rent-receiving category, 3.56 per cent were field labourers, wood cutters etc., and about 95.71 per cent were tenant-farmers, enjoying the status of either occupancy or non-occupancy *raiyat*. For details see, *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, Part II, pp. 370-373; see also, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 11-21.

- 8b. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 19.
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# 3

## Fazlul Huq, Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937:

### First Political Breakthrough

In 1936 Fazlul Huq added a new colour to Bengal politics by taking together the interests of the *krishaks* (peasants) as well as of the *prajas* (tenants). The extension of franchise right to the six annas-rent-paying tenant by the Government of India Act, 1935, had opened new opportunities before the Krishak Praja Party. To mobilize this selection of peasants behind the Party and capture their support, Fazlul Huq started a campaign for the abolition of the zamindari system. In the election *Manifesto* of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), published in 1936, it was clearly laid down:

“Thorough overhauling of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the interest of the agriculturists ensuring the vesting of proprietary rights in the tillers of the soil and including

- (i) the abolition of the zamindar’s right of *nazar* and *salamy* right of pre-emption;
- (ii) tenants’ right of mutation of name without additional payment;
- (iii) reduction of rate of rent”; and

“To take adequate and effective measures against illegal exactions by the zamindars, moneylenders and their representatives”.<sup>1</sup> The other highlights of the Krishak Praja Party’s manifesto were: introduction of free and compulsory education, construction of a hospital at every thana, total autonomy of Bengal, reduction in the administrative expenditure, rupees one thousand monthly salary for the Ministers and release of the political prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The KPP programme also included giving interest free loans to the peasants, creating irrigation facilities by digging canals all over the country, taking steps for the adequate representation of Muslims and the scheduled castes in the services, introducing measures for the amelioration of the condition of labourers by the provisions of minimum wages etc.<sup>3</sup> Though the manifesto of the KPP

concentrated more on the economic requirements of the Bengali masses, it also demanded “full responsible Government for India with adequate and effective safeguards of Mussalmans.....”<sup>4</sup> Most of these demands and programme of the KPP were mainly directed to appease the peasants for gaining cheap popularity and consolidating their support behind the Party. At the same time, in order to attract the rich peasants, it brought out the propaganda ‘down with zamindari’. The election *Manifesto* “reflected the aspirations of the richer peasants who held occupancy rights direct from the zamindars. It was they who were the most vocally critical of zamindari powers which stood in the way of their economic and social betterment”<sup>5</sup>.

So the richer peasants, Muslim middle class people, small traders, clerks, petty landowners and poorer under-raiyats rallied behind the Krishak Praja Party and made campaign against the money-lenders and the zamindars characterizing them ‘as Hindu oppressors of the Muslim people’.<sup>6</sup> The KPP projected itself as the tribune of the ordinary people against the elite, irrespective of the Hindu *bhadralok* or the wealthier Muslims who traditionally dominated rural Bengal. Having a rural background, Fazlul Huq realized the fact that his rustic origin would help him to wrest power from the traditional elite. This feeling ultimately persuaded some opportunists (who were very power-hungry) to join the Party.<sup>7</sup> Not only that, in order to play down the communal feelings and demonstrate its secular character, the Krishak Praja Party spearheaded its attacks on the zamindars in general, and Sir Nazimuddin and Sir K.G.M. Farouqi, in particular.<sup>8</sup> But it can be said without any doubt that the leadership of the KPP, failed to check the growth of the *jotedars* (at the expense of share croppers), who came forward to the centre stage of Bengal politics (‘from locality to province’) for political gain and to get themselves elected to the Legislative Council. “The Krishak Praja Party was thus the agency by which the jotedars, mainly Muslim and newly enfranchised, came out of the wings out the centre stage of Bengal politics. In the past Muslim jotedar had played little part in provincial politics, though they had begun to make their mark in the localities”.<sup>9</sup> So it was not unusual that the Krishak Praja Party had to face the charge of being a ‘jotedar party’.<sup>10</sup> Admitting the truth in this allegation Abul Mansur Ahmed recalled in his memoirs: “Bengal’s Krishak movement was criticized by many as being a jotedar movement. In absolute terms, their accusations held a great deal of truth..... but were, for that era, a kind of ultra-

leftism... According to my knowledge and belief, then the Praja movement was a natural and spontaneous people's movement, appropriate to the needs of the time".<sup>10a</sup>

By early 1930's in Bengal, "the provincial Muslim League did not exist except in name"<sup>11</sup> and its leadership virtually went to those who were more active in the newly formed Krishak Praja Party. Fazlul Huq was not satisfied with the policies and programme of the Muslim League and there was vast difference of opinion between him and the leaders of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League whose President and Secretary at that time were Maulavi Mujibur Rahman and Dr. R. Ahmad. Fazlul Huq said that the KPP would protect the interests of the poor peasants and the Party would be open for all irrespective of their caste, colour or religion. He understood the fact that the most important problem of the poor peasantry was the scarcity of food and cloth and he wanted its immediate solution. Famine, flood, drought, epidemic etc. did not make any difference between the Hindus and Muslims and these took lives irrespective of caste and religion. So the poor masses belonging to different caste and religion, saw the Krishak Praja Party as the Party of their own, trusted and supported it and realized that the KPP was the only political party at that time which could protect their interests and fight for their cause. The consolidation of the Muslim peasantry under the radical leadership of Fazlul Huq and the banner of the Krishak Praja Party, posed a serious threat to the prominent aristocratic and upper-middle-class Muslims who felt helpless in the fact of the extended suffrage as they had no other alternative but to depend on the votes of the peasantry whose interests were completely opposite to theirs. In this situation, Nawab Habibullah of Dacca thought it necessary to form a new political organization of the Muslims which would come forward to protect the interests of the landlords. Consequently, the United Muslim Party (UMP) was formed (with the Muslim led different groups) at his Calcutta residence in Hungerford Street, on 25 May, 1936. Nawab Khwaja Habibullah became its first President, Khan Bhadur Musharraf Hossain its Vice-President and Hasan Ispahani, a non-Bengali Calcutta merchant, its Treasurer.<sup>12</sup> Later on, men like Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy (who became its Secretary) Khan Bahadur Abdul Momen, Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan and Maulavi Tamizuddin Khan joined and strengthened the Party. Of the sixteen founder members, more than eight were big landlords of whom four belonged to the Dhaka Nawab family. The UMP soon made an electoral alliance with several powerful and prominent Muslim families of

Bengal who were united to challenge the KPP.<sup>13</sup> Along with the UMP, another organization, i.e. the New Muslim Majlis also came into existence under the initiative of Abdur Rahim Siddequi and H. Ispahani.

However, the leaders of the United Muslim Party did not feel themselves safe and realized the fact that their prospects in the forthcoming elections would remain uncertain and gloomy unless they forged a united front with the Krishak Praja Party. As a tactical move, Nawab Habibullah convened a joint meeting of the UMP and the KPP, at his residence in Calcutta, seeking the latter's cooperation in the ensuing elections. But the leading members of the Krishak Praja Party like Fazlul Huq, Abdul Karim and Syed Nausher Ali, did not attend the meeting in which the participants ultimately failed to take a unanimous decision of selecting a consensus candidate for the leadership of the united front.<sup>14</sup> The members of the KPP, wanted Fazlul Huq as the leader of the united front, but he was not acceptable to the Muslim aristocrats as he fought for the abolition of the zamindari system. Fazlul Huq accused the United Muslim Party as 'a *zamindar* party', 'a Ministerial Party'<sup>15</sup> where as Khwaja Nazimuddin of the UMP, charged that Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party was not a purely Muslim organization'.<sup>15a</sup> Keeping all these in his mind, Fazlul Huq spurned the hand of cooperation extended to him by the leaders of the UMP and began to campaign against the Dacca Nawab and the other prominent leaders of the UMP in their own districts, appealing the voters to back the true representatives of the peasants.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in an open letter written to the Governor of Bengal dated 8 August 1936, Fazlul Huq made an appeal to him to safeguard the interests of the peasantry from the onslaught imposed on them by the leaders of the United Muslim Party.<sup>17</sup> In reply, the Private Secretary to the Governor, agreed to support the movements for the benefit and welfare of the common masses and expressed his willingness to play the role of a neutral arbiter in the forthcoming elections.<sup>17a</sup>

Meanwhile Jinnah invited as many as forty leaders from Bengal to attend the first meeting of the Central Parliamentary Board (formed on 21 May 1936) held at Lahore on 8 June. Only the 'Three Musketeers', namely Abdur Rahaman Siddiqui, Hasan Ispahani and Khwaja Nooruddin responded to his call and, finally, Siddiqui and Ispahani went there. But the BPML and the Praja Party deliberately ignored Jinnah's invitation. On the other hand, from mid 1936, political rivalry between the

Krishak Praja Party and the United Muslim Party grew up in Bengal. In this situation, Nawab Habibullah of Dacca, the President of the United Muslim Party, convened a three-day All-Bengal Conference at the Calcutta Town Hall in August 1936 which was going to be attended by a large number of delegates. Apprehending a grand success of the conference, M.A.H. Ispahani persuaded Fazlul Huq to create disturbance which he thought, would impose bar on the success of the United Muslim Party. On the first day of the conference i.e., 2 August 1936, in a pre-planned manner, Fazlul Huq entered the Town Hall along with some of his supporters. At one stage, when the proceedings of the conference were going on, Fazlul Huq stood up and began to address the gathering. But the workers of the United Muslim Party shouted loudly in order to stop him. The supporters of Fazlul Huq then began the counter shouting which ultimately created a confusing situation and the functioning of the meeting became almost impossible. Thereupon, M.A.H. Ispahani suggested the postponement of the conference and also to invite Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to settle the differences among various leaders of Bengal<sup>18</sup> and instantly he sent a telegram to M.A. Jinnah in this regard. Intense factionalism among the Muslims in Bengal provided just the right opportunity to Jinnah to come to Bengal and establish himself as the overlord of provincial politics. He clearly mentioned his goal: 'Let the cream of Hindu society be organised under the banner of Congress and the cream of Muslim society under the banner of Muslim League. Then let us put up a united demand for independence of our dear motherland. Our demand will be irresistible!'<sup>19</sup>

M.A. Jinnah came to Calcutta on 15 August 1936<sup>20</sup> "to visit Bengal and to use his best endeavour to bring about peace, understanding and unity in the divided ranks of Muslim Bengal and to bring the United Muslim Party and the Krishak Praja Party under the banner of the All-India Muslim League".<sup>21</sup> The unity talks went on for several days but the prominent leaders of both the rival parties i.e., the Krishak Praja Party and the United Muslim Party, were not ready to compromise with each other. At one stage when the rumour of the Krishak Praja Party's merger with the Muslim League spread out, the UMP all of a sudden, took the initiative to merge itself with the Muslim League and thus out-manoeuvred the KPP at the last moment.<sup>22</sup> Jinnah then formed a thirty-three member Parliamentary Board for Bengal and nominated its members mainly from the zamindar class who were not acceptable to the Krishak

Praja Party. Jinnah's main intention was to incorporate his personal nominees in the Parliamentary Board from amongst the members of the United Muslim Party and in that process, make an attempt to give the KPP a minority status in the Board. An agreement was arrived at between the representatives of the United Muslim Party, the League and the Moslem Majlis, and the All-India Muslim League Parliamentary Board for Bengal be constituted according to the following quota: the UMP-15, the New Muslim Majlis – 7; the BPML – 7; Independent Non-Party members to be nominated by Mr. Jinnah – 4.<sup>23</sup> Although Fazlul Huq was initially nominated to the Central Parliamentary Board of the League (consisting of fifty-four members), the clash between Jinnah and Fazlul Huq became inevitable because of the former's non-cooperative attitude towards the KPP's twin demands – i) the abolition of the zamindari system in Bengal without compensation and ii) the introduction of free primary education in Bengal without raising additional taxation.<sup>24</sup> Unity talks between M.A. Jinnah and Fazlul Huq, however, continued. Jinnah put forward the following conditions:

- i) The Krishak Praja Party will have to nominate its candidates, for the forthcoming general election, on Muslim League tickets;
- ii) The demand for the abolition of the zamindari system will have to be struck off from the Krishak Praja Party's manifesto (as it went against the principle laid down in the Muslim League's new constitution);<sup>25</sup>
- iii) In the Parliamentary Board, the KPP and the Muslim League will get forty and sixty per cent representation respectively;
- iv) Jinnah himself will select the representatives of the Muslim League.

On the other hand, the demands of the Krishak Praja Party were:

- i) In Bengal, their representatives would fight the election not on Muslim League ticket but on Krishak Praja Party's ticket. However, at the Centre, they would accept Muslim League ticket and at All-India level, the KPP would abide by the principles of the Muslim League;
- ii) In the Parliamentary Board, the KPP will have to be given fifty per cent (not forty) representation;

- iii) Like the KPP, the Muslim League representatives will be selected by the Provincial Working Committee (not by Jinnah).<sup>26</sup> The prolonged discussions which lasted about a week, ultimately broke down as Jinnah did not accept the demands (particularly the abolition of the zamindari system) of the Krishak Praja Party<sup>27</sup> and for him, it was not ‘practical politics’.<sup>27a</sup> The question of ‘no nomination’ by Jinnah was another *sine qua non* for the KPP.

In the meantime, however, the Krishak Praja Party, in the interest of the Bengali Muslims, agreed on 1 September 1936, to join the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board (on a quota of fifteen) provided that

- i) the ideals, aims and objectives of the Krishak Praja Party be accepted and implemented;
- ii) the KPP be allowed to maintain its separate identity and make publicity of its own policy and programme; and
- iii) the KPP be given a free hand in selecting the non-Muslim candidates in the coming Legislative Assembly elections.<sup>28</sup> Fazlul Huq said: “I wish to make on point absolutely clear, whichever may be the group or groups with which we may consent to cooperate, the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samity will always maintain its separate entity and be prepared to carry on its propaganda for the purpose of carrying out its own aims and objects. It is only with regard to the Legislature that we are adopting our present policy. As regards the Non-Moslem candidates our election board will continue to take necessary steps for the nomination of candidates and supporting them at the time of elections”.<sup>29</sup>

The first meeting of the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board was called on 8 September 1936<sup>30</sup> at the Calcutta residence of the Nawab Habibullah of Dacca to elect the Leaders of the Parliamentary Board and to determine the policies, programmes and terms of the election manifesto.<sup>31</sup> But this meeting was convened without making any consultation with Fazlul Huq against which he issued a Press release characterizing the arbitrary action of the convener of the meeting as “a fresh and deliberate attempt to insult the Krishak Praja Party and to make them feel that as *krishaks* and *prajas* they must submit here and elsewhere to what the Nawabs and

zamindars may choose to decide on their behalf'.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the fact, Fazlul Huq and thirteen other members of the Krishak Praja Party attended the meeting which was presided over by Maulvi Abdul Karim. In this meeting, deliberations went on to minimize the differences between the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party.<sup>33</sup> But, when Shamsuddin Ahmed, the Secretary of the Krishak Praja Party, began to read out the aims, objectives and programmes of his party, some followers of Jinnah strongly opposed him and created an unruly scene claiming the exclusion of the demand for the abolition of the zamindari system without compensation from the programmes of the Krishak Praja Party.<sup>34</sup> The representatives of the KPP refused to compromise and left out of the meeting.<sup>35</sup> Fazlul Huq accused the non-Bengali Muslim businessmen in Calcutta responsible for the failure to achieve unity among the Bengali Muslims and declared that he would not allow that community to 'control the destiny of Bengali Muslims'.<sup>36</sup> The editorial column of *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* dated 9 September 1936, remarked that though Jinnah on 17 August 1936, had agreed to accept the KPP as one of the constituents of the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board (BMLPB), his followers preferred to forget it in the very first meeting of the Board and took unprecedented steps to disrupt the meeting. Therefore, Fazlul Huq could not be blamed for such an untoward incident.<sup>37</sup> It was also confirmed by Maulvi Abdul Karim, the President of the said meeting who held Jinnahite Muslim League leader Abul Hasan Ispahani, responsible for such an unwanted incident.<sup>38</sup>

The Nawab Bahadur of Dacca sent a letter to Fazlul Huq mentioning the date of the next meeting and requested him to attend the same. In its reply, Fazlul Huq wrote that until and unless the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board (BMLPB) did recognize his party as one of the constituents of the Board and accept its separate entity and, at the same time agree to implement the aims and programme of the Krishak Praja Party, the possibility of his joining the Board meeting was out of question.<sup>39</sup> This meeting of the BMLPB was, however, held at the residence of Nawab Bahadur of Dacca on September 10, 1936. In this meeting, the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca was elected as President, Adamji Haji Dand as Treasurer, Abul Hasan Ispahani and Hossain Sahid Suhrawardy as Joint – Secretaries of the BMLPB. During this time, H.S. Suhrawardy came into close contact with M.A. Jinnah and he became a very prominent leader of the Muslim League as he was very much trusted, supported

and backed by Jinnah.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, in parallel to the BMLPB, Fazlul Huq also formed the Krishak Praja Parliamentary Board (KPPB) with Shamsuddin Ahmed and, Later, Rajab Ali Tarafdar as its Secretary. Fazlul Huq himself became the President of the KPPB.<sup>41</sup> He did not trust the All-India Muslim League (AIML) leadership and in a Long Press statement he declared: “My fight is with landlords, capitalists, and holders of vested interests. The landlords are 95 per cent Hindus, and capitalists and others are about 98 per cent Hindus. Far from helping me, they are out to throw all obstacles in my way..... I am fighting for a satisfactory solution of the bread problem or, in other words, of the ‘dal bhat’ problem of Bengal, and also for the thorough overhauling of the Tenancy Laws in Bengal so as to give some relief to agriculturists. This can not be effected by the Muslim League Parliamentary Board, because in that Board out of 28 members, as many as 11 are non-Bengalis who hail from Ispahan (an obvious reference to M.A.H. Ispahani, the moving spirit behind the BPML and a close associate of Jinnah’s), Tehran, Badkshan, and Samarkand and other places outside Bengal, and 89 per cent are landlords and capitalists. These landlords and capitalists can not certainly join us in this fight, because they are the very people with whom we will have to carry on a life and death struggle. All talks of Muslim unity and solidarity for merely political ends are worse than useless when it is remembered that the Mussalman cultivating classes constitute more than 90 per cent of the total Muslim population of Bengal, and it is, therefore, their interest which must be fundamental in any scheme we may lay down for ourselves, or for the sake of any ideal which we may seek to achieve. On the fundamental question of the interest of the Projas and the Krishaks, the tillers of the soil who sweat so that others might enjoy the fruits of their labour, there is no difference whatever between the Hindus and the Mussalmans, for their interests are welded into one another, together they stand and together, we are confident, that shall triumph”.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Abul Hasan Ispahani and H.S. Suhrawardy tried their best to diminish the influence of Fazlul Huq on the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board. Both of them realized the fact that the poor Muslims were greatly influenced by the aims, objectives and programmes of the Krishak Praja Party. In order to create confusion among the poor masses, they on 12 September 1936, evolved a manifesto of the League Parliamentary Board imitating the aims and programme of the KPP and distributed it to publish in the newspaper. The manifesto reflected that the Muslim

League would try to abolish the Permanent Settlement if possible and included several demands protecting the interests of the Muslims.<sup>43</sup> The Nawabs and Khan Bahadurs of the League, in this way, tried to get popularity and success in the forthcoming election. Not only that, the BMLPB raised certain allegations against Fazlul Huq and charged him with betraying the Muslim cause in league with the Hindus. The leaders of the League Parliamentary Board also accused that the Hindus extended financial support to Fazlul Huq. In reply, Fazlul Huq completely rejected all these allegations and strongly demanded that he had not taken any kind of financial assistance from a single Hindu and gave an open challenge to the accusers to prove their allegation.<sup>44</sup> He also gave a call that the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca, Sir Nazimuddin, Nawab Farooqi and other zamindar members of the League Parliamentary Board would have to make an announcement repealing the practices of *Nazrana* and *Salami* which would testify that they were quite sympathetic towards the poor peasants. Huq reminded them that all big promises would bring no fruit if they were not put into action in reality.<sup>45</sup> He also urged that all the members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board should recognize the right of land ownership of the poor tenants and accordingly an amendment bill should be brought before the Council. If these were materialized, Fazlul Huq assured that he would stop the independent activities of the Krishak Praja Party. He gave this promise to Jinnah and his followers of Bengal.<sup>46</sup>

But on the other hand, so many allegations were raised and rumours were in the air against Fazlul Huq. It was publicized that Fazlul Huq was himself involved in a conspiracy for getting a ministry. In its reply, he explained that it should not be treated as an offence simply because nobody could raise a question on his ability and competence of becoming a minister. He demanded that he was the only living personality who had tirelessly tried his best to introduce administrative reforms in between 1908 and 1920 and also till the first two sessions of the Round Table Conference. According to him, if he was successful in becoming a minister, it would be greater gain of his own community and his country than his individual gain and interest.<sup>47</sup> Fazlul Huq categorically stated that if he was hungry for becoming a minister, his best policy should have been to join in the opponent party, the leaders of which were very eager to make an alliance with him and were very much willing to give him a seat in the ministerial cabinet as a reward of his desertion. But he was not

provoked rather determined on his principle and he had no hesitation in rejecting such offer.<sup>48</sup> Fazlul Huq also argued that his critics had either already forgotten his past service to his own community or they were committing self-deception. He reminded them that there was no one in Bengal except him who had given so much of time and labour for the protection of the interests of the Muslims. According to him, among the hundred Muslim government employees, fifty were indebted to him for their respective services.<sup>49</sup> But his critics did not stop there. Some of his contemporary politicians of Bengal, reminded Fazlul Huq of the treachery of Mirjafar and the dangers of a conspiracy with the Hindus. He vehemently opposed their allegation and said that he was not at all involved in any conspiracy with any one. Fazlul Huq remarked: "I have been reminded of the treachery of Mirjafar and the dangers of a conspiracy with the Hindus. In the first place, I am not in conspiracy with anybody. Secondly, Mirjafar's chief co-conspirator was not the Hindus. The Hindus played the second fiddle. I make a present of this fact to the Muslim Knights and Nawabs who are banking upon cooperation with Clive Street in the future Legislative Council".<sup>50</sup> But all these arguments and explanations did not satisfy the then Muslim League leaders and infuriated Jinnah then sought an explanation from Fazlul Huq on 4 October 1936 alleging that Huq was involved in anti-League activities.<sup>51</sup> Fazlul Huq made an aggressive reply: "You have the impertinence to ask for an explanation from me. Let me remind you that I have been associated with the Muslim League for a longer period than any other Muslim politician in India now living.... You are now the President of the League, but I held this very position as long ago as 1919 and I presided at the Delhi Session of the All India Muslim League in 1918.... You are not working for Muslim solidarity at all but seem to be playing a deep game.... The League Parliamentary Board is a creature of your fancy and is breeding dissension in Muslim ranks.... let me assure you, that the Bengal Presidency Muslim League treated your Parliamentary Board with deserved contempt. The Bengal Muslim League (is) co-operating with the Praja Party and have severed connection with your Parliamentary Board. Your conduct in Bengal has surprised everyone.... I call upon you to explain your conduct...."<sup>52</sup> Getting this reply, Jinnah became infuriated and removed Fazlul Huq in early November 1936 from membership of the Central Parliamentary Board of the League on the charge of 'insubordination, and disloyalty to and defiance of the principles and policies of the Central (League) Board'.<sup>53</sup> Not only that, the leading newspapers like *The Azad* and *The Star of India*, vehemently

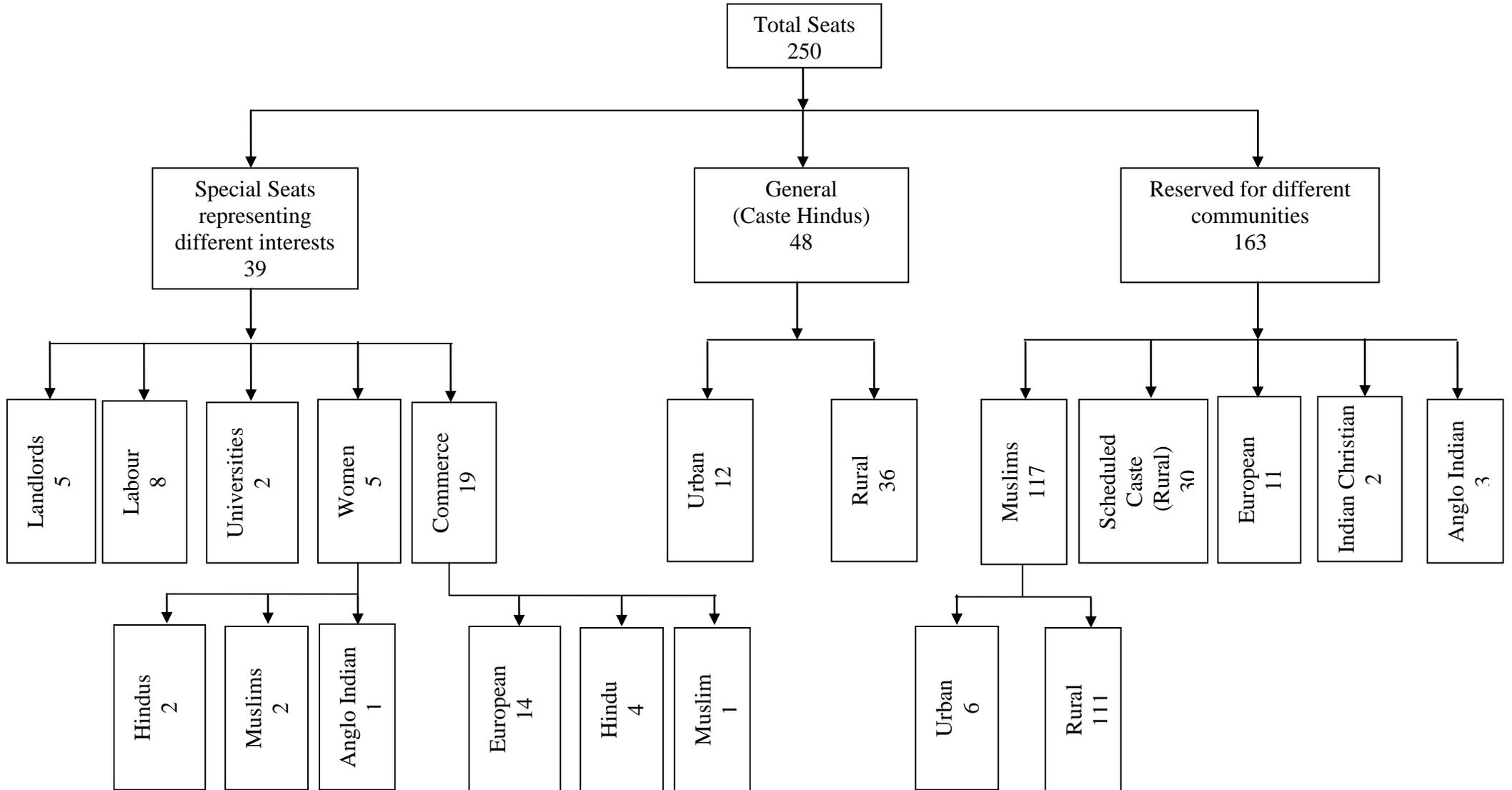
attacked Fazlul Huq for making conspiracy with the Hindus which went against the interests of the Muslims in Bengal.<sup>54</sup> In *The Star of India* on 17 October 1936, it was published that Fazlul Huq made an alliance with the Hindu zamindars for the forthcoming elections. In reply he said: “My attention has been drawn to an announcement made in the ‘Star of India’ dated 17 Oct. to the effect that I am going to join the Hindu landlords in the forthcoming election and that the Star of India is reliably informed that Maulavi Ashrafuddin Choudhury, Prof. Jitendralal Banerjee and myself have submitted a written letter to the Maharaja of Burdwan stating certain terms under which the Proja Party is willing to co-operate with the Hindu Zamindar group ..... I declare more emphatically that it is absolutely false that there are secret negotiations between the leaders of the Proja Party and the leaders of the Hindu Zamindar Party, that it is absolutely false that I signed any paper with anybody either on behalf of myself or others.....”<sup>55</sup> Thus on the eve of the 1937 Assembly elections, the schism in Bengal Muslim politics was complete, both internally and externally and Fazlul Huq decided to take part in the ensuing provincial elections on their own.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Elections of 1937:**

- a. **The composition of Provincial Legislature:-** The Government of India Act of 1919 set up a unicameral Legislature in all the nine provinces. But the Government of India Act, 1935 provided a bicameral Legislature consisting of a Legislative Council and a Legislative Assembly in six Indian provinces (Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces) and a unicameral Legislature in the rest five (Punjab, the Central Provinces, North-West Frontier Province, Orissa and Sind).
- b. **Distribution of seats in the various Legislative Assemblies under the Government of India Act, 1935:-** The number of seats in the various Legislative Assemblies was: 50 in the North-West Frontier Province, 60 each in Orissa and Sind, 108 in Assam, 112 in the Central Provinces, 152 in Bihar, 175 each in the Punjab and Bombay, 215 in Madras, 228 in the United Provinces and 250 in Bengal.

- c. **Distribution of seats in the Bengal Provincial Legislature under the Act of 1935:-** It had two chambers, the Legislative Council or the 'Upper House' and the Legislative Assembly or the 'Lower House' to which the Cabinet was made responsible. The number of seats in the Bengal Legislative Council was fixed not less than 63 and not more than 65 and they were divided as: General (Hindus) Urban – 2, Rural – 8; Muslims Urban – 1, Rural – 16; Europeans – 3; Candidates elected by members of the Legislative Assembly – 27; Government nominated – 6 to 8.<sup>57</sup> The total number of seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly or the 'Lower House' was fixed at 250 and these 250 seats were divided into 17 categories such as: 1. General Hindus, 2. Scheduled Castes, 3. Muslims, 4. Europeans, 5. Anglo-Indians, 6. Indian Christians, 7. Landlords, 8. Universities, 9. Labour, 10. Commerce, 11. Women etc. The composition of the Bengal Assembly (consisting of 250 seats) under the Government of India Act, 1935 is given below:

Table III. 1: Composition of the Bengal Assembly under the Government of India Act, 1935



Source: Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, p. 69.

This type of composition of seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly under the Government of India Act, 1935, helped Fazlul Huq and his Krishak Praja Party as the Party under his able leadership, gained more popularity in rural areas (where the seats were greater in number) than in urban areas (where the seats were nominal). On the other hand, the Congress was not very much benefitted as the General Hindu Seats were divided into Caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes. But the Muslim League got an edge as the number of Muslim seats was heavily increased which prompted the Party to organize its own strength and make a bid for capturing power in Bengal. The Christians on the other hand, who formed only 0.36% of the population were entitled to 31 seats which ultimately helped the European group to be a deciding factor in the formation of future coalition ministries in Bengal.

- d. **Voting Rights:** The Government of India Act, 1935 made a fundamental change in Bengal politics by lowering the franchise though it still remained tied to property qualifications. Previously, under the Government of India Act, 1919, only those paying an income tax on the minimum income of Rs.10,000 per annum or those paying a minimum land revenue of Rs.750 per annum, were entitled to vote. It was found that only 3% of the total population was able to cast their votes. But under the Act of 1935, the franchise was extended to those people who paid the motor vehicles tax, or income tax or a tax or licence fee to the Calcutta Corporation, or municipal tax of not less than annas 8 or road and public works tax of not less than annas 8 or the Chaukidari tax of not less than annas 6 per year<sup>58</sup> and passed the matriculation or an equivalent examination. Women having all these qualifications were given the right to vote. As a result, the franchise raised upto almost 14%<sup>59</sup> (although the figure was very meager keeping in mind the total number of population). The number of Muslim voters increased almost upto 600% in comparison to 1919. The total number of voters in Bengal went upto 66,95,483 (which was 13.4% of the total population) including 60,00,000 female voters. Out of the total voters (66,95,483) in Bengal, 34,58,364 were Muslim voters (which was 51.65%)<sup>60</sup> and the minimum age for obtaining the voting right was fixed at 20 years. The extension of franchise in Bengal is reflected in the table given below:

Table III.2: **Extension of Franchise in Bengal from 1920 to 1936**

Year	Total Voters in Bengal	% of the total population
1920	9,96,316	2.2
1923	10,21,300	2.2
1926	11,53,212	2.4
1929	13,44,316	2.6
1936	66,95,483	13.4

Source: Enayetur Rahim, *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937 – 1943)*, pp. 30-31.

But it was written in *The Statesman* that: “candidates seeking elections to the Bengal Legislature are now seeking the confidence of 6,662,654 persons entitled to exercise the franchise. This is very much wider franchise than has been previously existed. Altogether, only 13.3% of the population is yet able to vote”.<sup>61</sup> It further pointed out: “The six million voters whose support these candidates seek are spread over a total of 77,521 square miles. Bengal thus provides the largest electorate of any province in India spread over the widest field”.<sup>62</sup>

- e. **Extent of the Assembly Constituency:-** In 1937 elections, the number of voters and the areas of constituencies were not the same throughout Bengal. The biggest constituency (in terms of voters) was Faridpur (which was a Hindu seat having 1,37,478 voters) and the smallest constituency was Bankura (which was a Muslim seat having 5,158 voters). The largest rural constituency (in terms of geographical areas) was Midnapore (which was a Muslim seat having an area of 5,245 square miles) and the smallest was Munshiganj (which was a Muslim seat having an area of 126 square miles). The average of voters per Muslim seats was 29,596 and in its counterpart (i.e. in Hindu seats), the figure was 37,606 which was quite high in comparison to other provinces of India.<sup>63</sup> It should be mentioned here that in the elections of 1937, the Muslims would cast their votes only in Muslim seats and their counterpart i.e. the Hindus similarly would apply their voting right only in those seats assigned to them. As a result, the Muslim League (which was completely a Muslim organization) was able to contest only in those seats reserved for the Muslims and the Congress (which had its support base among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs etc.) was able to nominate its

candidates in different categories of seats which gave the Congress better opportunities and higher chances of success. The election areas, number of seats and voters are shown in the table given below:

**Table III. 3: Election Areas, No. of Seats and Number of Voters in the Elections of 1937**

<b>Election Areas</b>	<b>No. of Seats</b>	<b>Number of Voters</b>
General (Urban)	12	3,85,347
General (Rural)	66	24,26,288
Muslims(Urban)	6	55,538
Muslims(Rural)	111	34,02,826
Anglo-Indian	3	8,525
European	11	14,175
Indian Christian	2	10,038
Commerce	19	926
Landlords	5	1,951
Universities	2	1,479
Labour	8	3,13,400
Women	5	74,990
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>66,95,483</b>

Source: J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*, p. 292.

- f. **Contesting Political Parties:-** In the 1937 Bengal Assembly elections, there were three major political parties, viz. the Bengal Provincial Congress, the League Parliamentary Board (which virtually came to be meant the League in Bengal) and the Krishak Praja Party (KPP). It should be noted here that in the Assembly elections of 1937, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) did not contest in its name, rather it extended its support to the KPP led by Fazlul Huq. In the Muslim constituencies, the principal contestants were the KPP, the League Parliamentary Board (which fought each other for gaining political leadership of the Muslim community in Bengal) and a large number of Independents. There were other Muslim political organizations like the Jamiat-

i-Ulema-i-Bangla (an Islamic religio-political organization), the Jamiat-i-Talaba-i-Arabia, Bengal (All Bengal Arabic Student Association), the Dhaka District Muslim Federation (founded in 1930 with the Nawab of Dacca, Khwaja Habibullah as its President and Khwaja Shahabuddin as its Secretary),<sup>64</sup> All Bengal Muslim Student Association (formed in 1933 with Abdul Waseque as its Secretary and Khan Bahadur Asaduzzaman as its President)<sup>65</sup> etc. which did not contest in the elections rather extended their support to the League Parliamentary Board.<sup>66</sup> Along with these, the Tippera Krishak Samity, a locally based pro-congress militant faction of the Krishak Praja Party, also contested in a few seats under the leadership of Asimuddin. In the Hindu constituencies, the principal contestants were the Congress, Hindu Nationalist Party, Hindu Mahasabha and a huge number of Independents.

- g. **Number of Contestants:-** In the Bengal Assembly elections of 1937, there were 642 candidates who were contesting in 250 seats. As 2 Muslim League candidates, 1 KPP candidate, 6 Independent candidates and 38 candidates participating in the Special Seats, elected as 'uncontested' candidates, actually there were 203 seats in which finally 595 candidates contested against each other. Although the Muslim League was able to give its candidates in all the Urban seats (6), it failed to give its candidates in all the Rural seats (111) and it was finally able to give 73 candidates in 72 Rural constituencies. The Krishak Praja Party, on the other hand was able to give its candidates in 3 Urban seats and the Party ultimately filed its nomination in 72 Rural seats (having 73 candidates). Surprisingly, the Independents contested in 4 Urban seats and 176 Independent candidates filed their nominations in 87 Rural seats. In this election, the Tippera Krishak Samity also contested in 10 Muslim constituencies. It clearly suggests that all the Muslim political parties, failed to give their candidates in 117 Muslim constituencies. It is to be added here that the Muslim league failed to give a single candidate in the districts like Nadia, Murshidabad, Bagura, Pabna, Noakhali, Chittagong and Tippera.<sup>67</sup>

### **Election Manifestoes:-**

- (i) **The Muslim League:-** In June 1936, the Central Parliamentary Board of the AIML prepared a 14-point *Manifesto* which included: “(1) protection of the religious rights of the Muslims; (2) repeal of all repressive laws; (3) resistance to all measures detrimental to the interests of India; (4) reduction of heavy cost of administrative machinery; (5) nationalization of Indian Army and reduction of military expenditure; (6) encouragement of the development of industries, including cottage industries; (7) regulation of currency and exchange; (8) the social, educational and economic uplift of the rural population; (9) relief of agricultural indebtedness; (10) free and compulsory elementary education; (11) protection and promotion of the Urdu language and Script; (12) reduction of the heavy burden of taxation; and the last but not the least (14) creation of a healthy public opinion and general political consciousness throughout the country”.<sup>68</sup>
- The League Parliamentary Board accepted all the 14 points prepared by the Central Parliamentary Board and at the same time, it had also drawn up a 25-point programme setting out the special needs of Bengal. These points included: “(1) protection of the religious and other rights of the Muslims; (2) eradication of Permanent Settlement evils; (3) repealing the Bengal Tenancy act (1928) with a view to (a) repealing the provisions to enhancement of rent, transfer fees and pre-emption, and (b) securing reduction of rent; (4) relief of agricultural indebtedness through the enforcement of the Bengal Agricultural Debtors’ Act; (5) protection of the rural population from illegal exaction made by zamindars and *mahajan*; (6) raising of the price of jute; (7) marketing facilities for agricultural commodities; (8) an agricultural survey of Bengal for crop planning; (9) arrangement for dairy and poultry farming; (10) resuscitation of the dead/dying rivers and tanks; (11) supply of drinking water and better medical facilities; (12) introduction of compulsory and free primary education; (13) amendment of the Calcutta University act; (14) establishment of a Board of Secondary Education; (15) development of technical, industrial and agricultural education; (16) religious instruction for Muslim boys in schools and improvement of the *madrassah* education; (17) raising Muslim representation in the public services in proportion to their numerical strength; (18) solution of unemployment problem; (19) development of cottage industries; (20)

development of fisheries; (21) financial assistance for the development of industries; (22) adoption of a preferential policy favouring the use of Bengali and Indian products; (23) adoption of a well-defined labour policy including payment of a fair wage, provision for insurance, better housing and educational and medical facilities; (24) reduction in the cost of administration; and (25) amendment of the Calcutta Municipal Act to safeguard the Muslim interest”.<sup>69</sup>

- (ii) **The Krishak Praja Party (KPP):-** At the fourth Annual session, held in Dacca in July 1936, the Krishak Praja Party decided to participate in the Assembly elections believing the fact that ‘so long as full control over the administration of the country was not in the grip of the *prajas*, ..... the complete amelioration of the condition of the masses would be a mere dream’.<sup>70</sup> At that session, the KPP adopted a 14-point election *Manifesto* which were as follows: “(1) abolition of the Zamindari system (Permanent Settlement) without compensation; (2) establishment of proprietary right of the cultivators in the land; (3) reduction of land rent by fixing a maximum rate for each class of land; (4) annulment of landlords’ right of pre-emption; (5) abolition of *nazar-salami* and criminal punishment for all illegal exactions, such as, *abwab*; (6) solution of the problem of agricultural indebtedness of cultivators by constituting Debt Settlement Boards and giving long-term loans at not more than 4 per cent interest per annum; (7) restriction of jute cultivation and fixation of the minimum price of jute; (8) resuscitation of dead and dying rivers and improvement of agriculture, trade, commerce and sanitation; (9) establishment of one hospital in each *thana* (local police area); (10) full self-government in Bengal; (11) introduction of compulsory and free primary education; (12) reduction of the cost of administration; (13) fixation of minister’s salary at Rs.1000/- per month; and (14) repeal of all repressive laws, and release of all political prisoners”.<sup>71</sup>

If we make a comparison of the election manifestoes of the League Parliamentary Board and the Krishak Praja Party, it would reveal that both these parties had ‘common minimum programme’ like the introduction of compulsory and free primary education, reduction of the cost of administration and land rent, raising the price of jute and abolition of *nazar-salami* and other illegal exactions such as

*abwab* and pre-emption etc. Although both the KPP and the Muslim League agreed on the fact that operation of the Permanent Settlement and Tenancy Acts in Bengal had prevented the economic growth and development of the province, they differed on its solution. While the KPP strongly demanded for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement without compensation, the League Board was reluctant to take any drastic measure in this regard and concentrated only on the eradication of its evils. Fazlul Huq put forward his Party stand in a press release where he categorically stated: “To all these measures (i.e. measures incorporated in the *Manifesto*) zamindars, capitalists, and those holding vested interests will offer strenuous opposition. It is, therefore, inevitable that there will be a division of the country into two main classes, viz., those of the rich and influential on the one side and the poor and helpless on the other. We represent the latter .....<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, the KPP ignored some important demands of the Muslim community like the amendment of Calcutta Municipal Act and Calcutta University Act, establishment of a Secondary Education Board and for proportionate representation of the Muslims in the public services which were incorporated in the League Board *Manifesto*. On the other hand, unlike the KPP, the League Board did not make any specific commitment to the fixation of minister’s salary and the release of political prisoners. Above all, while the League Board emphasized the need for Muslim unity and solidarity, the KPP was non-communal in its approach, initiating a programme essentially for the peasantry irrespective of religion and considered the issue of Muslim solidarity as a “false cry”.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note that the KPP was not at all interested to contest a single Hindu or a Scheduled Caste seat although the Party had many caste Hindu and Namasudra supporters and rank holders. Rather it was only interested in getting the Muslim votes and tried to represent the ‘true’ interests of the Muslims of Bengal.

(iii) **The Congress:-** Although the Congress criticized and rejected the Government of India Act, 1935 ‘in its entirety’ and regarded that it could not produce ‘substantial benefits’, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolved to contest the provincial election ‘in order to prevent the operation of forces calculated to strengthen alien domination and exploitation’<sup>74</sup> and obtain *Swaraj*. The Congress election *Manifesto* identified extreme poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry as the most burning problems of the country and believed that ‘only independence can give us the power to solve our economic

and social problems and end the exploitation of our masses'.<sup>75</sup> As instructed by the AICC, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) issued a supplementary election *Manifesto* (on the eve of the Assembly elections) which proposed for: "(1) amendment of the land tenure system in the interests of the peasants; (2) reduction of indebtedness of the cultivators; (3) reduction of rent, revenue and the burden of taxation; (4) increase in the productivity of the land; (5) credit facilities for the cultivators; (6) development of small industries and arrangement for proper marketing; (7) development of industrial, commercial and cultural education; (8) building of all industrial and commercial ventures on national lines; and (9) development of waterways and irrigation channels and sanitation of the province as well as cheaper methods of transport".<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the BPCC in its election *Manifesto*, put emphasis also on the introduction of compulsory and free primary education, repeal of all repressive laws, release of all political prisoners, reduction of the cost of administration, fixation of maximum salary at Rs.500/- per month etc. Although the BPCC put forward all these need-based demands, the Bengal Congress was too divided at that time and isolation of most of the Muslim leaders after 1935, made the Party almost a 'Hindu organization'. As a result, the Bengal Congressites neither had courage 'to contest Muslim seats nor could any Muslim risk to fight election on Congress ticket'.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the election *Manifesto* of the BPCC, failed to attract the Bengal peasantry as it did not raise the demand for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement.

Apart from these there were other political organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Hindu Nationalist Party (which issued its Election *Manifesto* with a 9 – point programme like- to fight against the Communal Award, to promote friendly relations with other communities, to place the demand for release of detained prisoners, 'to bring about a more intimate and cordial relationship between landlords and tenants', to combat the problem of unemployment, to restructure and reorganized the educational system of the province and the like)<sup>77a</sup> and trade union organizations like the Bengal Trade Union Federation (whose Election *Manifesto* duly represented 17 workers' and 11 agricultural labourers' demands)<sup>77b</sup> also came out to contest the elections with specific objectives.

### **Election Funds:-**

In order to contest in the elections of 1937, it was absolutely necessary for the leading political parties to generate their election funds and in this matter, the Muslim League was far ahead than its counterpart i.e. the Krishak Praja Party. The major sources of funds for the League Board were the large scale subscriptions received from the zamindars and businessmen. When the United Muslim Party, the forerunner of the League Board, was formed in May 1936, five zamindars and one professional who were its founder-members, subscribed Rs.27,500/- to the party fund.<sup>78</sup> The inclusion of non-Bengali Muslim business magnates of Calcutta in the League Parliamentary Board, largely contributed to boost its election fund. The election of Hasan Ispahani as one of the Joint-Secretaries of the League Board and Sir Adamjee Hajee Dawood as its Treasurer was very significant from this particular aspect. Not only that, Jinnah before his departure from Calcutta on 26 August 1936, met with the members of the newly formed League Parliamentary Board and made an appeal to subscribe Rs.50,000/- to its funds for conducting the elections in the province.<sup>79</sup> Apart from that, both Khwaja Nazimuddin and K.G.M. Farooqui, two prominent League leaders, were in the Government – Nazimuddin in the Governor's Executive Council and Farooqui a Minister. Their personal influence also helped the League to flourish the party fund. Moreover, the Calcutta Khilafat Committee had a good fund at its disposal that became available for the League Board. Along with these, there was also financial backing from the Calcutta Muslim Chamber of Commerce. It should be mentioned here that the candidates of the League Board in general, economically were in a far better position and were able to bear a considerable portion of the election expenses of their own.

Financially, the Krishak Praja Party was completely unmatched for the League Parliamentary Board (as the KPP had a very limited fund) and the Party did not raise any central election funds for mitigating the election expenses. Although the KPP had the financial backing of a few zamindars, *taluqdars* and rich people, that support was not at all sufficient enough to meet the colossal election expenses. Further, most of its elections candidates who had middle class background, could hardly afford any lump sum amount from their own pockets to the general election fund. So the Party had to bank on the personal popularity and charisma of its leaders. But the leaders of the

League Parliamentary Board and a section of the Muslim Press alleged that the members of the KPP received money from the Congress and the Hindus 'who were said to be out to cause disunity within the Muslim community'<sup>80</sup> and wanted Fazlul Huq to win against the League. The base of this accusation was not confirmed but it is true that neither the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) set up candidates in Muslim constituencies nor did the KPP contest any Scheduled Caste seats on its ticket and these two political parties were reluctant to poach on each others territory.

### **Election Symbols:**

Each contestant participating at the Bengal provincial elections, was given his or her election symbol. The objects which were easily found in the rural areas and the people were very much familiar with those objects, were picked up as election symbols like the plough, spade, hurricane, hookka (tobacco-pipe), bullock-cart, mango tree etc. As the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) which is commonly used nowadays for election purposes in India indicating the candidate's name on the left hand side and his/her election symbol on the right hand side of the EVM was not at all available at that time and there was no system of issuance of the Ballot Paper (indicating the candidate's name and his or her election symbol), the voters usually collected their ballot slips from the Polling Officers and dropped those slips in the specific ballot boxes (which were kept in the voting and reflected each candidate's election symbol). At the end of voting hours, the Polling Officers collected the ballot slips from each ballot box (having the impression of election symbol of each contestant) and counted one by one. The ballot box in which highest number of ballot slips were found in favour of a particular candidate, he or she was declared 'elected'.<sup>81</sup>

### **Election Campaign:**

The submission of nomination papers was started in December 1936 and the leading political parties participating at the elections finalized their nominees in the first week of January 1937 and concentrated in the election campaign. In the Muslim Constituencies, there was a direct contest between the League Parliamentary Board and the Krishak Praja Party and both these parties had certain advantages over each

other. The first and foremost advantage which the League Parliamentary Board enjoyed, was that the Board had sufficient funds whereas the financial condition of the KPP was unsatisfactory and it stood nowhere to be compared with that of the League: Secondly, the defection of Akram Khan, Tamizuddin Khan (who were the prominent leaders of the Praja Movement), and Khan Bahadur Abdul Momin from the KPP and their joining the League Board strengthened the League and weakened the KPP. Thirdly, almost the entire Muslim press supported the League propaganda and started vigorous campaign in its favour. The League publicized its political agenda mainly through the *Azad* (Bengali daily) and the *Star of India* (English daily). Under Akram Khan's able editorship, the *Azad* (which had at that time the highest circulation among the Bengali Muslims), became the mouthpiece of the League Board in Bengal. Akram Khan was also the owner of another weekly *Muhammadi*. Along with these, there were a large number Urdu Weeklies and Monthlies which were engaged in popularizing the Election *Manifesto* of the League Board among the Urdu-speaking Muslims of Calcutta and suburbs. On the other hand, the KPP had only one weekly called *Chashi* (Peasant), published from Mymensingh – a district town in East Bengal. On certain occasions, the Hindu press supported the KPP against the League Board which gave the League and the Muslim press a golden opportunity to criticize the KPP as the 'paid agents' of the Hindus. Fourthly, the League Board's slogan of Muslim solidarity had a tremendous impact upon the righteous Muslims of Bengal. Last but not least, at the time of elections, Nazimuddin, a prominent leader of the League Board, was in the Governor's Executive Council and by virtue of his post, he was in a position to utilize the Government machinery and his power and position in favour of the League Board candidates. He also spent a huge amount of money, nearly three times as much as Fazlul Huq.

On the other hand, the KPP also enjoyed certain advantages. The first and foremost advantage (which the KPP had), was its leader Fazlul Huq who became extremely popular among the masses (for his leadership quality and extraordinary eloquence) and the people in general, affectionately called him 'Huq Saheb'. He was an asset for the Praja Party candidates who used his popularity and charisma for gaining success in the elections. Secondly, most of the KPP candidates in the elections of 1937, were not 'outsiders' in their constituencies, who used to address the election meetings and common gatherings in local dialects which attracted the rural

people who felt very homely with them and mixed and interacted with them more freely and spontaneously. On the other hand, with the exception of Akram Khan, none of the prominent leaders of the League Board (who were mainly Urdu speaking), ‘felt at home in a predominantly Bengali-speaking gathering’.<sup>82</sup> Thirdly, the election *Manifesto* of the Krishak Praja Party had become very popular among the rural masses than League Board *Manifesto*, particularly the KPP’s demand for the abolition of the Zamindari system without compensation. Not only that, Fazlul Huq promised everyone to provide *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses) which became a very significant slogan of the KPP in its election campaign and attracted a vast audience including a large number of newly enfranchised rural people who only dreamt of eating *dal-bhat* (which was according to them, the most important subsistence of living) regularly. Fourthly, the KPP had a large band of dedicated workers (particularly in the districts where the Proja movement was very strong), whose sincerity, simplistic approach and door-to-door activities, covering mile after mile on foot, talking to the peasants in their own language, had greater impact than the efforts of the ‘hired’ workers of the Muslim League who talked ‘in terms of religion and enemies of Islam’.<sup>83</sup> It should be kept in mind that the KPP workers never challenged talk of Muslim solidarity, rather they emphasized that this unity or solidarity should be attained at “the door of peasants and never at the palace of zamindars”.<sup>84</sup> According to them, it was ridiculous to talk about unity in a village between a Muslim zamindar and a Muslim praja, between a Muslim money-leader and a Muslim debtor. So they argued that it should be the duty of the elitist and high-placed Muslims to ‘come down from their pedestal and join the peasants for the sake of unity’.<sup>85</sup>

Certain dramatic political developments at this time took place in Bengal which created a stir among the voters and generated their interest in favour of the KPP. Dr. R. Ahmed gave an open challenge to Nazimuddin to contest against Fazlul Huq from any constituency and this ‘battle royal’ took place in Patuakhali constituency of the Dacca district – which was within the ‘zamindari’ area of Nazimuddin and was considered as the safest place for him. He was former Education Minister of Bengal (1929) and he was elected from that constituency twice in the past. On the other hand, Fazlul Huq (whose original constituency was Pirozepur), was an ‘outsider’ here except the fact that his ancestors came from the same area. But he showed his courage to fight against Nazimuddin from Patuakhali Muslim (rural)

constitency<sup>86</sup>, the contest which was categorized as ‘the fourth battle of Panipat’<sup>86a</sup> by B.D. Habibullah, one of the lieutenants of Fazlul Huq. He challenged the zamindari system on the one hand, and the Muslim League and the Government on the other. In the election campaign, Fazlul Huq assured that after being elected in this contest, he would abolish the zamindari of Nazimuddin and save the lives of the *krishaks* and *prajas* from the inhuman torture and massive exploitation of the Nawabs of Dacca and also of the money-lending classes.<sup>87</sup> This prompted the Nawab of Dacca to come forward in favour of Nazimuddin and participate in the election campaign against Fazlul Huq. Not only that, the Maulanas, Maulvis and Pirs from all over Bengal came down to Patuakhali and openly made appeals to the Muslims to vote for Nazimuddin for the sake of Islam<sup>88</sup> and Shah Sufi Maulana Abu Bakr Siddiqui, the famous Pir of Furfura and President of the Jamiat, issued the *fatwa* (religious ruling) in favour of Nazimuddin.<sup>89</sup> Maulana Abu Bakr highlighted the League Board as the ‘real Muslim praja samity’ and made appeal to the Muslims in general and to his disciples in particular, to cast their votes in favour of the League candidates. Even the Muslim students from the Punjab, U.P., N.W.F.P. and other provinces were brought to Bengal to canvass for Nazimuddin. “All the powers and influence of the Ahsan Manjil (Nawab’s palace) were poured into Nazimuddin’s campaign and even the Governor, Sir John Anderson, took unprecedented step by visiting Patuakhali and arguing voters to return the Khawaja”.<sup>90</sup> Against all these, Fazlul Huq also mobilized a huge number of party workers, students, *krishaks* and *prajas* and was able to bring a good number of Maulanas to participate in the election campaign in his favour and thus Patuakhali ‘attracted unprecedented interest’. In his election campaign Fazlul Huq captivated the hearts of the peasants by saying: “..... from now onwards begins the grim fight between the zamindars and capitalists on the one side and the poor people on the other .... You know much more than I do of the appalling misery that prevails in villages and how thousands are dying everyday in rural areas of Bengal in actual starvation and semi-starvation. The problem of ‘dal bhat’, some kind of coarse cloth to cover nudity is the problem of problems which stares us in the face and which must be solved immediately..... An obvious and immediate solution to the problem will be by effecting drastic economy in the cost of administration, by reducing taxation on the poor, by repeal of such taxation as tells heavily on the masses and by thorough overhauling the Bengal Tenancy Act and other Acts in the interest of the Raiyats....”<sup>91</sup> Thereafter, he promised them that ‘by the grace of God’, he would

abolish zamindari in the shortest possible time.<sup>92</sup> He also publicly declared that the 1937 elections would ‘determine whether there would be Bengali or non-Bengali *raj* in Bengal’.<sup>93</sup> It is to be mentioned here that M.A. Jinnah (who was invited by Ispahani in his letter dated 13 December 1936), also came to Bengal and engaged himself in canvassing for two weeks in favour of the Muslim League candidates in Calcutta, Dacca, Mymensingh, Comilla and Barisal and strongly criticized both the KPP and the Congress and made an appeal to the gathering not to believe in the election *Manifesto* of the KPP particularly its sensational promise to abolish the zamindari system. He said: “Men may promise to abolish the Permanent Settlement tomorrow. But in fact it is moonshine and a false promise.....”<sup>94</sup> At a public meeting in Calcutta where Ispahani was ‘facing a tough opposition’, Jinnah categorically stated: “.... I appeal to you in the name of the solidarity of the 80 million Muslims of India.... to see that those who create difference in your camp at this critical juncture are smashed and the flag of the Muslim League is carried into the Legislature.” In his political task, he was strongly supported by the Muslim press which considered the KPP candidates as the ‘paid agents’ of the Congress, Mahasabha etc. and warned the Muslims that ‘to vote for them is to cut your throat’.<sup>95</sup> During this election campaign, the *Star of India* gave a clarion call: ‘Muslim Voters, Beware! Do You Want Congressmen To Rule Bengal? If not-Send Fazlul Huq To The Wall: Smash Up The Praja Party’.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, on the eve of the election, Fazlul Huq gave an emotional statement: “.....if unfortunately I am defeated, my defeat will be even more glorious than that of Napoleon at Waterloo. The forces of wealthy people arrayed against me....”<sup>97</sup>

### **Elections of 1937:**

The elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 203 seats (as 47 seats were filled without contest) and Bengal Legislative Council in 19 seats (as 11 seats were filled without contest) were held in between 16 - 27 January 1937 and the by-election was held at the end of February 1937. In this election, 594 candidates contested for 203 seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly out of which 120 candidates forfeited their deposit while in the Bengal Legislative Council, 50 candidates contested for 19 seats out of which 7 candidates forfeited their deposit.<sup>98</sup> In the Legislative Assembly, only 40.5% voters (i.e. 2,586,404) cast their votes and in the case of Legislative Council,

the figure was 46.6% ( out of 12005, 5593 cast their votes).<sup>98a</sup> Although there was special arrangement for the female voters, only 5.2% female voters used their voting right.<sup>98b</sup>

### **Election Results:**

In the 1937 elections, the party/group-wise position (as per official results) in the Bengal Legislative Assembly of 250 members was as follows: Congress - 52,<sup>99</sup> Independent (Hindu) - 39, Hindu Nationalist - 3, Hindu Mahasabha - 2, Independent (Muslim) - 43, League Parliamentary Board - 39, KPP - 36, Tippera Krishak Samity - 5, European Group - 25, Anglo-Indian - 4 and Indian Christian - 2.<sup>99a</sup> It is clearly reflected in the table and diagram given below:

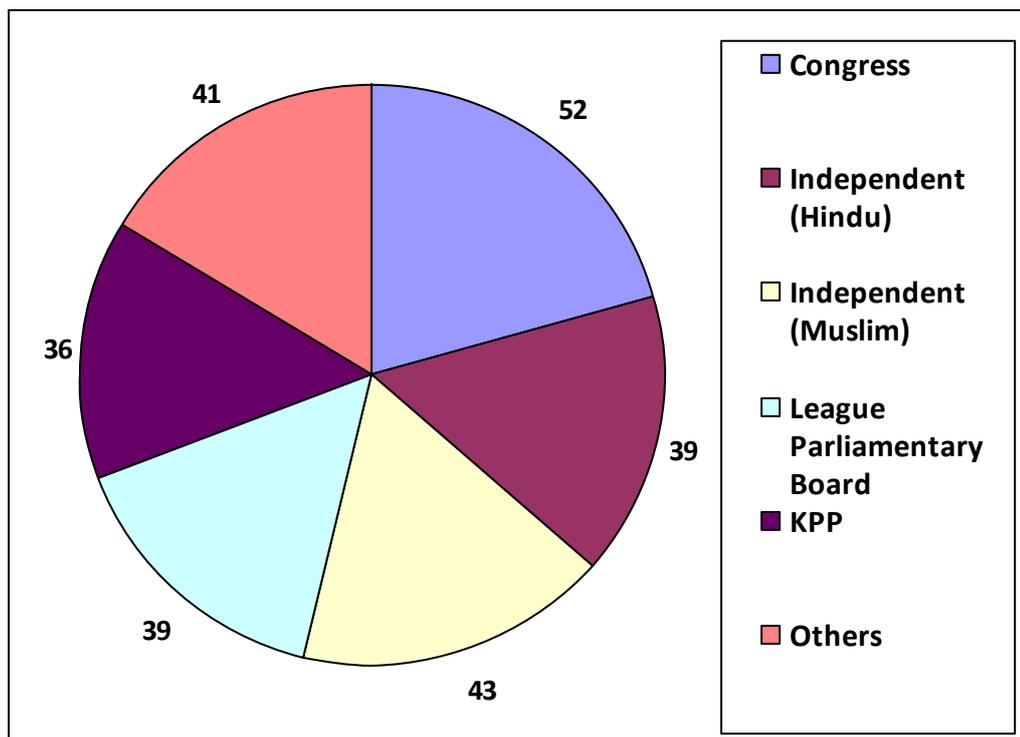
**Table III.4: Results of the Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in January 1937**

Name of the Party	No. of Seats Contested				No. of Seats Won <sup>a</sup>			
	Special Constituency	Urban	Rural	Total	Special Constituency	Urban	Rural	Total
Congress				54	5	11	36	52
Independent (Hindu)					9		6	15
Independent (Scheduled Castes)				128	3		21	24
Hindu Nationalist					1	1	1	03
Hindu Mahasabha							2	02
Independent (Muslim)	4 <sup>b</sup>	6	87	97	2		41(5)	43(5)
LPB <sup>c</sup>	4 <sup>d</sup>	6	72	82	4(1)	6(1)	29(4)	39(4)
KPP <sup>e</sup>		3	72	75			36(1)	36(1)
TKS <sup>f</sup>			10	10			5	05
European Group								25
Anglo-Indian								04
Indian Christian								02
Total								250

- a. Number of seats won uncontested in brackets
- b. 2 special (general) seats, 1 women’s seat and 1 Muslim Chamber of Commerce
- c. League Parliamentary Board
- d. These included 3 special (reserved) seats, viz. 2 women’s and 1 Muslim Chamber of Commerce, and 1 special (general) seat, i.e. Dhaka University Constituency
- e. Krishak Praja Party
- f. Tippera Krishak Samity

This Table is based on the following sources: *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmd. 5589, Vol. XXI; cited in Harun -or – Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906 – 1947*, p. 75; Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*, p. 88 .

**Diagram III.1: Results of the Elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in January 1937**



In the prestige fight in the Patuakhali (rural) constituency, Fazlul Huq achieved an overwhelming victory against Nazimuddin which came as a deep blow to the confidence of the Muslim League. In this contest, Fazlul Huq obtained 13,742 votes while his opponent Nazimuddin secured only 6,308 votes which was less than half of the votes that Mr. Huq was successful to get in his favour.<sup>100</sup> On receiving the news of his victory, Fazlul Huq became overwhelmed and in youthful exuberance uttered: “In the event of the failure of the government to accept the demands of the peasants I will throw the Writers’ Buildings into the Lal Dighi (the lake in front of the red coloured Writers’ Buildings, the secretariat building where the Ministers took their offices)”.<sup>101</sup> But Nazimuddin’s agony for his humiliating defeat in the hands of Fazlul Huq did not last long as he was soon elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in a bye-election (held on 25 February 1937) from the North Calcutta Constituency, vacated by H.S. Suhrawardy who became victorious from two constituencies in the elections of 1937. Fazlul Huq also became successful in Pirozpur North (rural) Mohammedan Constituency where he defeated the League candidate Lehaz-ud-din Ahmed and thus he was elected both from Patuakhali and Pirozpur constituencies.<sup>102</sup> He then decided to give up the Pirozpur seat which was ultimately won by Syed Ahmed Afzal of the KPP in the by-election.

In the Upper Chamber (i.e. Bengal Legislative Council), the Party/Category-wise position is reflected in the table given below:

**Table III.5: Results of the Elections to the Bengal Legislative Council held in 1937**

<b>Party/Category</b>	<b>Direct Election</b>	<b>Indirect Election (elected by the members of the Legislative Assembly</b>	<b>Total</b>
Congress	03	07	10
Independent Hindu & Scheduled Castes	05	07	12
Hindu Nationalist	01	00	01
Hindu Mahasabha	01	00	01
Independent Muslim	09	04	13

Muslim League	07	04	11
Krishak Praja Party	01	02	03
Tippera Krishak Samity	00	00	00
European Group	03	03	06
Anglo-Indian	00	00	00
Indian Christian	00	00	00
Total	30	27	57

Source: Enayetur Rahim, *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal 1937-1943*, p. 91.

In the Legislative Council, the KPP won only 1 seat out of 17 elected Muslim seats. The main reason for the massive failure of the Krishak Praja Party to capture more Council seats was probably the size of the electorate. The voting qualifications for the Council elections were so high that only 3,683 people were given the right to vote of whom only 1,587 persons cast their votes.<sup>103</sup> The results further signified that the League Board had much stronger support base than the KPP amongst the upper section of the society. For example, in the elections to the Legislative Assembly (Lower House), the League did not win a single seat in the district of Barisal, whereas the Party became successful to capture the only Council seat allotted to that district.<sup>104</sup>

1. **Result Analysis:-** The highlight of the election results was that in the Muslim constituencies, Independents won the highest number of seats, while the League Board and the KPP came out the second and third position respectively. While all the seats won by the KPP belonged to the rural constituencies (the bulk of them belonging to the East Bengal), the League Board alone won seats in all types of constituencies special, urban and rural (as the Table III.1 shows) and performed exceptionally well in the western part of Bengal because of the personal influence and popularity of Akram Khan, H.S. Suhrawardy and Abdul Momin among the Muslim voters. Interestingly, although the League Board secured more seats, the percentage of votes it polled was less than that of either the KPP or the Independents taken together. The League Board polled 61.47 per cent of the urban votes, 26.52 per cent of the rural votes and altogether 27.10 per cent of the total Muslim votes. The KPP secured 15.39 per cent of the urban votes, 31.78 per cent of the rural votes and 31.51 per cent of all Muslim votes<sup>105</sup> which was 4.41% more than the League Board. All these are shown in the tables and diagrams given below:

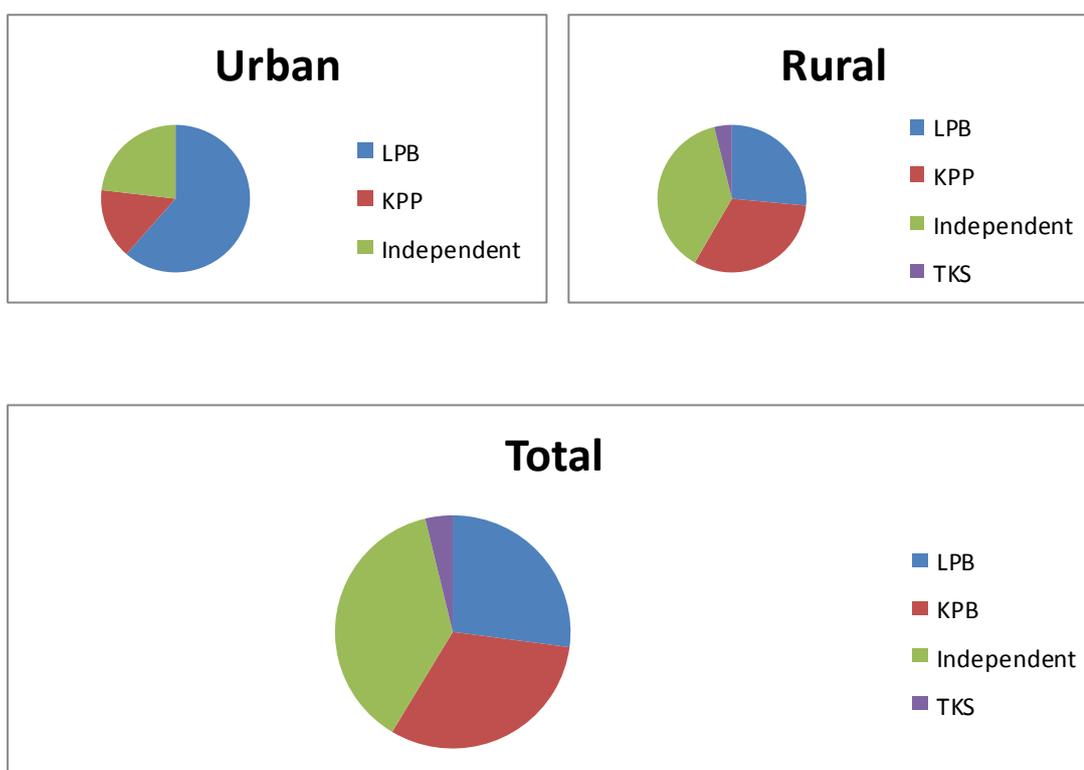
**Table III.6: Percentage of Votes Secured by the Parties in the Muslim Constituencies<sup>a</sup> in Bengal\***

Name of the Party	% of Votes Secured		
	Urban	Rural	Total
LPB	61.47	26.52	27.10
KPP	15.39	31.78	31.51
Independent	23.14	37.87	37.62
TKS	-	3.83	3.77

<sup>a</sup> Special Constituencies excluded

\*This Table is based on the following sources: *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmd. 5589, Vol.XXI; see also, Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-89 and Harun -or – Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

**Diagram III.2: Voting Percentage Secured by the Parties in the Muslim Constituencies (excluding Special Constituencies)**



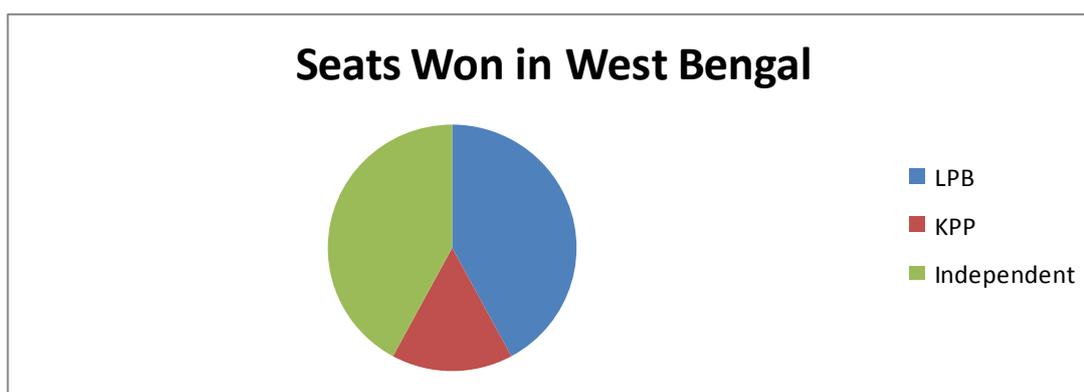
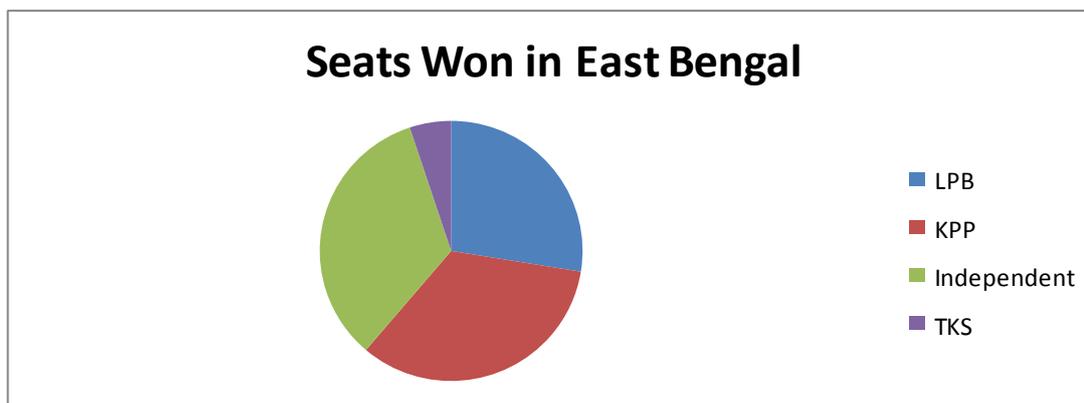
**Table III.7: No. of Seats Won and Percentage of Seats Secured by the Parties in the Muslim Constituencies<sup>a</sup> in Bengal East and West\***

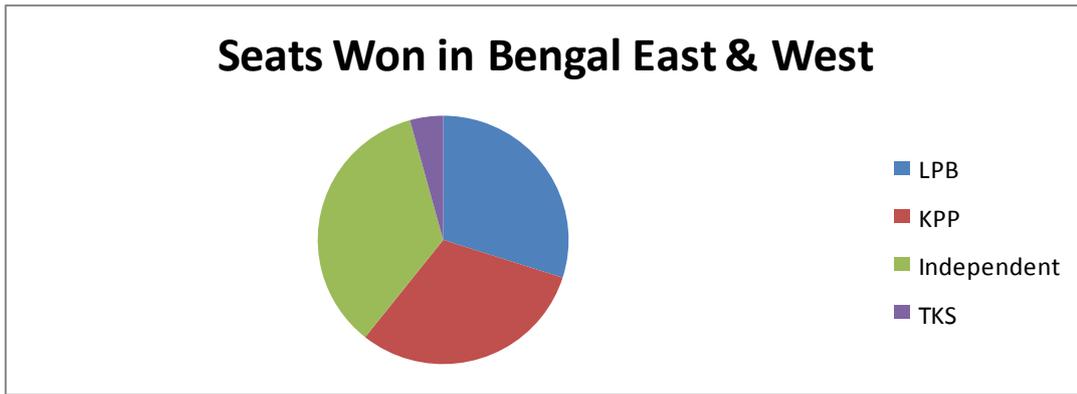
Name of the Party	East Bengal		West Bengal		Bengal(East & West)	
	Seats Won	% of Seats Secured	Seats Won	% of Seats Secured	Seats Won	% of Seats Secured
LPB	27	27.55	08	42.10	35	29.91
KPP	33	33.67	03	15.79	36	30.76
Independent	33	33.67	08	42.10	41	35.04
TKS	05	5.10	-	-	05	4.27
Total	98	99.99	19	99.99	117	99.98

a Special Constituencies excluded

\*The number and percentage of seats won by each party in Eastern and Western parts of Bengal are counted from: *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937-38, Cmd. 5589, Vol. XXI*; cited in Harun -or – Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

**Diagram III.3: No. of Seats Won by the Parties in the Muslim Constituencies (excluding Special Constituencies) in the East and West Bengal**





Although in the urban and rural constituencies (consisting of 117 seats), the KPP won 1(one) seat more than the League Board (as the Table III.7 shows), the addition of 4(four) seats to the League Board from special constituencies (35+4=39 seats) reduced the former to the third position. However, the Tippera Krishak Samity with its 5(five) elected members, decided to make an alliance with the KPP against the League Board<sup>106</sup> which would allow the KPP to count upon 2(two) seats more (36+5=41 seats) than the League Board in the final results. So all the three rival groups (including Independent) shared almost equal number of seats and became ambitious for forming the new ministry.

The results further suggest that within East Bengal, the Krishak Praja Party succeeded more in the districts of Barisal, Faridpur, Khulna, Jessore, Mymensingh, Bogra and Rajshahi which were the strongholds of the *Praja* movement. The League Board achieved success mainly in Dacca and Rangpur and it failed to capture even a single seat in the district of Barisal which was the home town of Fazlul Huq. Unlike the KPP and the League Board, the Independent achieved success throughout the province. The Tippera Krishak Samity confined itself within the district and captured 5 (five) seats out of 10(ten). All these are reflected in the table given below:

**Table III.8: Seats Won by the Parties in the Muslim Constituencies in Different Districts of Bengal\***

Name of the District	Seats Won by Parties				
	LPB	KPP	TKS	Independent	Total Seats
Burdwan	–	–	–	1	1
Birbhum	–	1	–	–	1
Bankura	1	–	–	–	1
Midnapore	–	–	–	1	1
Hooghly	1	–	–	1	2
Howrah	–	–	–	1	1
24-Pargana	3	–	–	1	4
Khustia	–	1	–	1	2
Murshidabad	–	–	–	3	3
Jessore	1	2	–	1	4
Khulna	–	3	–	–	3
Rajshahi	–	2	–	3	5
Dinajpur	1	–	–	2	3
Rangpur	5	2	–	–	7
Jalpaiguri	–	–	–	1	1
Bogra	1	2	–	1	4
Pabna	1	–	–	4	5
Malda	–	1	–	1	2
Dacca	8	1	–	1	10
Mymensingh	4	7	–	5	16
Faridpur	2	3	–	1	6
Barisal	–	7	–	2	9
Tipper	2	–	5	3	10
Noakhali	1	2	–	3	6
Chittagong	1	1	–	3	5
Calcutta	3	–	–	–	3
Total	35	36	5	41	117

\*This Table is derived from *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937* in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38, Cmd.5589, Vol. XXI; cited in Harun -or – Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

It is to be mentioned here that the League Board inspite of Jinnah's sincere efforts, failed to achieve an extraordinary success in all the Provincial Assemblies in India and secured 104 seats out of the total 482 Muslim seats and polled only 4.8% of the total Muslim votes. In the Muslim majority provinces, the Board obtained the highest number of seats in Bengal (35 out of 117 seats) and only 2 seats in Punjab and failed to open its account in Sind and NWFP. In the Muslim minority provinces, the Board got the highest number of seats in UP (29 out of 64 Muslim seats) but failed to secure even a single seat in Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces. All these are reflected in the table given below:

**Table III.9: No. of Seats Won and Percentage of Seats Secured by the League Parliamentary Boards in different Provinces of India\***

	Name of the province	Total Muslim Seats <sup>a</sup>	Seats Won	% of Seats Won
Muslim Majority Provinces	Bengal	117	35	29.91
	Punjab	84	02	2.38
	Sind	33	—	—
	NWFP	36	—	—
Total		270	37	13.70
Muslim Minority Provinces	UP	64	29	45.31
	Madras	28	10	35.71
	Bombay	29	19	65.51
	Assam	34	09	26.47
	Bihar	39	—	—
	Orissa	04	—	—
	CP	14	—	—
Total		212	67	31.60
Grand Total		482	104	21.57

a Special Seats excluded

\*The Table is based on the data collected from: *Star of India*, 2 March 1937, p. 5; *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmd. 5589, Vol. XXI; cited in Harun -or – Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

From the earlier tables and diagrams, it is quite clear that in the elections of 1937, not a single political party was able to get an absolute majority in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. The strength of the Congress, Krishak Praja Party and Muslim League in the Bengal Assembly was almost the same, though the Congress had an edge and emerged as the single largest party. The approximation of number was such that no single party could form a ministry of its own. So the formation of a coalition ministry became inevitable. The best option was the KPP-Congress coalition or a KPP ministry backed by the Congress. As both the parties (i.e. the KPP and the Congress) had the strength of 96 members, they needed the support of another 30 members ( $250 \div 2 + 1$ ) to prove the majority in the House and form a coalition ministry and there was the scope to reach at that magic figure (i.e. 126) with the support of the Independents. Fazlul Huq initially wanted to form a coalition ministry (headed by him) with the Bengal Congress (led by Sarat Chandra Bose) and talks between the KPP and the Bengal Congress began at the positive end. It is to be mentioned here that having the highest strength in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, the Congress could come forward to form a ministry but the All India Congress Committee at that point of time was suffering from indecision. Bengal Congress members of all the factions, such as J.C. Gupta, B.C. Roy, K.S. Roy, S.C. Bose and T.C. Goswami wanted to take office in alliance with the Muslim – Namasudra party of Fazlul Huq.<sup>107</sup> Sarat Chandra Bose assured support to Fazlul Huq on condition that the Praja ministry would release all the political prisoners including the anarchists. But the talks between the leaders of the KPP and the Bengal Congress failed as the leaders could not agree on the question of priority in the proposed coalition ministry: the Congress insisting on the release of political prisoners and the KPP harping on land reforms including the abolition of the zamindari system. The discussion among the leaders of the KPP and the Congress went on for hours at the residence of J.M. Sen Gupta. But as both sides insisted on their point, the discussion ultimately broke down.<sup>108</sup> According to some, the negotiations did not materialize because of obstinate insistence of Fazlul Huq on the inclusion of Nalini Ranjan Sarker (who was once a well-known Congress leader but later left the Congress and was said to have given financial assistance to Fazlul Huq) in the Cabinet. But the Congress leaders were deadly against of it and Nalini Ranjan Sarker ultimately played an active role in bringing about rapprochement between the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party at his residence.<sup>108a</sup> The contemporary newspapers also expressed their opinion on the

issues of disagreement between the KPP and the Congress. The *Forward* wrote on 22 February 1937: “We are in a position to state that the proposal for a combination of the Congress party and the Praja Party in order to form the first Ministry in Bengal has been finally dropped. The inclusion of the release of political prisoners in the programme of the Praja Party roused the hope that the Congress Party and Praja Party might work together either in opposition or in office but it has been discovered... that the Praja leaders are not prepared to make the question a cause of war with the Governor and all they intend is to move resolutions in the Assembly recommending that course....”

Ultimately the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) decided not to accept the office and the official announcement was made on 13 March 1937.<sup>109</sup> The Congress Working Committee (CWC) also did not favour this coalition and Nehru directed that the Congress should not negotiate for membership of any coalition in Bengal which would give a chance to the Muslim League for coming to power in Bengal. The Muslim League leaders realized the danger of the Praja-Congress coalition. When the Leaguers saw that the formation of a KPP-Congress coalition ministry became impossible in Bengal, they took the opportunity and Jinnah as well as the League Board leaders of Bengal offered their support to Fazlul Huq and assured their full co-operation including the acceptance of his premiership in a coalition with the League.<sup>110</sup> Mr. Huq had, therefore, no other alternative but to enter into a coalition with the Bengal Muslim League led by Khwaja Nazimuddin and Nawab Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca. On a positive note, Mr. Huq declared on 31 January 1937, that ‘the Praja Party would co-operate with the other Muslim groups in the Bengal Assembly’.<sup>111</sup> On 13 February 1937, the *Star of India* in a special late edition published a statement issued by Fazlul Huq, Ispahani, Shamsuddin Ahmed, H.S. Suhrawardy and K. Habibullah to the effect that the leaders of the Krishak Praja Party and the Muslim League agreed to co-operate for the purpose of working the constitution. The statement was as follows: “In response to the very strong feeling in the Province that the Muslim members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly should work together and the desire expressed by all the members that could be consulted, the leaders of the League and Praja parties have decided to cooperate under the leadership of Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq for the purpose of working the constitution and, as a result of discussions, have arrived at an agreement subject to the ratification of the

parties”. Thereafter, a meeting of the members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Board who were elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly and also a meeting of the executive committee of the Krishak Praja Party held on 14 - 15 February 1937, respectively, ratified the move by the leaders for a “Praja-League combine”. The decision was formally made public through a joint formal statement on 26 February 1937, by both Nawab Habibullah of Dacca (President of the BPML) and Fazlul Huq.<sup>112</sup> Both the KPP and the Muslim League agreed to a common 14-point parliamentary programme primarily at the expense of ‘the toning down of the more extreme portions of the former’s original manifesto’. For example, instead of an outright abolition of the zamindari system (which was the first and foremost electoral promise of the KPP), it was agreed to appoint a committee of inquiry on the matter.

In spite of the Praja-League entente,<sup>113</sup> the formation of a ministry proved to be a ‘delicate problem’<sup>114</sup> for Fazlul Huq as a number of influential members elected in the Bengal Assembly who were prominent zamindars, began to mobilize support in their favour in the name of territorial or other parochial interests with the purpose of ensuring and securing seats in the cabinet.<sup>115</sup> The most prominent of them were Masud Ali Khan Panni (a leading landlord of Karatia, East Bengal), Nawab K.G.M. Farooqui (a big zamindar of Comilla, East Bengal) and Nawab Musharraf Hossain (an influential zamindar and a tea magnate of Jalpaiguri, North Bengal). Being a resident of North Bengal, Nawab Musharraf Hossain posed a threat by organizing the Assembly of North Bengal Group consisting of 25 members to protect what they called ‘the legitimate rights of North Bengal to its share in the administration of the country’.<sup>116</sup>

It took almost three weeks for Fazlul Huq to form a ministry of 11 members of whom 6 were Muslims (including the premier) and 5 Hindus (though they constituted the smallest group in the coalition) and the Governor of Bengal finally accepted Mr. Huq’s proposals (for the formation of eleven-member Cabinet) on 2 March 1937.<sup>117</sup> Among the 6 Muslim ministers, it was decided to have 3 from the Krishak Praja Party (Fazlul Huq, Syed Nausher Ali and Shamsuddin Ahmed) and the rest (i.e. 3) from the Muslim League (Nawab Habibullah, Sir Nazimuddin and H.S. Suhrawardy). On the day before the submission of the final panel of ministers to the Governor, Shamsuddin Ahmed, the Secretary of the KPP was dropped and Nawab Musharraf Hossain of the

Muslim League included in his place which ultimately helped the Muslim League to make stronger its position in the Cabinet with its 4 members than that of the KPP which had 3, including the Premier. According to Abul Mansur Ahmed, Fazlul Huq gave up the idea of Shamsuddin largely because of the opposition from the Governor (secret I.B. report against him)<sup>118</sup> and the European Group who considered him (Shamsuddin) a person of ‘extreme views’<sup>119</sup> which created great resentment among the young brigade of the KPP and a few months later, finally caused a split of the Party,<sup>120</sup> both parliamentary wing and the organization, into two sections – one led by Shamsuddin Ahmed (who later formed the Independent Praja Party) and the other remaining loyal to Fazlul Huq. It was also decided that that among the 5 Hindu members, there would be 3 Caste Hindu ministers (Nalini Ranjan Sarker, Sir Bijoy Prasad Singh Roy and Maharaja Srish Chanda Nandi who belonged to the Nationalist Party) and 2 would be Scheduled caste (Mukunda Bihari Mullick and Prasanna Dev Raikat who belonged to the Scheduled Caste Party). It should be mentioned here that the Nationalist Party led by J.N. Basu, having a strength of 14 members, got 3 and Scheduled Caste Party with 22 members, obtained 2 Cabinet seats.<sup>121</sup> In this context, Fazlul Huq in a press interview said: “To the great Hindu community, I have cheerfully given an equal representation in the Cabinet with the Muslims because I recognize that although the exigencies of a political situation may have reduced the proportion of cooperative Hindus in the legislature to the position of a negligible minority, the representation to which any community is entitled in the counsels of Government must be determined by much higher consideration than the mere counting of heads of its members in the legislature”.<sup>122</sup> It is to be noted here that an attempt was made to include Syama Prasad Mookerjee in the Cabinet which ultimately did not materialize because of the strong opposition of the Muslims. In an executive meeting held on 1 April 1937, the Bengal Muslim Youngmen League passed a resolution to the effect: “This meeting learns with surprise and resentment that Prof. Humayun Kabir, M.L.C., tried his utmost for the inclusion of Mr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, in the Cabinet in utter disregard of the wishes of the entire Muslim students for reasons best know to him”.<sup>123</sup>

As per the schedule, the following members were sworn in as Cabinet Ministers in the Praja-League Coalition Ministry on 1 April 1937 and the portfolios were allotted to them<sup>124</sup> as herein under:

**Table III.10: List of Cabinet Ministers, their Parties and their Portfolios in the Praja- League Ministry**

Sl. No.	Name of the Cabinet Minister	Name of the Party/Category	Name of the Portfolio
1.	The Hon'ble Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq, Chief Minister	KPP	Education
2.	” ” Sir Nazimuddin	Muslim League	Home
3.	” ” Khwaja Habibullah	Muslim League	Agriculture and Industries
4.	” ” H.S. Suhrawardy	Muslim League	Commerce and Labour
5.	” ” Syed Nausher Ali	KPP	Public Health and Local Self-Government
6.	” ” Musharraf Hossain <sup>a</sup>	Independent/ League Board	Judiciary and Legislature
7.	” ” Nalini Ranjan Sarker	Caste Hindu	Finance
8.	” ” Sir B.P. Singh Roy	Caste Hindu	Revenue
9.	” ” Prasanna Dev Raikat	Scheduled Caste	Excise and Forest
10.	” ” M.B. Mullick	Scheduled Caste	Co-operative, Credit and Rural Indebtedness
11.	” ” Maharaja Srish Chandra Nandi	Caste Hindu	Communication and Works

Source: *Star of India*, 1 April 1937, p. 5.

a In the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937, Musharraf Hossain contested as an independent candidate and was returned unopposed. Originally he belonged to the League Parliamentary Board.

A close look at the composition of the Ministry reveals that out of 11 members, 6 were zamindars (Khwaja Habibullah, Sir Nazimuddin, Musharraf Hossain, Sir B.P. Singh Roy, Srish Chanda Nandi and Prasanna Dev Raikat), 1 capitalist (Nalini Ranjan Sarker) and 3 lawyer-cum-politicians (Fazlul Huq, H.S. Suhrawardy and Nausher Ali)<sup>125</sup> which caused great resentment and dissatisfaction

among the ‘radicals’ in the KPP who described the Ministry as ‘subservient to British Imperialism and Bengal Landlordism’.<sup>126</sup> Certainly rural Bengal and, particularly, the *krishaks* and *prajas* were not at all adequately represented in the Cabinet which was basically filled up by urban people belonging to zamindar class (9 out of 11) and most of its members (at least 6 out of 11) were returned from special constituencies who did not have any contact with the people at large.<sup>127</sup> As the zamindari elements dominated the Cabinet, it was practically impossible to implement the election manifesto of the KPP and Fazlul Huq was to shelve the *dal-bhat* issue on which he fought the elections. It was almost a year later (in July 1938), Fazlul Huq was to circulate a note among his Cabinet colleagues in which he complained: “I have been repeatedly suggesting that something should be done which will catch the imagination of the people and make the Ministry popular but all my suggestions have been turned down as either impracticable or difficult or harmful..... I wish to emphasize the point that we are a thoroughly unpopular lot. I have heard it said by more than one responsible person that the public impression is that the present Cabinet is a “bankers’ Cabinet”.<sup>128</sup> It clearly resembles the fact that he had ‘responsibilities’ but he did not enjoy much ‘power’ to fulfill those responsibilities and satisfy his own *krishaks* and *prajas*. In his Cabinet, ‘the advocates of ryats, if any, will be clearly outvoted by those of the landlords..... Although Fazlul Huq was the Premier, he did not have much ‘authority’, ‘command’ and ‘control’ over his Cabinet members and he was ‘at the mercy of reactionary groups and vested interests represented by the Nalini-Nazimuddin-Musharruff – B.P. Singh Roy combine’.<sup>129</sup> Not only that, the British officials in Bengal clearly preferred Nazimuddin to Huq and ‘used him as a foil against the Chief Minister and the KPP within the ministry’.<sup>130</sup>

But ‘this was the only kind of ministry Fazlul Huq could form’<sup>131</sup> and he tried his best to cool down his own party members who became angry due to the exclusion of Shamsuddin Ahmed from the list of the Cabinet ministers. So an emergency meeting of the KPP leaders in Calcutta was called in the evening of the day on which the Bengal Cabinet was sworn in. After heated discussions, the meeting decided to form a six member advisory board with 3 members from the KPP namely, Fazlul Huq, Syed Nausher Ali and Abul Mansur Ahmed and 3 members from the Muslim League, namely, Nawab Habibullah, Sir Nazimuddin and H.S. Suhrawardy<sup>132</sup> which became defunct at its very first meeting because of disagreement on the question of

ministers' salary and abolition of the zamindari system.<sup>133</sup> But the formation of the advisory board (which was termed as 'Super Cabinet' by the critics) could not satisfy the 'rebellious' members of the KPP who consequently formed an Independent group within the Party and decided to contest in the election of the Speaker of the new Assembly. In this case, the Congress committed the first mistake – a Himalayan blunder<sup>134</sup> by putting up its own candidate, Kumar Sibsekhareswar Roy. The coalition supported by the European bloc proposed the name of Khan Bahadur (later Sir) Azizul Haque for Speakership. As a matter of strategy, the Congress should have backed the opposition candidate, Tamizuddin Khan who was supported by the Independent group of the Krishak Praja Party which resulted in the division of the votes of the Opposition. In the first voting for the Speakership, Azizul Haque got 116, Sibsekhareswar Roy – 83 and Tamizuddin – 42 votes. In the second voting, the name of Tamizuddin Khan was dropped and consequently Azizul Haque obtained 158 votes and Sibsekhareswar Roy got 82 votes.<sup>135</sup> The Congress failure to support Tamizuddin Khan for Speakership paved the way for the easy victory of the Opposition and 'injected a fresh dose of communal feeling into the legislative politics of Bengal'.<sup>136</sup> In order to teach a good lesson to the dissident group (led by Shamsuddin Ahmed) of the KPP, Fazlul Huq convened a meeting of the Bengal Krishak Praja Assembly group on 1 September 1937. After a prolonged heated deliberation, 17 dissident Praja M.L.A.s (including Shamsuddin Ahmed) were expelled from the Party which ultimately resulted in reducing the strength of the Praja Party in the Assembly to 32. The virulent opposition from the Congress, the dissatisfaction of the Hindus and also of the *krishaks* and *prajas*, the split within the KPP and the desertion of a considerable number of the Party members, created an awkward situation for Fazlul Huq which compelled him to join the Muslim League publicly on 15 October 1937 at its Lucknow session hoping to save the Ministry and to turn 'personal loss into political gain'. He at first, signed the creed of the League in the midst of a huge gathering which embraced him with shouts of "Allah-o-Akbar" and applauded him with 'Sher-e-Bangla' (The Tiger of Bengal).<sup>137</sup> In return, Fazlul Huq declared that "he would be under the banner of the League without any reservation". Thus he came under the 'control' of Jinnah and his Muslim League and a new chapter in his life as well as in the history of Muslim politics in Bengal began. He openly remarked: "I submit to my leader Mr. Jinnah for all my future work and

assured him that I shall abide by his decision.... I have entirely thrown myself at the disposal of Mr. Jinnah.... I am prepared for any sacrifice when Islam demands it”<sup>138</sup>

In this manner, Fazlul Huq who was a non-communal at heart and fought to protect Hindu-Muslim unity, compromised with the communal forces and just within three years, he was invited by Jinnah to move the Lahore Resolution (at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League held on 22 March 1940 at Lahore) which demanded separate homeland for the Muslims and paved the way for the creation of ‘Pakistan’ (sacred land). If the formation of a KPP-Congress coalition ministry or a KPP ministry backed by the Congress would have come to reality in Bengal after the elections of 1937, it is to be said that there would have been a complete change in the political dynamics of Bengal vis-a-vis India.

## Notes and References:

1. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 September 1936; see also, Amalendu De, *Pakistan Prastab O Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1989, Appendix A, pp. 218-222.
2. For more details, see, Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachhar* (in Bengali), Dhaka, 1988, Vol. I, pp. 91-99; also see, Rangalal Sen, "Elite Conflict and Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947", in S.R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds.), *Bangladesh History and Culture*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 87.
3. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10 September 1936.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-47*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 75.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 10a. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 63.
11. M. A.H. Ispahani, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him*, Karachi, 1976, p.14.
12. *The Statesman*, May 25, 1936; see also, Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 79; *Star of India*, 25 May 1935, p. 5.
13. Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
14. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 87.
15. *Star of India*, 16 June 1936, p. 5.
- 15a. *The Statesman*, 16 June 1936; *Star of India*, 24 June 1936, p. 5.
16. *The Statesman*, 13 July 1936.

17. S.M Azizul Huq Shahjahan, *Shatabdir Kanthaswar, Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1387 B.S., pp. 89-94.
- 17a. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.
18. M.A.H. Ispahani, *op.cit.*, pp. 20-23; also see, Rangalal Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 85.
19. Soumitra De, *Nationalism and Separatism in Bengal: A Study of India's Partition*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 219-220.
20. Z.H. Zaidi (ed.), *M.A. Jinnah – Ispahani Correspondence, 1936 – 1948*, Karachi, 1975, p. 77.
21. M.A.H. Ispahani, *op.cit.*, p. 23.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
23. *The Statesman*, August 26, 1936; see also, Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937 – 1947*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 74.
24. Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 143 – 144.
25. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 96.
26. The prominent leaders of the Krishak Praja Party thought that they would lose the support of the Scheduled Caste population of Bengal if they would fight the election at the provincial level on Muslim League ticket. They also realized the fact that the selection of the Muslim representatives by the Provincial Working Committee (and not by Jinnah), would help them to get the support and cooperation of the Muslim League workers and nomination could open back-door for the unwanted person who would create disturbing situation. See, Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 96 – 97.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 97; see also, Humayun Kabir, *Muslim Politics: 1906-1942*, Calcutta, 1943, p. 10.
- 27a. Jinnah to Fazlul Huq, 4 October 1936, Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937*, Dhaka, 1972; p. 50.
28. Statement Issued by A.K. Fazlul Huq, see *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 September 1936.
29. *Ibid.*, see also, *The Statesman*, 1 September 1936.

30. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 74.
31. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 September 1936.
32. *The Star of India*, 1 September 1936.
33. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 September 1936.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Social History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1970, p. 33.
37. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 September 1936.
38. *Ibid.*, 11 September 1936.
39. *Ibid.*, 10 September 1936.
40. A.S.M. Abdur Rab, *Sahid Suhrawardy* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1968, pp. 20 – 21.
41. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 78 – 79.
42. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 11 September 1936.
43. The Programme of work in the Assembly outlined by the Muslim League Parliamentary Board. See, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 September 1936.
44. A.K. Fazlul Huq' reply to critics, see, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 September 1936.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. S.M. Azizul Huq Shahjahan, *op.cit.*, pp. 115 – 122.
52. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 30 October 1936, Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.* pp. 33-35.
53. *Star of India*, 3 November 1936, p. 1.
54. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

55. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 October 1936, p. 10.
56. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 100 – 103.
57. Enayetur Rahim, *Provincial Autonomy in Bengal (1937 – 1943)*, Rajshahi, 1981, pp. 25 – 30.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 30 – 31.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 43, fn. 196; The women were given the right to cast their votes in 1925, see, Humaira Momen, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
61. *The Statesman*, 13 January 1937.
62. *Ibid.*, 14 January 1937.
63. Enayetur Rahim, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
64. *Star of India*, 11 February 1936, p. 3.
65. *Ibid.*, 26 December 1933, p. 6.
66. *Ibid.*, 14 November 1936, p. 9.
67. Humaira Momen, *op.cit.*, pp. 62 – 65.
68. *Star of India*, 12 June 1936, p. 1; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906 – 1947*, Dhaka, 2003, p. 54.
69. *Election Manifesto* of the League Board, *Star of India*, 12 September 1936, p. 4; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*, p. 55.
70. Fazlul Huq's presidential speech in *Star of India*, 15 July 1936, p. 6.
71. *Star of India*, 18 July 1936, p. 3; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 56; Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 113.
72. *Ibid.*, 12 September 1936, pp. 9, 12.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Congress Election Manifesto*, (Bombay 1936), pp. 1-12.
75. *Ibid.*; see also, Jawaharlal Nehru's speech in *The Statesman*, 10 January 1937, p. 12.

76. *Circular* (n.d.), AICC G-24 (i) 1936; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, pp. 58-59.
77. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 81.
- 77a. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 November 1936.
- 77b. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1936.
78. Khwaja Habibullah, Sir Nazimuddin, Nawab Mohiuddin Farooqui, Nawab Musharraf Hossain and Khan Bahadur Azizul Huq subscribed Rs.5,000/- each and Professor A.F. Rahman Rs.2,500/-, *Star of India*, 25 May 1936, p. 1.
79. *Ibid.*, 27 August 1936, p. 1.
80. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1937, p. 8; *ibid.*, 25 January 1937, p. 1.
81. Humaira Momen, *op.cit.*, p. 61.
82. Kamruddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
83. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 85.
84. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, n. 2, p. 127.
85. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 86.
86. In the Patuakhali Constituency, the polling was held on 23 January between 8 A.M. and 4.30 P.M. and the counting was taken place on 27 January 1937.
- 86a. B.D. Habibullah, *Shere Bangla* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1962, p. 60.
87. Imran Hossain, *Bangali Muslim Buddhijibi: Chinta O Karma* (in Bengali), Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1993, p. 171.
88. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 10 January 1937.
89. *Azad*, 17 January 1937.
90. Joya Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p. 85.
91. Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Shesh Adhyaya* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1966, pp. 27-28.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
94. *Star of India*, 4 January 1937, p. 5.
95. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1937, p. 8.

96. *Ibid.*, 13 January 1937, p. 5.
97. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 January 1937, p. 9.
98. Jahanara Begum, *The Last Decade of Undivided Bengal: Parties, Politics & Personalities*, Calcutta 1994, pp.34-36.
- 98a. *Ibid.*
- 98b. Enayetur Rahim, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-85.
99. According to Prof. John Gallagher, in the Bengal Assembly Election of 1937, the Congress won 54 seats (43 of the 48 General Seats, 6 of the seats reserved for the Depressed Classes and 5 of the seats reserved for Labour) out of the total 250 seats (which was 21.6%). See, John Gallagher, "Congress in Decline: Bengal, 1930 to 1939", in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1973), p. 643.
- 99a. *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmd. 5589, Vol. XXI; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 74.
100. *Franchise: Elections in Bengal 1936-37*; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
101. Jahanara Bengum, *op.cit.*, p. 36.
102. *The Statesman*, 28 January 1937.
103. *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 in Parliamentary Papers, 1937-38*, Cmd. 5589, Vol. XXI; see also, Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 79.
104. *Ibid.*
105. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-89.
106. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4 February 1937, p. 13.
107. Nalinaksha Sanyal to Nehru, 20 February 1937; File E5/840 of 1937, AICC.
108. Abdul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 144-46.
- 108a. Kalipada Biswas, *op.cit.*, n. 28, pp. 32 and 36-37; see also Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 93.
109. *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, Vol. I, 1937, p. 8.
110. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, n. 2, pp. 136-137.
111. *Indian Annual Register*, Calcutta, Vol. I, 1937, p. 4.

112. *Shila Sen, op.cit., p. 91.*
113. See *Star of India*, 15 February 1937, p. 6; *ibid.*, 17 February 1937, p. 5; *ibid.*, 20 February 1937, p. 10; also *ibid.*, 27 February 1937, p. 9.
114. *A Brief Summary of Political Events in the Presidency of Bengal during the year 1937*, Government of India, Home Department (Political), File No.132/38, in National Archives of India, New Delhi.
115. Anderson to Linlithgow, 9 March 1937; see also *Star of India*, 11 March 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, 16 March 1937, p. 4.
116. *Star of India*, 27 February 1937, p. 9; see also *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 February 1937, p. 5.
117. *Indian Annual Register*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1937, p. 9.
118. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, n. 2, p. 142.
119. Anderson to Linlithgow, 7 April 1937, *Bengal Governor's Reports to Viceroy*, R/3/2/2, p. 3. Anderson wrote: “..... in deference to my very strong views he (Fazlul Huq) gave up the idea of getting into the Cabinet a very useful lieutenant of his own, by name Shamsuddin – a capable person of extreme views.....”
120. On 1 September 1937, Fazlul Huq purged 17 ‘disloyal’ members (1 Independent, 5 Tippera Krishak Samity and 11 original members of the KPP) of the Krishak Praja Assembly Party including Shamsuddin Ahmed, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Abu Hossain Sarkar, Ghyasuddin Ahmed and Nawabzada Syed Hasan Ali. On 11 September 1937, Shamsuddin’s faction of the KPP organized the Fifth Annual General Meeting at Gaibanda in Rangpur district at which a vote of no confidence against Fazlul Huq was held and the members who remained ‘loyal’ to him (Mr. Huq) were expelled. See, *Star of India*, 13 September 1937, p. 8. But that meeting was declared illegal by Fazlul Huq who six days later, convened the Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Party in which new office-bearers were elected with himself as President and Abul Quasem, a member of the Bengal Assembly elected as an independent candidate, as Secretary. See, *Star of India*, 17 September 1937, p. 4.
121. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 April 1937.

122. *Star of India*, 25 March 1937.
123. *Ibid.*, 5 April 1937.
124. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1937, p. 5.
125. The profession of Mukunda Bihari Mullick, a Scheduled Caste representative, is unknown.
126. Nausher Ali, after he resigned from the Cabinet in June 1938, made same kind of rundown on Fazlul Huq's Ministry. Nausher Ali to Fazlul Huq, 14 June 1938, *Star of India*, 25 June 1937, p. 8.
127. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 31 March 1937.
128. Confidential note by Fazlul Huq, B.P. Singh Roy Papers; see also Partha Chatterjee, "Bengal Politics and the Muslim Masses, 1920-47", *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, March 1982, Vol. XX, No. 1, pp. 37-38.
129. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 95.
130. Partha Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-38.
131. *Ibid.*
132. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 123.
133. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.
134. Kalipada Biswas, *op.cit.*, n. 28, p. 104.
135. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 97.
136. *Ibid.*
137. Sirajuddin Ahmed, *Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali), Dacca, 1997, p. 94.
138. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 October 1937.

## 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes and References:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

119. *Ibid.*
120. N.N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, Vol. I, p. 117.
121. Herbert to Linlithgow, 23 November 1940, Report No. 22; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 66.
122. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 8 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 281, pp. 21-23; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 119.
123. Herbert to Linlithgow, 23 February 1941, Confidential Report No. 3; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 78.
124. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 9 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-26; cited in Harun-or-Rashid *op.cit.*, p. 120.
125. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 8 March 1941, cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
126. Jinnah to Fazlul Huq, 15 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 281, p. 27; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
127. Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 March 1941, Confidential Report No. 5; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 82.
128. *Azad*, 26 March 1941.
129. Jinnah to Raghbir Ahsan, 23 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 204, p. 129; see also, *Azad*, 25 March 1941, p. 5; cited in Harun-or-Rashid *op.cit.*, p. 120.
130. Formuzul Huq, Assistant Secretary (BPML), to the President of the AIML, 9 April 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 281, pp. 28-29; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 121.
131. Fazlul Huq to Abdul Hamid Khan (Madras), 30 March 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, *ibid.*, p. 27; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
132. Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 May 1941, Confidential Report No. 9; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 92.
133. *Ibid.*
134. Raghbir Ahsan to Jinnah, 15 May 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 204, pp. 145 - 56; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

135. Khwaja Nazimuddin to Jinnah (Strictly Confidential), 10 June 1941, *Quaid-i-Azam Papers*, F. 392, pp. 45 - 48; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 123.
136. Ispahani to Jinnah, 12 June 1941, Zaidi (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 171-73; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
137. Jinnah to R. Lumby, Governor of Bombay, 21 July 1941, Jamil-Ud-Din Ahmad (ed.), *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, Vol. I, Lahore, 1952, pp. 333-35; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 123.
138. Herbert to Linlithgow, 8 September 1941, Report No. 16; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 108.
- 138a. *Ibid.*
139. Fazlul Huq to Liaquat Ali Khan, 8 September 1941, Zaidi (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 647-48; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, Appendix IV, pp. 264-267, see also, *The Statesman*, 11 September 1941.
140. *The Statesman*, 11 September 1941
141. *Ibid.*
142. *Ibid.*
143. *Ibid.*
144. *Ibid.*
145. *Ibid.*
146. *Ibid.*
147. *The Statesman*, 12 September 1941.
148. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 September 1941, Confidential Report No. 17; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 111.
149. Herbert to Linlithgow, 18 October 1941, Confidential Report No. 18; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 113.
150. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 September 1941, cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 111-112.
151. Jinnah to Ispahani, 26 September 1941, Zaidi (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 188; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

152. Fazlul Huq to Linlithgow, 27 September 1941; Linlithgow to Fazlul Huq, 5 October 1941, Office of Secretary to Government of Bengal, file no.15, 1941-42, National Archives of India (NAI), microfilm no.3169; cited in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal 1920-1947*, OUP, New Delhi, 2014, p. 221.
- 152a. Herbert to Linlithgow, 1 October 1941.
- 152b. Herbert to Linlithgow, 18 October 1941, Confidential Report No. 18; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), Vol. II, *op.cit.*, p. 114.
153. Linlithgow to Herbert, 12 October 1941, *Formation of New Government*; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 126.
154. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 October 1941, Confidential Report No. 19; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 116.
155. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Qaid-E-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him*, Karachi, 1966, p. 49; see also, Amalendu De, *Islam in Modern India*, Calcutta, 1982 p. 157.
156. *Ibid*; see also, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 November 1941.
157. *The Statesman*, 17 November 1941.
158. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 221.
159. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding The Muslim Mind*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 204.
160. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 225.
- 160a. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 221.
- 160b. M.A.H. Ispahani, *op.cit.*, 1976, p. 29.
161. Herbert to Linlithgow, 5 December 1941, Confidential Report No. 22; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 123.
- 161a. *The Statesman*, 30 November 1941.
162. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 131.
163. Ispahani to Jinnah, 1 December 1941, M.A.H. Ispahani, *op.cit.*, 1967, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 46; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 132.
164. Shila Sen, *ibid*.

165. *The Statesman*, 1 December 1941.
166. *Ibid.*
167. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, *Leaves From a Diary*, Calcutta, 1993, pp. 38, 46, 51.
168. *I.A.R.*, 1941, Vol. II, p. 149; *Star of India*, 5 December 1941; see also, Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 133.
169. *Resolutions of the All India Muslim League from April 1941 to April 1942*, Delhi, n.d., p. 39; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 133-34.
170. Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 December 1941, Report No. 23; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 125-126.
171. *Ibid.*
172. Amalendu De, *op.cit.*, p. 160.
173. Jinnah to Ispahani, 13 December 1941, Zaidi (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 225; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 127.
174. Herbert to Linlithgow, 20 December 1941, Report No. 23; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 126.
175. Fazlul Huq, *Bengal Today*, Calcutta, 1944, pp. 5-7.

# 5

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

The second Huq Ministry which was known as the Progressive Coalition Ministry was composed of 9 Ministers, of whom 5 including the Premier were Muslims and 4 were Hindus. The new Ministry was formed in two phases - partly on 11 December and partly on 18 December 1941. The delay was probably because of the exploration of any possibility of a ministry under Khwaja Nazimuddin (the leader of the Bengal Legislature Muslim League Party) and the question of arresting Sarat Chandra Bose,<sup>1</sup> the Deputy Leader of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party and the elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose who was expected to hold the Home portfolio in the Ministry. On 11 December 1941, only three members of the Cabinet, namely Fazlul Huq (Chief Minister), Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Nawab Khwaja Habibullah (who along with his seven or eight followers<sup>2</sup> decided to join with Huq's side following the Muslim League Assembly Party election), took the oaths of office. Six more ministers were sworn in on 18 December. This was part of the strategy pursued by the then Governor J.A. Herbert as he thought it necessary 'to play for time'.<sup>3</sup> Although the Bengal Congress (which earlier resolved to remain neutral towards a ministry formed by Fazlul Huq but to oppose Khwaja Nazimuddin in any event), stayed outside, the Progressive Coalition Ministry in an Assembly of 250 seats, commanded a comfortable majority (unlike a marginal majority of the previous Coalition Ministry) in the House and it did not have to depend on the votes of the European members. The Muslim League, on the other hand, attacked Fazlul Huq and his Coalition Ministry (which was sarcastically called by the Leaguers as the 'Syama - Huq Ministry') for 'having betrayed the Muslim cause by seeking a cross-communal alliance' and sat on the 'opposition bench'. Nazimuddin became the leader of the Opposition and under his leadership, the Muslim League left no stones unturned to disown, discredit and dislodge this Coalition Ministry. *The Statesman* wrote: "... Fazlul Huq became the Premier once again. But the Coalition which supported Fazlul

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile the problem arose with the appointment of the Muslims in the F which became an important issue in the anti-Huq campaigns of the League and its press. In the A.R.P. services, at that time, the Muslims did not enjoy even 5 per cent<sup>44</sup> which fell far short of their legitimate 50 per cent communal ratio in services as fixed earlier by the Praja-League Coalition government. The Chief Minister was 'clearly unhappy over his relations with his colleagues, particularly with Dr. Mukherjee, and with Santosh Basu' whom he accused of 'deliberately filling up A.R.P. appointments with Hindus to the disadvantage of his own community'.<sup>45</sup> On 2 August 1942, Fazlul Huq wrote a very strong letter to Herbert, the then Governor in which he highlighted the 'feeling of bitter resentment in the minds of the Muslim Community of Bengal': "Let me begin by referring to the atrocious manner in which Muslim interests have been sacrificed by the appointing authorities in the A.R.P. services.... Possibly, the permanent officials wanted a breakdown of the cabinet.... they could not have adopted a more effective means of achieving their end. But I am not going to accept the position created by the officials. I am only referring to this affair simply to show how officials have been encouraged to act arbitrarily in consequence of their belief that they will always find in you a powerful supporter....".<sup>46</sup> While admitting the low proportion of Muslims in the A.R.P. services, Herbert on the other hand, considered the fact that 'the fault lay with the Muslims for not coming forward to join earlier'.<sup>47</sup> Whoever might be responsible for this, the Muslim disappointment was there and Fazlul Huq became the main target of attacks from the League leaders at various protest meetings. While addressing such a meeting in Calcutta, Suhrawardy said: "Muslims of Bengal can expect no better treatment from Fazlul Huq who had sold the right of Muslims to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee for his Ministerial 'Gadi' (i.e. seat).... He is powerless to do anything for Muslims...."<sup>48</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

alleged that without submitting its resignation, the Ministry was still denying its responsibility for the officers' conduct. The European Group led by David Hendry took the same approach and urged the Ministry that it should 'make way for those who with an equal knowledge of the constitution are prepared honestly to accept the responsibilities of office'.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, Kiran Shankar Roy, the leader of the official Congress, opposed the censure motion and described the attitude of its supporters as a 'bomb-shell' because some distinguished members of the House at that time were trying to form 'an administrative cabinet of all parties' minus the official Congress.<sup>92</sup> Opposing the motion, Syama Prasad Mookerjee made an appeal to all the members of the House: "It is for us to forget our party affiliations for the time being, keep controversies aside for the present and unite on the basis of one constructive programme and it is then and then alone that we can truly and faithfully serve the interests of the people of this province".<sup>93</sup> Supporting this motion, H.S. Suhrawardy declared on the floor of the House that Syama Prasad Mookerjee had made an attempt 'to create disunity among Muslims so that his community could rule Bengal'.<sup>94</sup> The debate went on for three days and ultimately the motion was defeated by 86-115 votes.<sup>95</sup> The Huq Ministry was also able to escape defeat by 16 to 15 votes on 23 March 1943 in the Legislative Council on the special motion tabled by Khan Bahadur Sayyed Muazzamuddin Hossain (Muslim League) regarding the food crisis in the province. Although there was a split within the Progressive Coalition Party and the withdrawal of support of some Muslim and Hindu members of the House from the Ministry, Fazlul Huq still managed to have the majority in the House. But he was gradually losing his ground and popularity not only among the Muslims of Bengal (who were gradually leaning towards the Muslim League) but also among the Hindus (who henceforth lost their confidence in Mr. Huq as he expressed his desire in his latest correspondence with Jinnah to return to the League). The charged-up BPML leaders demanded that the Huq Ministry lost the support of the Bengal Muslims<sup>96</sup> and as the majority of the voters (of both the communities) did not have any faith in Mr. Huq at that time, he had no other option but to tender his resignation as the Premier. Nazimuddin, the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party and the 'projected' League contender for the post of the Premier (who was also a very 'favourite' candidate of J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal), issued the following statement: "The unparalleled success of the Muslim League in the elections in which it has captured all the seats – which were held by supporters of the present government and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

as I have said, Sir, I am not saying this only now, but I have been saying this for months and months together that if any time I am a hindrance I am prepared to walk out. I do not want to be a hindrance for a single moment for the formation of a complete cabinet in Bengal. If it means the consummation of the wish of Mr. Suhrawardy that I should be blotted completely out of existence, I am prepared to face my fate..... Wherever I am – in office or not – my services will always be at the disposal of my countrymen in any way that I may be called upon to do so. If there is a complete National Government, I will accept it most willingly, most gladly and most delightfully and give it the best possible assistance in my power”.<sup>106</sup> By delivering this long speech on the floor of the House (on 27 March 1943), Fazlul Huq tried to clarify his position and intention before the esteemed members and by doing this he tried his best to win their confidence and get the much needed support at the time of voting on the cut motion moved by K.A. Hamilton (on 27 March 1943) which was again defeated by a margin of ten votes<sup>107</sup> (99-109). The voting pattern in the House proved that Fazlul Huq still enjoyed the majority in the Assembly.

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

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

Dear Sir John,

Dated, the 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1943,

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

Yours sincerely,

Sd/- A.K. Fazlul Huq<sup>109</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes and References:

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

16. Fazlul Huq's note on the file on 25 February 1942; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 153.
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- 17a. *Ibid.*
18. *Star of India*, 13 February 1942, p. 8.
19. M.A.H. Ispahani, *Qaid-E-Azam Jinnah As I Knew Him*, Karachi, 1966, p. 52.
20. *Star of India*, 13 February 1942, p. 9.
21. *Ibid.*, 3 March 1942, p. 3.
22. N. Mansergh(ed.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47*, Vol. I., London, 1970, pp. 398- 399.
23. *Star of India*, 17 April 1942, p. 5; see also, Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 April 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 149.
24. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 April 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *ibid.*
25. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 March 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 143.
26. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 April 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 150.
27. *The Statesman*, 26 May 1942.
28. Huq to Herbert, 2 May 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 156-158.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Herbert to Linlithgow, 8 May 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 152-153.

- 32a. Herbert to Linlithgow, 21 May 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 160.
33. Herbert to Linlithgow, 6 June 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 164.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Amalendu De, *Islam in Modern India*, Calcutta, 1982, p. 164.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
37. *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 June 1942; quoted in Amalendu De, *ibid.*, pp.165-176.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
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43. Herbert to Linlithgow, 23 July 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 174.
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47. *Formation of new Government Under Fazlul Huq (1941-43)*, part 1, pp.14-15; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
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49. *Ibid.*, 19 August 1942.

50. *Resolution of the All India Muslim League from April 1942 to May 1943*, Delhi, no date, p.10; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 138.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 139.
- 52a. Herbert to Linlithgow, 25 August 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 179.
53. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 139.
54. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 August 1942; cited in Shila Sen, *ibid.*
55. Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 August 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 177.
- 55a. N. Mansergh (ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 436.
56. Herbert to Linlithgow, 25 August 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 180.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *The Statesman*, 16 September 1942.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. Herbert to Linlithgow, 27 September 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 185.
62. Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr: Biography of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee*, Bombay, 1969, p. 40.
63. Ashim K. Datt(ed.), *Leaves From a Diary*, Oxford, 1993, p. 73; see also, Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 August 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 178.
64. *Ibid.*, p.192.
65. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's letter to His Excellency Lord Linlithgow, 12 August 1942; cited in S.P. Mookerjee, *A Phase of the Indian Struggle*, Kustia, 1942; see also, Rita Basu, *Dr. Shyamaprasad Mookherjee And An Alternative Politics in Bengal*, Kolkata, 2002, pp. 53-54.

66. *Ibid.*
67. Kalipada Biswas, *Yukta Banglar Shesh Adhyay* (in Bengali), Barisal, 1963, p. 363.
- 67a. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's letter to His Excellency Sir John Herbert, Governor of West Bengal, published in Ashim K. Datta(ed.), *op.cit.*, Appendix IV, pp.199-203.
68. *The Indian Annual Register (I.A.R.)*, Vol. II, 1942, p. 58; see also, *the Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 23 November 1942; *Advance*, 23 November 1942.
69. *The Azad*, 20 November 1942 and 22 November 1942.
70. Herbert to Linlithgow, 11 January 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 205.
71. Fazlul Huq to Linlithgow: *Note* (n.d.), October 1942.
72. Linlithgow to Amery, 10 October 1942, *Formation of New Government*, part 2, p. 219; see also, Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, *Telegram*, 8 October 1942, *ibid.*, p. 243.
73. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 15<sup>th</sup> session, 1943, Vol. LXIV, No.1, pp. 25-34.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
75. A.K. Fazlul Huq, *Bengal Today*, Calcutta, 1944, p. 25; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 142.
- 75a. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-18.
76. Herbert to Linlithgow, 6 November 1942; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 194-195.
77. *The Statesman*, 7 December 1942.
78. Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp.142-143.
79. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings(BLAP)*, 5 July 1943, Vol. LXV, pp. 46-54; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 271-275.
- 79a. A.K. Fazlul Huq, 10 March 1943, *BLAP*, Vol. LXIV, No.3, pp. 53-54; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, pp.143-144.

80. Fazlul Huq's speech on the floor of the Assembly, 15 February 1943, *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings (BLAP)*, Vol. LXIV, No.1, p. 98.
- 80a. Letter of Sir J.A. Herbert to Chief Minister dated 15 February 1943; see also, Herbert to Linlithgow, 22 February 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 214
- 80b. Fazlul Huq's statement "Why I resigned" on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly on 5 July 1943. *BLAP*, Vol. LXV, No. Nil, pp. 39-63; see also, *Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. II, July-December, p.130.
81. Herbert to Linlithgow, 22 February 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 214.
82. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 13 November 1942; see *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 February 1943; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *Fazlul Huq-Jiban O Rajniti* (in Bengali), Kolkata, 2001, p. 77.
83. Sacchidananda Banerjee, *ibid.*
84. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 5 February 1943; see, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 February 1943; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *ibid.*
85. *The Statesman*, 17 February 1943.
- 85a. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 February 1943; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-80.
86. Fazlul Huq to Jinnah, 17 February 1943; see also, *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 February 1943; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *ibid.*
87. *The Statesman*, 19 February 1943.
88. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 February 1943; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *op.cit.*, p. 78.
89. Amalendu De, *Pakistan Prastab O Fazlul Huq* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1989, p.168; see also, Herbert to Linlithgow, 7 April 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 219.
- 89a. *Star of India*, 25 March 1943, p. 2 & 5.
- 89b. Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 217.

90. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Vol. LXIV, No.3, pp. 477-81.
91. David Hendry, 24 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 557; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.146.
92. Kiran Sankar Roy, 23 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 564; cited in Shila Sen, *ibid.*
93. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, *ibid.*, p. 597; cited in Shila Sen, *ibid.*
94. H.S. Suhrawardy, 24 March 1943, *ibid.*, p. 580; cited in Shila Sen, *ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 477-481; see also, Satyabrata Dutta, *Banglar Bidhansabhar Eksho Bachar: Rajanugatya Theke Ganatantra* (in Bengali), Kolkata, 2002, p. 158.
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97. *Ibid.*
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99. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Fifteenth Session, 1943, Vol. LXIV, No.3, pp.729-733; cited in Amalendu De, *op.cit.*, pp. 169-170.
100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*, pp.728-729; cited in Amalendu De, *ibid.*
102. *Ibid.*, p. 570; cited in Amalendu De, *ibid.*, pp. 170-171.
103. *Ibid.*, p.745.
104. *Ibid.*, p.747.
105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.*
107. Satyabrata Dutta, *op.cit.*, p. 159.
108. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, Vol.LXV, 1943, pp. 39-61, see also, Fazlul Huq, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-37; cited in Sacchidananda Banerjee, *op.cit.*, p. 83.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 1943, Vol. LXIV, No.3, p.753; cited in Shila Sen, *op.cit.*, p.147.
111. Herbert to Linlithgow, 7 April 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 218-219.

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113. Rajamohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 206.
114. Linlithgow to Herbert, 2 April 1943; *Formation of New Government*, part I, pp.135-36; see also Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, fn.357, p. 144.
115. N. Mansergh(ed.), *op.cit.*, Vol. III, Document No.1637, pp. 875-76.
116. Herbert to Linlithgow, 7 April 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 219.
117. Kalipada Biswas, *op.cit.*, p. 379.
118. A.S.M. Abdur Rab, *Fazlul Huq*, Lahore, 1966, p. 138.
- 118a. Anil Chandra Banerjee, *A Phase in the life of Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee 1937-1946*, Calcutta, 2000, p. 44.
119. *The Statesman*, 1 April 1943.
120. *Ibid.*
121. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1943.
122. Herbert to Linlithgow, 7 April 1943; cited in Enayetur Rahim & Joyce L. Rahim(eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 220.
123. *The Statesman*, 7 April 1943.
124. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1943.
125. *Ibid.*, 13 April 1943.
126. *Ibid.*
127. Fazlul Huq to Gilbert, 24 April 1943, *Formation of New Government*, part I, p. 105; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *op.cit.*, p. 145.
128. *Presidential Address of Qaid-E-Azam, 1937-43*, pp.138-39; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *ibid.*
129. Stanley Wolpert, *op.cit.*, p. 217.

# 6

## **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'<sup>1</sup> 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 below<sup>2</sup>:

**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 Whips<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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'.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup> 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',<sup>8</sup> 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'.<sup>9</sup>

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'.<sup>10</sup> 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'.<sup>11</sup> 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".<sup>12</sup> 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'<sup>13</sup> 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".<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Price (per maund) Rs. Anna</b>
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).<sup>15a</sup> 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”.<sup>15b</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.....”<sup>17</sup> 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. 1/3<sup>rd</sup>) people of this province.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>20a</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Huq took ‘the occasion to continue his personal attacks’ upon the Governor.<sup>21a</sup> 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”.<sup>21b</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> The Oppositions moved 19 special motions on food shortage out of which 9 were accepted for discussion in the House.<sup>23a</sup> 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....”<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup> 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 schemes<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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)".<sup>28</sup> 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".<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> According to Fazlul Huq, this accursed government would have to leave having the curse of two crores people of Bengal on its head.<sup>33</sup> 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’.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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”.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 famine<sup>43</sup> 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”.<sup>43a</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> 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’<sup>45</sup> 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”.<sup>46</sup> 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”.<sup>47</sup> 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”.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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”.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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 votes<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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**

<b>Government (Nazimuddin)</b>		<b>Opposition</b>	
<b>Party/Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>	<b>Number</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>

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

<b>Government (Nazimuddin)</b>		<b>Opposition</b>	
<b>Party/Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>	<b>Number</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>

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'.<sup>55</sup> 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').<sup>56</sup> 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'.<sup>57</sup>

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'.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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”.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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 minutes<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> This is for the first time after the death of C.R. Das, a Ministry in Bengal was defeated by direct voting.<sup>64a</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup> 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 bribes<sup>66</sup> and money of the Marwari businessmen was used for their 'purchasing'.<sup>67</sup>

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...".<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> 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”.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> Jinnah immediately responded to his appeal and gave him permission to form the Coalition Ministry with the Official Congress ‘but on honourable terms’.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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”.<sup>74</sup> 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”.<sup>75</sup> 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”.<sup>76</sup> 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”.<sup>76a</sup>

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’)<sup>77</sup> 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’.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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”.<sup>80</sup> 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”.<sup>81</sup> 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”.<sup>82</sup> 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”.<sup>83</sup> After all these deliberations, Gandhiji gave assurance to the Congress delegation from Bengal that “he would not do anything without consulting Bengal”.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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’.<sup>86</sup> 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”.<sup>86a</sup> 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.....”.<sup>86b</sup> Dr. Shila Sen in her research wrote that before 1945 Jinnah ‘was not clear in his mind about Pakistan or Pakistans’.<sup>87</sup> 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’.<sup>88</sup> 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”.<sup>88a</sup> 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”.<sup>89</sup> 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”.<sup>90</sup> 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”.<sup>91</sup> 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”.<sup>91a</sup> 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;.....”<sup>92</sup> 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!”<sup>93</sup> 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’.<sup>94</sup> So he felt the urgency to prepare ‘a well-thought-out and clear-cut manifesto’ which ‘will concretise our cherished ideal of Pakistan’.<sup>95</sup> 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”.<sup>96</sup> 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”.<sup>97</sup> 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”.<sup>98</sup>

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,<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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....”<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> Nazimuddin feared that ‘his life would not be worth living under the pressure which Suhrawardy and his party would put on him’.<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>104a</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> The Europeans bagged three seats in the Central Assembly from Bengal.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> 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”.<sup>108</sup> 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’.<sup>109</sup> 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-Baqi, 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".<sup>110</sup> 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".<sup>111</sup> 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".<sup>112</sup> 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'.<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup> 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’<sup>115a</sup> 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’.<sup>116</sup> 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”.<sup>117</sup> 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’.<sup>118</sup> The Leaguers also considered the issue of ‘Pakistan’ as a charter of Muslim *Azadi* (Independence) or as an anti-thesis to *Akhand Hindustan*.<sup>119</sup> 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....”<sup>120</sup> 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".<sup>120a</sup> 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".<sup>120b</sup>

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.<sup>121</sup> 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.<sup>122</sup> Bengal was not an exception to it and the Parliamentary Board of the BPML prepared an 'ambitious and big' budget of about one million rupees<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup> 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.<sup>125</sup> 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".<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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*.<sup>127a</sup>

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.<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> 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).<sup>129a</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup> 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)<sup>131</sup> 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 1/3<sup>rd</sup> (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.<sup>132</sup> 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.<sup>132a</sup> 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.<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> 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.<sup>136</sup> 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.<sup>137</sup> 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:

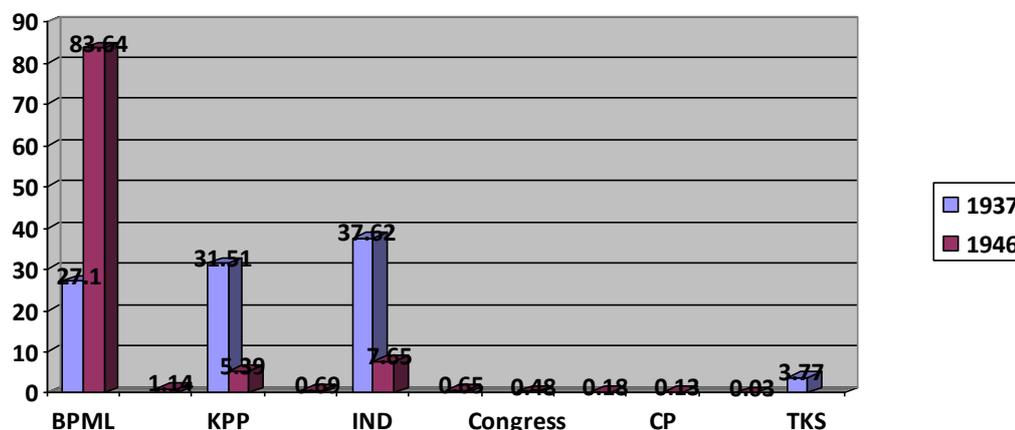
**Table VI.10: Results of the Elections (Muslim Constituencies)<sup>a</sup> to the Bengal Legislative Assembly held in March 1946**

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**

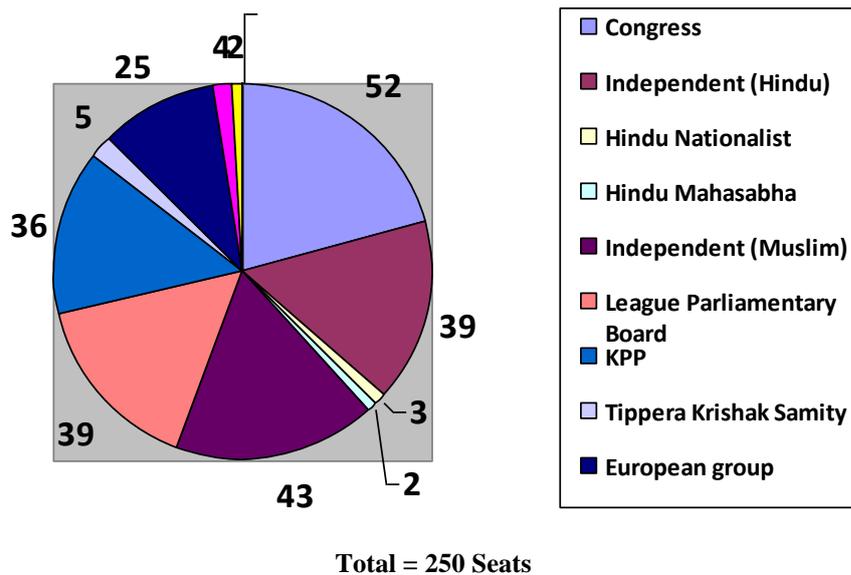


This Diagram is based on: *Return Showing Results of Elections in India 1937 & Franchise: Elections in Bengal 1946*; cited in Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 75-76 & 215 – 216.

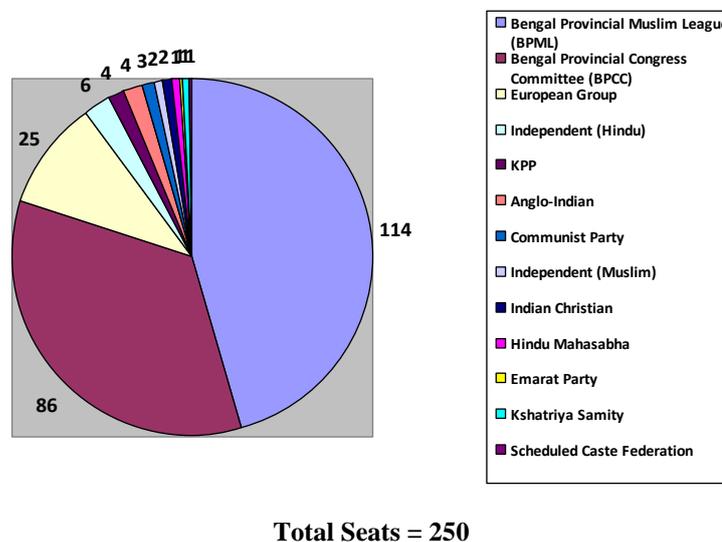
In 1946, the Congress won most of the Hindu seats in Bengal and had 86 members in the new Assembly. Although it gave 6 candidates in the Muslim Constituencies, it failed to open its account in those seats. The prominent Congress leaders who returned in the Bengal Assembly were Kiran Sankar Roy, J.C. 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’.<sup>138</sup> 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).<sup>139</sup> 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”.<sup>140</sup> 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’.<sup>141</sup> 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.<sup>142</sup>

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”.<sup>143</sup> 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”.<sup>144</sup> 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”.<sup>145</sup> 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”.<sup>146</sup> 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).<sup>147</sup> 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)<sup>148</sup> 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).<sup>149</sup> 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".<sup>150</sup> 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.<sup>151</sup> 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”.<sup>152</sup> 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 Bengal<sup>153</sup> 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....”<sup>154</sup> 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”.<sup>155</sup> 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”.<sup>156</sup>

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”.<sup>157</sup> 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’.<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup> 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”.<sup>160</sup> 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....”<sup>161</sup> and went further that “.... the probability is, from any approach to the question, that there will be no grouping”<sup>162</sup> 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.<sup>163</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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".<sup>164</sup> 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".<sup>165</sup> 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'.<sup>166</sup>

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).<sup>167</sup> 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".<sup>168</sup> 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".<sup>169</sup> 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.<sup>170</sup>

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”.<sup>171</sup> 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”.<sup>172</sup> 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’.<sup>173</sup> 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’.<sup>174</sup> In one of its leaflets (written in Bengali), the Hindu Mahasabha urged: “Sixteenth August, Beware! The Muslim League has declared the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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*” ...”.<sup>175</sup>

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".<sup>176</sup> 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'.<sup>177</sup> 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..."<sup>178</sup> The main participants and culprits of the Calcutta riot, according to Prof. Suranjan Das, were non-Bengalis, many of whom belonged to the underworld.<sup>179</sup> 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.<sup>180</sup> 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'),<sup>181</sup> 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".<sup>182</sup> 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...."<sup>183</sup> 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....."<sup>184</sup> 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.<sup>185</sup> 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.....<sup>186</sup> 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”.<sup>187</sup> 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’.<sup>188</sup> 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)<sup>189</sup> 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”.<sup>190</sup> 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.<sup>191</sup> 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".<sup>192</sup> 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'<sup>193</sup> 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'<sup>194</sup> 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.<sup>195</sup> 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'.<sup>196</sup> 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".<sup>197</sup>

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).<sup>198</sup> 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.<sup>199</sup> 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'.<sup>200</sup> 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".<sup>201</sup> 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...."<sup>202</sup> 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".<sup>203</sup> 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.<sup>204</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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".<sup>205</sup> 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".<sup>206</sup> 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.<sup>207</sup>

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.<sup>208</sup> 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).<sup>209</sup> 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'),<sup>210</sup> 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”.<sup>211</sup> 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’.<sup>212</sup> 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),<sup>213</sup> 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’.<sup>214</sup> 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 Society<sup>215</sup> 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.<sup>216</sup> 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'.<sup>217</sup> 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".<sup>218</sup> 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.<sup>220</sup> 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'.<sup>221</sup> 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".<sup>222</sup> 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'.<sup>223</sup>

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.<sup>224</sup> 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.<sup>225</sup> Not only that, when Liaquat Ali Khan joined the Interim Government, Jinnah made Nazimuddin his Deputy in the Assembly.<sup>226</sup> 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 candidate<sup>227</sup> 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".<sup>228</sup> 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').<sup>229</sup> 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'.<sup>230</sup> 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.<sup>231</sup> 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'.<sup>232</sup> 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.<sup>233</sup> 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".<sup>234</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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”.<sup>235</sup>

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...’<sup>236</sup> 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”.<sup>237</sup> 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".<sup>238</sup> 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.<sup>239</sup> 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".<sup>240</sup>

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.<sup>241</sup> 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..."<sup>242</sup> 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”<sup>242a</sup> 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’.<sup>243</sup> Not only that, in that resolution it was also said that the ‘new Province should be constituted before the British Government transferred power’.<sup>244</sup> 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”.<sup>245</sup> 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”.<sup>245a</sup>

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”.<sup>246</sup> 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.<sup>247</sup> 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.<sup>247a</sup> 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’.<sup>248</sup> 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”.<sup>249</sup>

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”.<sup>250</sup> 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’.<sup>251</sup> 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”.<sup>252</sup> 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.....”<sup>253</sup> 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....”<sup>254</sup> 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”.<sup>255</sup>

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’.<sup>256</sup> 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”.<sup>257</sup> 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”.<sup>258</sup> 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”.<sup>259</sup> 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”.<sup>260</sup> 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”.<sup>261</sup> 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.....”<sup>262</sup>

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.<sup>263</sup> 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”.<sup>264</sup> 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”.<sup>265</sup> 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.<sup>266</sup> 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.<sup>267</sup> 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...."<sup>268</sup> 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'.<sup>268a</sup>

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.<sup>269</sup> 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".<sup>270</sup> 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”.<sup>271</sup>

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”.<sup>272</sup> 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”.<sup>273</sup> 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”.<sup>274</sup> 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’.<sup>275</sup> 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’.<sup>276</sup> 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”.<sup>277</sup> 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’.<sup>278</sup> 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.....’<sup>279</sup> 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”.<sup>280</sup> 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.<sup>281</sup> 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.<sup>282</sup> 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’.<sup>283</sup> 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”.<sup>284</sup> 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”.<sup>285</sup> 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”.<sup>286</sup> 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

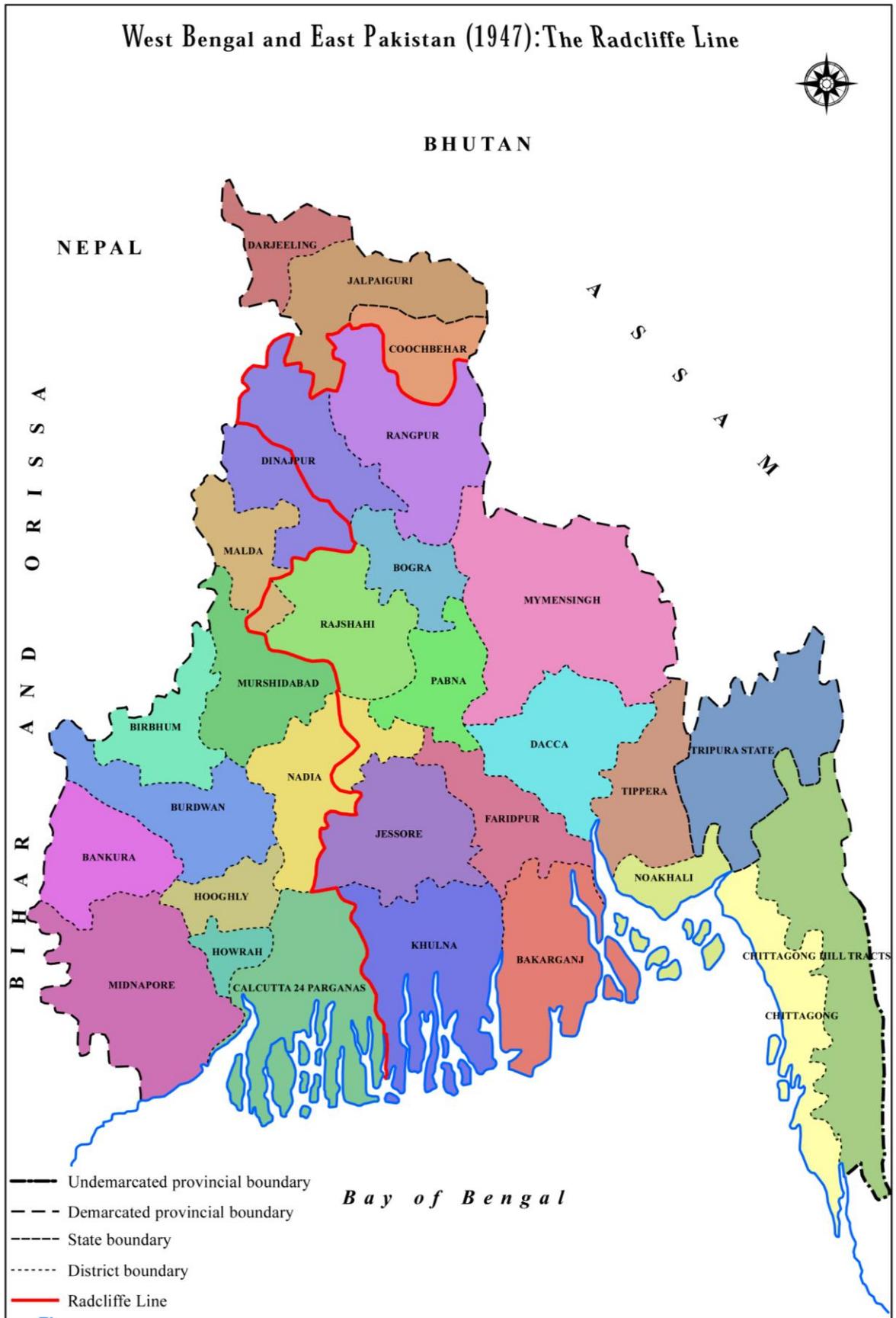
accepting H.M.G's plan. If independence is what we seek, the Plan sounds its death-knell".<sup>287</sup>

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"<sup>288</sup> – 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)<sup>289</sup> 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)<sup>290</sup> 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".<sup>291</sup> 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).<sup>292</sup> 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.<sup>293</sup> 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.<sup>294</sup> 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).<sup>295</sup> 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.<sup>296</sup>

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".<sup>297</sup> 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".<sup>298</sup> 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".<sup>299</sup> 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".<sup>300</sup> 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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286. Sarat Chandra Bose, *op.cit.*, p. 195.
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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.
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299. *Ibid.*
300. *Ibid.*

# 7

## Conclusion

By a long standing tradition, any research work is designed to have a concluding section where the researcher makes a humble attempt to put together all his or her findings and observations on the basis of the discussions in the earlier chapters, to tie up those facts to give a concrete shape which ultimately leads to a successful completion of the research undertaken and in this case, the present work is not an exceptional one.

From the overall discussions (containing in six chapters), it can be said without any doubt that Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq was a very fascinating, charismatic, popular and at the same time enigmatic and controversial character in the first half of the twentieth century Bengal. He was an independent *talukdar* and a successful lawyer cum politician from Eastern Bengal who wavered between the Muslim League, the Indian National Congress and his own-made the Krishak Praja Party (KPP). He was out and out anti-British throughout his political career and always stood for and fought for Bengal and the Bengalis. Above all, he was not an outsider in Bengal politics but a solid *bhumiputra* (son of the soil) who was proud to be a Bengali as well as a Muslim. It was he who was hailed by the common people of Bengal as the ‘friend’ of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants), adored as *Sher-e-Bangla* or the ‘Tiger of Bengal’ and was often been called ‘a giant of the sub-continent’,<sup>1</sup> ‘a wizard politician’<sup>2</sup> and an ‘eagle-eyed statesman’.<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, he was ‘a man of contradictions’ and one of the most controversial Chief Ministers (then called the Premiers) of undivided Bengal. He was accused of ‘the most uncertain quantity in Muslim politics, completely devoid of principle and trusted by nobody’<sup>4</sup> and was attacked by *Quaid-i-Azam* Muhammad Ali Jinnah (who expelled Fazlul Huq from the Muslim League on the charge of ‘gross misconduct’ amounting to ‘treachery’), as a ‘treacherous person doing in calculable harm to the Muslims of Bengal’.<sup>5</sup> During his life time, Fazlul Huq was to go through several ups and downs and to face the political enemies who were not only in the opposition camp but also

within his own camp. Throughout his political career, he did not stick to any single political party and he changed his political camp from time to time as he always wanted to remain at the 'centre' of 'power' and not in the 'periphery' which heavily damaged his image and prestige and the critics labelled him as an 'opportunist'. In the 1930s, Fazlul Huq and his Krishak Praja Party (KPP) obtained unbelievable popularity. He won the confidence of the oppressed and exploited *krishaks* and *prajas* which helped him to 'rise to power' and to be the Premier of Bengal. But he did not confine himself within the boundaries of Bengal and often drifted from provincial to national politics and vice-versa. It led him to make reconciliation of the twin identities of region and religion in which religion took the upper hand and which prompted him to move the Pakistan Resolution in 1940. The Bengali Hindus and Muslims who were delighted to see Fazlul Huq in the chair of the Premier of Bengal in 1937, ultimately lost their faith in him and his KPP (which became clearly evident in the election results of 1946 wherein the Party got only 04 seats out of 250 Bengal Assembly seats) and within a short span, the *Sher-e-Bangla* completely lost his dominance and popularity and prior to the second partition of Bengal, he became almost irrelevant not only in Bengal politics but also in national politics.

The career, activities and political journey of Fazlul Huq from 1905 to 1947 (the period under study) can be broadly divided into five phases – the first phase: from 1905-1913; the second phase: from 1913 to 1929; the third phase: from 1929 to 1937; the fourth phase: from 1937 to 1943 and the last but not least the fifth phase: from 1943 to 1947. In the first phase, Fazlul Huq (who was highly educated in Mathematics and Law), in order to uplift the Muslims from the socio-economic backwardness, to 'obtain their due share of state patronage'<sup>6</sup> and for their overall progress, he supported the partition of Bengal (1905). He was also closely associated with the foundation of the All-India Muslim League (1906), a communal political association and in Dacca he was asked to help in formulating the League's constitution. At that point of time, he came into close contact with Nawab Salimullah of Dacca and his communal politics. Expressing his resentment at the annulment of Bengal's partition (in 1911) and the rejection of his appeal to be recruited for a higher Government service under the British Raj, Fazlul Huq actively joined politics in 1912 and soon ascended the political ladder. When all other Muslim leaders did not have any courage and confidence to fight in the by-election of the Dacca Division seat in

the Bengal Legislative Council as it was a Hindu-majority constituency, he came forward to contest the election in 1913 and with the support of Aswini Kumar Dutt, he got himself elected by defeating Roy Bahadur Kumar Mahendra Nath Mitra.<sup>7</sup> Since then, Fazlul Huq almost uninterruptedly associated with the Bengal Legislature till 1947, except for two years (1934-1936) when he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Being elected, he participated in the debates in the Bengal Legislative Council and delivered firing speeches giving emphasis on the spread of education particularly among the Muslims, the establishment of a Mohammedan College at Dacca and also a first grade college of Arts for the Muslims in Calcutta and the teaching of Arabic and Persian in Government – aided schools. He also spoke for the adequate representation of the Muslims in the various branches of the public services. On different occasions, his orations in the Bengal Legislative Council, captivated the hearts of the audience and earned huge reputation for him. Huq's growing popularity and his personality helped him to become the Secretary of the BPML and the Joint Secretary of the AIML in 1913 (in that year Jinnah, a young barrister who was previously actively involved in Congress politics, joined the League) and he was in these posts upto 1916. Thereafter, he became the President of the AIML and continued in that post upto 1921.

In the second phase (1913-1929), Fazlul Huq came out of his narrow, communal outlook and stood for the Hindu-Muslim unity and cooperation. He appealed to rise above petty selfish considerations and he was instrumental in drafting the historic Lucknow Pact which was signed in between the Congress and the League in December 1916. By this Pact, the Congress accepted separate Muslim electorates and weightage for the Muslims in the five Hindu-majority provinces; in exchange the Muslim League agreed to give weightage for the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab and for the Hindus in Bengal where they were in a minority. Although as a leading Muslim of Bengal Fazlul Huq had much to lose in conceding the Hindus better representation in the Legislature, he did not hesitate to approve it. It was probably because he wanted to get an all-India stage which led him to speak in Lucknow from all-India perspective and as an Indian rather than as a Muslim or a Bengali and for the transfer of power by constitutional and legitimate means. The Lucknow Pact which marked the beginning of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal, was Huq's a stepping stone to all-India politics. As he became a much known face in the Indian political canvas,

the Congress leaders also wanted to bring Fazlul Huq into their team which was fulfilled in 1917 when he joined the Congress and became its Joint Secretary and a year later (1918-1919), he served this organization as General Secretary. When the Rowlatt Bill was introduced to the Central Legislature on 6 February 1919, Fazlul Huq along with Surendra Nath Banerjea, C.R. Das and other prominent leaders of Bengal, protested against the Bill as it (if given into effect), would throttle fundamental rights of the Indians and cause political death of the freedom fighters. He urged the people and the political leaders, irrespective of their political ideologies, to discard their differences and join together to fight against the arbitrary action of the British Government.<sup>8</sup> The Rowlatt Satyagraha movement and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre failed to prevent the British from passing the Government of India Act, 1919, which avoided the term self-government. During the course of the Khilafat Movement, the League, Congress and the Khilafat Committee at their joint Nagpur sessions in November 1920, adopted Gandhiji's boycott programme which infuriated Fazlul Huq, Jinnah and others. The chief issues which led Fazlul Huq to oppose Gandhiji's boycott programme were the question of education of Muslim youths and participation in the Council elections.

He was deadly against of Gandhiji's call for boycotting the schools and colleges which, according to him, would hamper the education of Muslim boys and girls.<sup>9</sup> Not only that; he along with Abul Kashem, Abdul Karim, Azizul Haque, Tazimuddin and the like, wanted to participate in the Council elections. As the Huq-Kashem faction within the BPML contested in the December 1920-January 1921 Council elections, both Fazlul Huq and Abul Kashem were formally expelled from the party.<sup>10</sup> The difference of opinion and the conflicting interests also led him to resign from the Congress. After the formation of the Congress-Khilafat-Swarajya Party (on 31 December 1922) under the initiative of C.R. Das, Fazlul Huq joined the party and participated in the Council election which was held in November 1923. In this election, he and his party got outstanding victory. Being elected the leader of the single largest party, C.R. Das formed the Swarajya Council Party and within a few days, he played a very significant role in concluding the Bengal Pact in December 1923 which was the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim collaboration in Bengal politics. But as C.R. Das refused to form the ministry, Fazlul Huq along with eight Muslim followers left the Swarajya Party, joined the 'Ministerial Party' (there was no

such party, but the people who extended support towards the British in order to become ministers were sarcastically called as the ‘Ministerial Party), and accepted the office of the Minister of Education in January 1924. Though his tenure was short-lived, he came forward to allocate funds for deserving Muslim students, to lay the foundation of the Islamia College in Calcutta (which was established in 1926, later named as Central Calcutta College and thereafter came to be known as Maulana Azad College), and also to help an Indian B.M. Sen, as Principal of the Presidency College.<sup>11</sup> Within six months, the ministers, including Fazlul Huq, lost the confidence of the Council and were compelled to resign. The defeated Swarajists like Mujibur Rahman, H.S. Suhrawardy, Akram Khan and Fazlul Huq launched another organization called United Muslim Council Party in May 1926 which within a few days, also suffered from a split as the deserters (from Huq) founded the Independent Muslim Party. Thereafter, Fazlul Huq decided to test his luck in another front which was reflected in his opposition to the passing of the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Bill (in August 1928) as it was pro-zamindar measure.

In the third phase (1929-1937), Fazlul Huq ‘de-classed’ himself, sincerely and spiritedly took up the cause of the peasants, spoke with them in their own language, mixed with them, stood by them and raised his voice against the oppressive landlords. Immediately after the 1929 Council elections, Fazlul Huq wanted to form a non-communal organization which came into reality when the United Council Party, better known as the Bengal Praja Party or the Council Praja Party was founded by him for safeguarding ‘the interests of tenants and labouring classes of the province’.<sup>12</sup> Thereafter, he wanted to launch an exclusively ‘peasant-oriented political organisation’ which was founded at the end of 1929 and named as the Nikhil Banga Praja Samity (All Bengal Tenants’ Association). Soon the Samity became very popular particularly among the peasantry for its slogan – ‘Land to the tillers’ and it had its strongest support-base in the rural areas of eastern Bengal. In 1935, a power struggle occurred within the members of the Praja Samity and the young radical group who mostly belonged to East Bengal, elected Fazlul Huq as President of the Samity. But within a few days, they raised the demand to include in the Samity the ‘real’ *krishaks* (peasants) and to re-name the Samity as Krishak Praja Party (Peasants’ and Tenants’ Party) ‘with the hope of wooing the rural votes whose number had then greatly increased’. Hence Fazlul Huq along with his large East Bengal supporters, left

the parent body, established the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) in July 1936 and was elected the party's President. The main demand of the KPP was the abolition of the Zamindari system without compensation. Fazlul Huq claimed that 'by the grace of God' he would abolish zamindari 'within the shortest possible time' and also stated that 'the peasantry of Bengal were dearest to his heart'<sup>13</sup> and for their cause, he would always fight against the zamindars and capitalists. Not only that, he promised everyone to provide *dal-bhat* (rice and pulses) which became a very significant slogan of the KPP in the election campaign and attracted the imagination of a large number of newly enfranchised rural people who cast their votes in the elections of 1937.

In the fourth phase (1937-1943), Fazlul Huq contested the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937 from two Mohammedan Constituencies – Patuakhali (rural) and Pirozepur North (rural) and won overwhelming victory against the League candidates – Khwaja Nazimuddin and Lehaz-ud-din Ahmed respectively. His KPP also achieved considerable success (absolutely in rural constituencies) in this Assembly Elections and won 36 seats. As in a House of 250, the leading political parties failed to secure absolute majority (the magic figure was 126), the foundation of a coalition ministry became the best possibility. In this matter, the Congress had an edge as it secured 52 seats and emerged as the single largest party. But theoretically the formation of a Congress led coalition ministry in Bengal was not possible as the Central Board of the Congress had 'ruled out a ministerial role by Congressmen in provinces where they were not a majority'.<sup>14</sup> The formation of a League-KPP coalition ministry was not feasible at that point of time as both of the party leaders – Nazimuddin and Fazlul Huq fought against each other in the elections of 1937 and had bitter and strained relationship. So the formation of a KPP-Congress coalition ministry seemed more likely and Fazlul Huq and the elected members of the KPP were very keen to join hands with the Congress in that direction. Discussions took place between the BPCC and the KPP leaders for a coalition government headed by Fazlul Huq. But the 'marriage' did not take place as Sarat Chandra Bose, a prominent member of the Bengal Congress, insisted on the release of pro-Congress prisoners and freedom fighters who were arrested by the outgoing government. Mr. Huq thought that it would not be possible for him to accept this demand as he was sure that the British Governor would not give his consent for the release of the political prisoners. Jinnah wanted to capitalize this golden opportunity to establish his control over Bengal and

likely instructed the BPML to offer Fazlul Huq the leadership of a League – KPP ministry. Fazlul Huq who wanted to be the Premier, accepted the offer and accordingly formed a 11- member Praja-League Coalition Ministry and he was sworn in as the first Premier (under the Government of India Act, 1935) of Bengal on 1 April 1937. In order to give stability to his ministry, he gave equal number of ministerial posts (3) to both the League and his own KPP. Not only that, in order to win the confidence of the Hindus, he included 5 Hindus in his ministry. But surprisingly, the Coalition Ministry which was comprised of 6 zamindars, 1 capitalist and 3 lawyer-cum-politicians, did not have any proper representation from the *praja* community and was labelled as ‘subservient to British Imperialism and Bengal Landlordism’. As the zamindari elements were very prominent within the Cabinet, the abolition of the zamindari system which was the main issue of the KPP’s election *Manifesto*, became a ‘far reality’, a ‘social utopia’ and Fazlul Huq was bound to put on ice the *dal-bhat* issue unless he would have lost his Premiership. The Congress’s stiff opposition to the Ministry and the desertion of a considerable number of the KPP radicals (on the issue of ministerial salaries), forced Fazlul Huq to lean more and more on the League and join it on 15 October 1937 at Lucknow where he was greeted with the popular title *Sher-e-Bangla*. He not only signed the League pledge at Lucknow but also he announced that he would advise his colleagues in the Coalition Ministry to join the League and make it a stronger political organization which ultimately enabled Jinnah to achieve his target i.e. to establish his hold over Bengal as well as to enhance the organizational strength of his party in Bengal. Not only that, at Lucknow, Huq came out with a communal outlook, asked the Muslims to keep safe distance from the ‘selfish, deceptive and hypocritical Congressmen and unite under the banner of Islam. He warned: “If Muslims were ill-treated in Congress-governed provinces, the Bengal Ministry would retaliate”<sup>15</sup> Immediately after the Lucknow session, he became the President of the Muslim League branch in Bengal and gave his full-hearted effort to popularize the League’s propaganda not only in Bengal but also in other parts of India and imprinted his footprints at the all-India level. Huq’s political dualism (simultaneously being the President of the KPP and the League) created ‘a good deal of confusion’ among the supporters of the KPP. That’s why the KPP (which raised the peasants’ issues in the party organ called the *Krishak* under the editorship of Abul Mansur Ahmed), failed to capitalize the tenure of Huq’s Premiership as a catalyst force to increase its organizational strength in Bengal. The

KPP suffered from a split as the party's left wing and its Hindu members drifted towards the Congress and Shamsuddin Ahmed, Tamizuddin Khan along with 16 KPP members, formed the Independent Praja Party in March 1938. Fazlul Huq got another blow when Mr. Nausher Ali who was erstwhile the Minister-in-Charge of Local Self-Government and a strong critic of Mr. Huq for joining the Muslim League, tendered his resignation on 22 June 1938 and joined the Opposition. As a result, Fazlul Huq became the only KPP representative (who at the same time was a stakeholder of the League) in the Cabinet which virtually turned into a Muslim League Ministry. Immediately after Nausher Ali's resignation, Fazlul Huq was able to prove his ministerial strength with the support of the European Group (consisting of 25 members) when a no-confidence motion was brought by the Opposition in August 1938. Though he was successful in proving the majority in the House, Fazlul Huq felt the necessity of bringing back the support of his ex-KPP colleagues. He started negotiations with both Shamsuddin Ahmed and Tamizuddin Khan which became fruitful as both of them decided to join the Cabinet on 17 November 1938. But this understanding did not last long as Shamsuddin Ahmed resigned from the Ministry because of non-fulfillment of his demands. Fazlul Huq got another tremendous blow in the Assembly on 19 December 1939 when his Finance Minister Nalini Ranjan Sarkar refused to vote for the 'War Resolution' (which declared 'complete sympathy with the British Government for taking up arms against Nazi Germany' and assured the Government of India 'full Co-operation in the successful prosecution of this war') and resigned from the Ministry. All these resulted in Huq's complete dependence on the European Group and the League which virtually brought him under the control and vigilance of the *Quaid-i-Azam* Jinnah who propagated 'two-nation' theory in his presidential address at Lahore in March 1940 and asked Mr. Huq to move the resolution at Lahore for the separation of India's Muslim majority areas which came to be known as the 'Pakistan Resolution'. At Lahore Huq strongly advocated the cause of the Muslims in India and came out with his Muslim identity: "We assumed power on behalf of Muslims and other people in Bengal in 1937. We have been given an opportunity by the Almighty to serve our people after a couple of centuries and we are not going to barter away the power and the opportunity to an imaginary and unknown central authority..... I am a Muslim first and Bengalee afterwards.... It was in Bengal in the year 1906 that the flag of the Muslim League was unfurled and it is now my privilege as the leader of Bengal to move the resolution for the homeland of

the Muslims from the self-same platform of the Muslim League".<sup>16</sup> Apart from this, in the Lahore session the constitution of the AIML was amended by which the Working Committee was empowered to 'control, direct and regulate all the activities of the various provincial Leagues' and the Working Committee was entrusted with full authority 'to suspend, dissolve or disaffiliate any Provincial League'. Having been strengthened by this amendment, Jinnah imposed a ban in June 1940 on the participation of the Muslim League members in the 'War Committees' which caused profound disappointment not only to Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy but also to Jinnah's loyal Nazimuddin. Fazlul Huq and Sikander Hyat Khan, the two Premiers of Bengal and Punjab respectively, wrote a joint letter to Jinnah requesting that 'the ban on war committees and civic guards be removed from the Muslim Leaguers' in their respective provinces. Not only that, having been nourishing the idea of a national all – Party Government with himself as its supreme head, Fazlul Huq decided to support the war effort.<sup>17</sup> He was very eager to form a Coalition Ministry with the Bengal Congress (especially with the 'Bose group') and wanted to have a Congress representation in his Cabinet. As Huq was not in a position to carry his plans into effect, he sought the permission from the League Supremo which he failed to get. Another issue on which controversy and disagreement arose between Fazlul Huq and Jinnah was the observance of the 'Pakistan Day' on 23 March 1941. As there had been communal riots 'of a serious nature' in Khulna and Dacca, Huq being the President of the BPML, instructed the district and sub-divisional League Committees to postpone the 'Pakistan Day' celebration throughout Bengal. Jinnah totally rejected this decision of Mr. Huq and directed the members of the BPML (including the Calcutta District League), not to 'stop holding Pakistan Day' unless the meetings were banned by the Government of Bengal. Instantaneously the Calcutta District Muslim League which was under the control of the 'Calcutta trio' (as the Bengal Governor Herbert called Hasan Ispahani, Abdur Rahman Siddiqui and Khwaja Nooruddin) who were also known as 'the Jinnah group', strictly adhered to the decision of Jinnah and the observance of 'Pakistan Day' took place in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. Fazlul Huq became very much disappointed with this stand of the AIML and the Calcutta District Muslim League and few days later he met with Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy, at Simla in the middle of May 1941 urging him to form national cabinets both at the Centre and the Provinces. The Calcutta District Muslim League strongly reacted against this venture of the Chief Minister and

considered his proposal 'as detrimental to Muslim solidarity and an infringement on the authority of the All-India Muslim League'.<sup>18</sup> Jinnah became very much infuriated with Fazlul Huq and wanted to take a very strong action against him. The 'opportunity' came on 21 July 1941, the day on which the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow announced the formation of a National Defence Council consisting of thirty members including three Muslim Premiers – Sikander Hyat Khan (Punjab), Fazlul Huq (Bengal) and Mohammad Saadullah (Assam). All the three Premiers immediately accepted the Viceroy's offer which completely went against the party line. Criticizing this act of Mr. Huq as 'highly objectionable', Jinnah, the League Supremo, ruled that as a League member Fazlul Huq should have sought the party's approval before giving his consent to the Viceroy. Jinnah was seriously thinking of taking disciplinary action against all the League Premiers unless they decided to quit the Council. While the Premiers of Punjab and Assam succumbed to Jinnah directives, Fazlul Huq was in search of collecting support from his colleagues, the Viceroy and the Governor and finally stuck to his decision in order to represent the province in the national Defence Council. Huq's explanation did not satisfy Jinnah who convened a meeting of the League's Working Committee on 25 August 1941 in which Fazlul Huq was asked to resign from the Defence Council within ten days. Criticizing this decision of the Working Committee and the President of the League as 'unfair and unconstitutional', Huq tendered his resignation from membership of the Working Committee and the Council of the AIML on 8 September 1941 'as mark of protest against arbitrary use of powers vested in President'.<sup>19</sup> Not only that, in order to 'avoid greater evil of domestic feud' and his realization of the fact that after the resignation of the Premiers of Punjab and Assam, he would not be able to serve any 'useful purpose' for his community, prompted Mr. Huq also to resign from the National Defence Council. Thereafter, he got another blow from his Cabinet member Suhrawardy who took the initiative to convene a meeting of the Working Committee of the B.P.M.L. (without the consent of Fazlul Huq) in which in Huq's absence, a resolution was passed amounting to a vote of no-confidence in Mr. Huq. Being shocked, frustrated and humiliated, Fazlul Huq wrote a letter to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on 27 September 1941 asking for employment in Indian Foreign Service to represent the Indian Government in Arabia. But his appeal was not approved by the Viceroy. Helpless Mr. Huq then wrote a letter to Liaquat Ali Khan, the Secretary of the AIML on 14 November 1941 in which he expressed 'a half-apology' for his

attack on Jinnah. Two days later in its meeting, the Working Committee of the AIML treated the matter as closed. Although for the time being a truce had been concluded between these two camps, both Fazlul Huq and Jinnah were still not happy and closely monitored each other's activities. While Jinnah accused Fazlul Huq of acting like an 'independent satrap' in Bengal, the latter (i.e. Mr. Huq) was unwilling to work together with his Cabinet colleagues who had been disloyal to him. At the end of November 1941, there were rumours that Fazlul Huq was going to form a new party by dissolving the coalition party and for that purpose he met at the home of J.C. Gupta, the Congress M.L.A., with Sarat Chandra Bose, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and some other M.L.A.s, Hindu and Muslim. Although Huq strongly denied such an initiative, his supporters left the ministerial coalition party and formed the Progressive Assembly Party which was turned into the Progressive Coalition Party (on 28 November 1941) with Fazlul Huq as its Leader and Sarat Chandra Bose as its Deputy Leader. In order to carry forward 'a life and death struggle', the League Ministers (namely, Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Habibullah and Tamizuddin) tendered their resignation on 1 December 1941. They expected that Sir John Herbert, the Bengal Governor, would immediately ask Nazimuddin (who was also his favourite) to form a new ministry headed by Nazimuddin which, however, proved wrong.

Fazlul Huq on the other hand, did not waste any time in finding out 'new friends' for forming another coalition ministry led by him. It persuaded him to assume publicly the leadership of the newly formed Progressive Coalition Party on 3 December 1941 which claimed to have a strength of 119 members and commanded a majority in the Assembly. Both the groups of the Congress i.e., the Bose group (who joined the coalition) and the 'Official Congress' (having 25 members under the leadership of Kiran Sankar Roy) extended their support towards the formation of a new coalition ministry under Fazlul Huq. In order to form a stable government, he sought the assistance of Syama Prasad Mookerjee (whom Mr. Huq earlier considered as 'one of the most communally-minded men in Bengal')<sup>20</sup> and other Hindu leaders who quickly responded to his call as they wanted to get relief from the League ministry. The Hindu leaders decided not only to join the Progressive Coalition Party but also to the new Cabinet. On 4 December 1941 Fazlul Huq was elected the President and Leader of the Progressive Coalition Party and he was anxiously waiting for the call on behalf of the Governor of Bengal. The League ministers on the other

hand, accused Mr. Huq of taking initiative for the formation of an alternative ministry and condemned him for betraying the Muslim League. They also requested Jinnah to intervene in this matter and to expel Fazlul Huq from the party which prompted the League Supremo to seek written explanation from Mr. Huq within 10 December. But Mr. Huq's reply did not at all satisfy Jinnah who finally expelled him (on 10 December 1941) from the League on charge of 'gross misconduct' amounting to 'treachery' and finally cleared the path for his 'favourite' candidate, Nazimuddin (who also happened to be the Governor's choice), to be in the chair of the Premier. Although Nazimuddin was the 'favourite' candidate of both Jinnah and the Bengal Governor J.A. Herbert, he was not in a position to get the support of the Official Congress, a section of the followers of the Nawab of Dacca and a good number of Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s. The arrest of Sarat Chandra Bose (who was supposed to be the Deputy Premier of Bengal) by the British Raj under Defence of India Rules on 11 December 1941, removed the 'threat' to the British and the dilemma in the thought – process of the Bengal Governor Herbert who finally asked Fazlul Huq on the same day to form his second coalition ministry.

He immediately responded to the Governor's call and headed a new Ministry (from 12 December 1941) consisting of 9 Ministers (among those 5 including the Premier were Muslims and 4 were Hindus). While the Official Congress remained outside the Progressive Coalition Ministry, the Bose group and Syama Prasad Mookerjee (who was given the portfolio of the Finance Department) joined the ministry. This prompted the Leaguers to criticize Mr. Huq and his new ministry which was sarcastically called by them as the 'Syama-Huq Ministry'. The League Supremo had a general belief that this understanding among the diverse political groups, and interests could not last long and the new Coalition Ministry would automatically fall. According to Jinnah, its removal would be 'as simple as falling off a log'.<sup>21</sup> But it was not as simple as he thought and against his thinking, Fazlul Huq's second Coalition Ministry survived for 15 months (December 1941- March 1943). Though the inclusion of Syama Prasad Mookerjee into his new Cabinet surprised almost everyone of Bengal, Fazlul Huq gave assurance to the people that 'he would be the best defender of Hindu interests and Mookerjee would protect Muslim interests'.<sup>22</sup> This was not only a mere incidental remark and both Huq and Mookerjee made sincere efforts to put it into reality. Fazlul Huq tried to get back the support of the

Hindus by renouncing the Lahore Resolution of 1940 and assured them that ‘the Pakistan scheme could not be applied to Bengal’.<sup>23</sup> Syama Prasad on the other hand, tried to create some job opportunities for the Muslims in various departments of the government and also at the Calcutta University<sup>24</sup> – which altogether helped to pacify communal tension in Bengal for the time being. But the new Ministry had to confront with three major events; the climax of the Second World War (particularly with Japan), the Quit India Movement under the leadership of Gandhiji and the initial phase of the Great Bengal Famine. In the Second World War, the British were highly involved and the Quit India Movement was led against them by the Congress. Both these events ‘stiffened the Raj’ and put Fazlul Huq into a dilemma. He was neither in a position to defend the Quit India Movement (which would ensure the support of a section of the Congress but would embitter the relationship between Huq and His Excellency, the Bengal Governor J.A. Herbert and would invite the dismissal of his Cabinet) nor he could whole-heartedly support the repressive policy of the Raj (as the Governor pressurized him to pursue drastic steps against the 1942 ‘rebels’). When Huq’s new Ministry was busy in confronting all these problems, it was severely criticized by the League for a very low percentage of recruitment (less than 5 per cent) of the Bengal Muslims in the A.R.P. services. Meanwhile, the Ministry got another tremendous blow when Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a very important member of Huq’s new Cabinet, tendered his resignation to Sir John Herbert, the then Governor of Bengal on 16 November 1942 as he could not perform his ministerial work due to the hostile and unsympathetic attitude and interference on behalf of the Governor and his coterie officials.

Fazlul Huq’s Progressive Coalition Ministry suffered from another crisis, the rice shortage which was accentuated by a disastrous cyclone and by the Japanese occupation of Burma from where rice was imported in different parts of Bengal. All these paved the way for the outbreak of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 (which also terribly hit the next ministry). By the end of the year 1942 and in the beginning of 1943, the people of Bengal were going through an acute non-availability of rice and the consequent price rise. In order to get rid of the situation, Herbert, the Bengal Governor, appointed a British official as the ‘Rice Controlling Officer’ without making any kind of discussion or consultation with the Bengal Premier who personally wanted to have an experienced Indian in that post. As a result the

relationship between the Governor and the Bengal Premier became very stiff and strained and the latter blamed the former for this catastrophe and criticized the Governor for making interference in ministerial works. Although Raj's rice policy was largely responsible for the failure of Huq's Ministry in tackling the situation, Herbert (also supported by the European Group), was very much determined to oust Fazlul Huq and his Coalition Ministry from power and to install a League – led Ministry in Bengal. In order to save his premiership and the Ministry, Fazlul Huq then decided to patch up his differences with Jinnah, sought the League support and wrote a letter to the League Supremo wherein he requested Jinnah to lift the ban on him so that he could easily take entry into the League fold which ultimately did not materialize. The BPML leaders demanded that the Huq Ministry lost the support of the Bengal Muslims and as the majority of the voters of both the communities (i.e. Hindus and Muslims) did not have any faith in Mr. Huq and his leadership, he had no other option but to resign as the Premier which ultimately came into a reality on 28 March 1943 when J.A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, compelled him to tender his resignation.

Thus during this phase, Fazlul Huq headed two successive coalition ministries which inspite of their limitations, tried to perform several beneficial works for the people of Bengal, made significant contribution to the improvement of the condition of the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajaks* (tenants) and the labourers, introduced reforms in the field of education and created more job opportunities especially for the educated Muslims. At first, Fazlul Huq gave priority to the needs of the common people and attempted to fulfill many of his promises (which he gave during his election campaigns and reflected in the Election *Manifesto* of the KPP) given to the peasants and tenants of Bengal by passing a number of Bills in the Assembly for the betterment of their living conditions. Among these, the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act (1938), the Public Demands Recovery (Amendment) Act (1938), the Cooperative Societies Act (1939), the Agricultural Debtors' (Amendment) Act (1940), the Bengal (Moneylenders) Act X of 1940, the Bengal Famine Insurance Fund act (1938) were most important. Although all these Acts gave certain relief to the poor agriculturists, Mr. Huq failed to abolish the Zamindari system (which was the chief target of Mr. Huq and his KPP and also contained in its Election *Manifesto*) as he failed to get the support of his coalition partners (i.e. the Leaguers) and other vested landed interests.

The most remarkable achievement of the Praja-League Coalition Ministry was the establishment of 'Debt Settlement Boards' (both Ordinary and Special) in all the districts of Bengal which by the end of December 1938 settled claims amounting to Rs.3,73,01,448 (both by Ordinary and Special Boards). The total amount which was ultimately awarded by both the Boards on these claims was Rs.1,82,01,939.<sup>25</sup> During this time, Bengal also faced the chronic problem of unemployment. In order to fight against this problem and to create more job opportunities for the poor, the Praja-League Coalition Ministry passed the Bengal Poor and Unemployment Bill (1937). The Ministry was also aware of the unemployment problem of the educated Muslim youths. Considering their cases, it was able to pass (amidst of criticisms), the Bill for Reservation of Posts in Government Offices for the Muslims (1938) which reserved 60 per cent of all Government appointment for the Muslims. In 1939 the Ministry decided that in the case of direct recruitments, the reservation of posts for the Muslims would be 50 per cent. Not only that, in 1938 Fazlul Huq Ministry amended the Police Recruitment Rules (Rule 833 of Police Regulation) so that 'while enlisting Bengali constables the Superintendent of Police must see that not less than fifty per cent of the recruits are Muhammedans'.<sup>26</sup> Syed Muazzamuddin Hossain, the leader of the Muslim League went further and demanded that 'the interests of Bengali Muslims would be better served if the Muslims from outside Bengal are brought, even from outside India...'<sup>27</sup> which was supported by the then Premier who conveyed in the Council: "We try to recruit the best men, if the standard which we have set up is not attained by any candidate in Bengal".<sup>28</sup> All these policies of the Bengal Government opened greater avenues of employment for the educated Muslim youths. Subsequently the Coalition Ministry tried to modify the service and recruitment rules and reframed and prepared the Bengal Services Recruitment Rules or Communal Ratio Rules (1939) and a special officer, i.e. Communal Ratio Officer, was appointed to the Home (Appointment) Department to pursue the decision of the Government according to the communal ratio. The Praja-League Coalition Ministry's bias towards one section of the populace (reserving 50 per cent Government posts for the Muslims by sacrificing 'efficiency' and 'quality'), completely disheartened the Hindus and they felt that the 'service to the community' policy followed by the Huq Ministry, was engulfing differences between these two communities and bringing a dangerous dimension in the body politic of Bengal.<sup>29</sup> The rift between these two communities even extended when the Government passed the Calcutta Municipal (Amendment)

Act in 1939 which decided to hold the general election of the Calcutta Corporation on the basis of separate electorate for the Muslims (and the Anglo-Indians) and reserved 22 out of 84 elective seats for the Mohammedans. Side by side, the Huq Ministry made an honest attempt to provide benefits for the working class (including child labours) and to give the agricultural labourers adequate protection against the oppression of the moneylenders and accordingly passed the Bengal Workman's Protection Act (1940), the Child Labour Act (1938), the Bengal Shops and Establishment Act (1940) etc. Not only that, the Praja-League Coalition Ministry also gave priority and relief to women workforce (particularly those who were pregnant) and was very much determined to prevent the hatred dowry system. Accordingly, it passed the Maternity Benefit Act (1939) and introduced the Bengal Marriage Dowry Prevention Bill (1940).

The Praja-League Coalition Ministry made remarkable contribution in the field of education. In a 14-point election *Manifesto* of the KPP, Fazlul Huq gave priority to the introduction of compulsory and free primary education in Bengal. When he became the Premier of Bengal in 1937, Fazlul Huq kept the portfolio of Education with himself. Although he failed to fulfill his election pledge (because of paucity of funds), he decided to put into effect the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 and proposed to impose 'cess' on both the cultivators and the landlords which created mixed reactions (it was welcomed by the Muslims and Scheduled Castes but it was not supported by the Hindu elites). He put emphasis on the full-fledged expansion of education among the Muslim of Bengal and believed that it was only through education that the Muslims would regain their lost position among the advancing communities of India. Fazlul Huq strongly advocated for English education and understood the necessity of the establishment of educational institutions in different places and at different levels. Therefore, he enhanced the budgetary allocation for 'Education' and took initiatives for the foundation of different Schools, Madrasahs, Makhtabs, Colleges and Universities in different parts of Bengal to spread the light of education particularly among the Muslims and women. Under his auspices, Wajid Memorial Girls' School, the Lady Brabourne College (at Park Circus), Eden Girls College (at Dacca), Fazlul Huq College (at Chakhar) Harganga College (at Munsiganj), Adina Fazlul Huq College, Tezgaun Agricultural Institute (at Dacca) and so on and so forth were established. Huq also founded the Eden Hostel at

Dacca for the students of the Eden School and persuaded the Government to take over the management of the Rokeya Sakhwat Memorial Girls' School when the institution was going through a severe financial crisis. All these activities and initiatives of Fazlul Huq were very praiseworthy. But as an Education Minister, he was often criticized for alleged communal fervour in his policy and favouring and giving 'special treatment' to the people of his own community. The Huq Ministry also introduced the Secondary Education Bill in the Assembly in 1940 with an intention of delinking Secondary Education from the purview of the University of Calcutta which generated very heated controversy. The Government's proposal for the establishment of a Secondary Education Board (as recommended by the Sadler Commission) was not acceptable to the Hindu members of the Bengal Legislature except the Hindu Ministers. The Hindus were afraid of the Muslim control over the Calcutta University and on education as a whole as there was scope for the government control and thereby establishment of Muslim control through the Board. As there were dissensions, the Bill in a new form, was reintroduced in the House in 1942. It was referred to a Select Committee for its consideration but ultimately, the Bill was not passed. It is to be mentioned here that the Second Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq practically did not produce any important social legislation and in 1942 only four Bills, viz., the Bengal Public Demands Recovery (Amendment) Bill, the Bengal Agricultural Debtors (Amendment) Bill, the Bengal Non-Agricultural Tenancy (Temporary Provisions) Extending Bill and the Bengal Criminal Law (Industrial Areas) Amendment Bill, were passed. The people of Bengal had high expectations from Fazlul Huq and his two successive coalition ministries but many of their demands and expectations remained unfulfilled as Huq's Second Coalition Ministry, suffered even more than the first from an 'existential crisis' and did not have ample scope and time to initiate socio-economic reforms and put into effect the peoples' basic demands and expectations.

In the fifth and last phase (1943-1947), Fazlul Huq, the ex-Premier, sat on the Opposition Bench, raised his voice against the Bengal government and kept a very keen watch on the political happenings and developments in Bengal. The last five years witnessed so many interesting political developments as well as many dramatic and tragic events which totally changed the course of political history of Bengal vis-à-vis India. The Nazimuddin Ministry was sworn in Bengal on 24 April 1943 which

immediately after its installation faced the onslaught of the Great Bengal Famine. Fazlul Huq, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and other honourable members sitting on the Opposition Bench, severely criticized the Government for its failure in tackling the havoc food crisis in Bengal and accused the Nazimuddin Ministry and mainly Suhrawardy, the Minister of Civil Supplies, for the gradual deterioration of the situation leading to appalling famine conditions in Bengal. The Muslim League Ministry led by Khwaja Nazimuddin completely denied its responsibility and put the blame absolutely on the 'Syama-Huq' Ministry. Nazimuddin also brought allegations against the Central Government that it had failed to persuade the autonomous Indian provinces to part with their surplus foodstuffs for Bengal. He put emphasis on going out of the control of the Centre which would enable Bengal to have more effective control over transport and also its economic resources to combat any catastrophe such as the famine. Thus Nazimuddin stood in favour of the establishment of 'independent sovereign states' in the areas where the Muslims constituted majority. Both T.G. Rutherford, the acting Governor of Bengal and Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy, were not at all satisfied with the activities of Nazimuddin Ministry and questioned its ability 'to get down to things' over the Famine. In January 1944, the Viceroy urged His Majesty's Government to dismiss the Nazimuddin Ministry which was rejected by Churchill and Amery as they did not want to weaken the League which, according to them, prevented the advancement of the 'seditious' Congress. Although the Ministry was able to survive for the time being, it got a tremendous setback in the Budget session which took place in March 1945. The Opposition led by Fazlul Huq, severely criticized the budget demand placed by Muazzamuddin Hossain, Minister for Agriculture and requested the Speaker to put the whole motion to the House. Under the influence of Fazlul Huq, 21 existing members of the Treasury Benches crossed the floor and joined the Opposition Benches on 28 March 1945<sup>30</sup> which threatened the stability of the Nazimuddin Ministry. When the members of the Opposition camp got excited, Dharendra Nath Datta, the Deputy Leader of the Official Congress, opposing the Agricultural Budget, brought the cut motion in the House. The Opposition Bench led by Fazlul Huq, altogether demanded for voting on the cut motion and the Speaker Nausher Ali also decided to put it into vote. As the European members of the House (who were the supporters of the Nazimuddin Ministry), remained absent at the time of voting in the House, the Treasury Bench had to face a defeat in the hands of the Opposition (by 106 to 97 votes). Next day (i.e. 29 March 1945) after the defeat of the

Nazimuddin Ministry, Speaker Nausher Ali gave his ruling on the adjournment of the Assembly as he thought that the House could not function any longer unless a new ministry was to be formed.<sup>31</sup> Not only the members of the Treasury Bench but also the Bengal Governor were not at all happy with this decision of the Speaker. Two days later (on 31 March 1945), R.G. Casey, the then Governor of Bengal, issued a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 taking the reins of administration of the province in his hands. The Labour Party which came into power in Britain after the elections (held in July 1945) accepted the recommendation of a Governor's Conference (which took place 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 as early as possible. In pursuance of this decision, the Bengal Assembly was dissolved in September 1945 and accordingly fresh elections to the Bengal Assembly took place in March 1946. Meanwhile, Fazlul Huq read the pulses of the Muslim population of Bengal (the bulk of whom rallied behind Jinnah, the League and its demand for 'Pakistan') and wanted to rejoin the League and to patch-up his differences with Jinnah. On that note, Fazlul Huq wrote a letter for Mr. Jinnah to remove the ban he had put on him.<sup>32</sup> But Jinnah did not feel the necessity of bringing back Mr. Huq into the League as the party alone won all Muslim seats in the by-elections held in Bengal (despite Huq's alliance with Sarat Chandra Bose and Syama Prasad Mookerjee) and the League Supremo was confident enough that his party alone would be able to secure absolute majority in the Bengal Assembly (consisting of 250 members) elections and would easily be in a position to form the Ministry. The 72-year old campaigner got frustrated and wanted to take *sannyas* (retirement) from active politics and Mr. Huq expressed his desire to R.G. Casey, the then Governor of Bengal that 'he might be sent to represent H.M.G. in some capacity in Saudi Arabia' which also did not materialize. Thus he had no other option but to return to the political arena and to pose a serious challenge to the League. Huq assumed the chairmanship of the Congress sponsored Bengal Muslim Parliamentary Board (which was the common platform of various anti-League Muslim organizations) and decided to compete with the League with his 'weak' KPP (as it suffered from splits and lost its support-base) in the forthcoming Bengal Assembly elections. But the political scenario was not the same as that of 1937 and in 1946 Fazlul Huq had to face a much tougher political

contest in Bengal with a much stronger Muslim League which already gathered tremendous support by raising the slogan of 'Pakistan'.

Getting overwhelming victory in the elections to the Central Assembly (in which the Muslim League won all six Muslim seats in Bengal), the League wholeheartedly 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 8,496,992 which was 14.17% of the population).<sup>33</sup> The Congress, the largest and most active political organization at that time in India, issued a 12-point *Manifesto* by the end of October 1945 and the party was very keen to fight the elections of 1946 mainly on the issues of Independence and the immediate transfer of power to the Indians. But the party was not confident enough for getting the support of the Muslims (who largely inclined towards the Muslim League because of its campaign for 'Pakistan') in the Muslim constituencies. The Congress thus felt the necessity of getting the support of Scheduled Castes who at that time numbered not less than 76 lakhs.<sup>34</sup> Muslim League on the other hand, declared to fight the General Election of 1946 on two issues: "Pakistan and the representative character of the League in regard to the Muslim community".<sup>35</sup> Jinnah, the League Supremo, who came to Bengal in the mid of February 1946, made an appeal to all the party workers and supporters to 'work wholeheartedly for only one objective – Pakistan'<sup>36</sup> which ultimately became a 'battle cry' for the League, an anti-thesis to *Akhand Hindustan*.<sup>37</sup> 'To present a united front against the Muslim League during the elections and to create a new political alternative for the Muslim masses in the province',<sup>38</sup> different Muslim organizations like the KPP, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, Muslim Majlis, Momin Conference, Anjuman Watan etc. formed the Nationalist Muslim Parliamentary Board. But at that time, the KPP was almost turned into a shadow of its 1937-phase because it lost its popularity and strength as many of its important leaders like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abdulla-el-Baqui, Shamsuddin Ahmed (Secretary of the KPP), Hasan Ali, Nurul Islam Chowdhury, Giasuddin Ahmed and the like left the KPP and joined the League. Apart from these, there were many other political parties and organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.), the Radical Democratic Party (RDP of M.N. Roy), the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Kshatriya Samity - many of which suffered from man-power and election

fund and were not able to give their candidates in many constituencies. It is to be mentioned here that the CPI and RDP for the first time, decided to contest in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1946 and also gave their candidates in some of the Muslim Constituencies but the election ultimately turned into ‘a pitched battle with the Congress’.<sup>39</sup>

In the Bengal Assembly Elections which were held in March 1946, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) achieved overwhelming victory and emerged as the single largest party by capturing 114 seats in a House of 250 members. Its campaign for ‘Pakistan’ gave it heavy dividends and the BPML obtained 83.64% of the total votes polled in the Muslim Constituencies. The seats won by other parties/groups were as follows: Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) – 86; European Group – 25; Independent (Hindu) – 6; KPP – 4; Anglo – Indian – 4; Communist Party – 3; Independent (Muslim) – 2; Indian Christian – 2; Hindu Mahasabha – 1; Emarat Party – 1; Kshatriya Samity – 1 and Scheduled Caste Federation – 1.<sup>40</sup> The BPCC was also able to increase its strength to 86 seats as against the 52 seats in 1937. But the election verdict completely went against the KPP and it was a major setback for the party which was in power from 1937 to 1943. The KPP bagged only 4 seats (as against 36 in 1937) and Fazlul Huq who was the mouthpiece of the party, was only able to retain his popularity and was elected from two constituencies – Barisal-South and Bagherhat (Khulna). The KPP’s support-base was drastically came – down as the party secured only 5.39% (as against 31.51% in 1937) of total votes polled in the Muslim Constituencies<sup>41</sup> and the KPP almost turned into a ‘signboard’ in the political canvas of Bengal. The Communist Party, contesting for the first time in this election, bagged 3 seats. The Hindu Mahasabha (which earlier won 2 seats in 1937) bagged only 1 seat in 1946 and its leader Syama Prasad Mookerjee was returned from the Calcutta University Constituency. The parties which failed to open their account were the Radical Democratic Party, Muslim Parliamentary Board, Nationalist Muslims and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind.

Immediately after the declaration of the election results, H.S. Suhrawardy was unanimously elected as the Leader of the League Parliamentary Party. Sir Frederick Burrows (who succeeded Mr. R.G. Casey on 19 February 1946 as the Governor of Bengal), decided to give him the first chance to form the Government and prove the

majority in the House. Suhrawardy decided to capitalize this opportunity and tried to collect support from the existing M.L.A.s and different political parties. Having failed to form a Coalition Ministry with Congress, he managed to get the support of seven other M.L.A.s and finally was able to count on a voting strength of about 126 (excluding the Speaker) in a House of 250. It was expected that the European Group, numbering 25, following their earlier practice, would extend its support to the Government.<sup>42</sup> Having convinced, the Governor of Bengal, finally invited Suhrawardy to form the Ministry which was ultimately formed on 24 April 1946. The new Ministry consisted of 8 Ministers (7 from the Muslim League and 1 from the Scheduled Castes). Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal (Scheduled Castes) was the only Hindu representative in this Cabinet and for the first time, a Ministry was formed in Bengal that did not include any members belonging to the Dacca Nawab family. Also there was no representative from the 'Khwaja group' in this Cabinet. Later Suhrawardy changed his attitude towards the 'Khwaja group' and one of its important members, Khan Bahadur Nurul Amin, was elected the Speaker. There was rumour that Fazlul Huq was in the race of Speakership which was totally rejected by Mr. Huq. Later Suhrawardy expanded the Cabinet (on 21 November 1946) and four new Ministers (one from the 'Khwaja group', one belonged to the Caste Hindu and two belonged to the Scheduled Castes) were included into his Cabinet. Mr. Jogendra Nath Mondal who was in charge of Judicial, Works and Buildings Departments was dismissed and Mr. Nagendra Narayan Roy and Mr. Dwarkanath Barori were appointed to share his responsibilities.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A.V. Alexander arrived in India on 24 March 1946 to frame a constitution, to set up a constitution making body and to form an Executive Council with 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. Quickly he convened 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..... That two separate constitution-making bodies be set up by peoples of Pakistan and Hindustan for the purpose of framing their respective constitutions”.<sup>44</sup> This resolution (moved by Suhrawardy) marked a sharp departure from the Lahore Resolution of 1940 (introduced by Fazlul Huq) which envisaged two independent Muslim states in two Zones (North-East and North-West) of India and changed the word “States” into “State” which proved the fact that the establishment of ‘a sovereign independent state (i.e. Pakistan) instead of two independent Muslim states in two Zones of India, was voiced by the elected representatives of the Muslim League. 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 shown as its parts. The ‘Khwaja group’ which earlier stood for an independent Eastern Pakistan in the light of the Lahore Resolution, later changed their stand and in order to show their loyalty towards Jinnah, accepted his idea of a single Pakistan state. On the other hand, Suhrawardy who moved the resolution at the convention in Delhi in April 1946, changed his view within a year and he along with Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim, came forward to initiate a movement for a ‘united and greater Bengal’.

On 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission announced its draft plan which rejected the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan and proposed the formation of a Federal Union consisting of British Indian Provinces and Indian States and also an Interim Government. The Hindus and Muslims of Bengal who were against the dismemberment of their province, felt relieved which was also reflected in the opinion of Frederick Burrows, the then Governor of Bengal (placed before the Cabinet Mission and Lord Wavell on 24 May 1946): “They [the Muslim League Ministers of Bengal] all wanted to stay in office and were not very keen Pakistanis. Both Hindus and Muslims were ..... relieved that Bengal would not be partitioned”.<sup>45</sup> There were mixed reactions from the Congress and the Muslim League towards the Plans of the Cabinet Mission. The Congress welcomed the Plan as it rejected the Pakistan proposal on the basis of an undivided India but opposed to the grouping of provinces as it would deprive the autonomy of the provinces and hammer the interests of the residents particularly the Sikhs. The Muslim League, on the other hand, was not at all

happy with the rejection of the Pakistan scheme but welcomed the Grouping Scheme. Finally the AIML accepted the Cabinet Mission's Plan on 6 June 1946 as it thought that the seeds of Pakistan were inherent in the Plan by virtue of the compulsory grouping of six Muslim provinces in Section 'B' and 'C'. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) after a much heated debate, accepted the Plan on 25 June 1946. But within a few days, complications arose which prompted Jinnah to convene a meeting of the League Council at Bombay on 27-29 July 1946 where two important resolutions were passed. By the first it decided to withdraw its acceptance of the long-term plans of the Cabinet Mission. By the second resolution (passed on 29 July 1946), the League Council gave a clarion call on the 'Muslim Nation' to go in for 'Direct Action' to achieve Pakistan.<sup>46</sup> Next day (i.e. 30 July 1946), the Working Committee of the AIML took a resolution by which all the branches of the League across the country were directed to hold Friday, 16 August as a 'Direct Action Day'.<sup>47</sup>

The BPML leaders (Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Nazimuddin and the like), came forward to abide by the decision of the AIML and decided to observe complete general *hartal* or strike on that day and made the same appeal to all other political parties. When the AIML was taking preparations for the observance of the 'Direct Action Day' on 16 August, the Viceroy gave an offer to the Congress on 8 August 1946 to form an Interim government (with Jawaharlal Nehru as its Vice-President) at the Centre and the Congress almost instantaneously accepted the offer on 12 August. This decision of the Viceroy did not at all please both the AIML and the BPML leaders and Suhrawardy in an interview with the Associated Press of America, gave warning: "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".<sup>48</sup> The Bengal Premier went further and declared 16 August as a public holiday (under Negotiable Instrument Act) in Bengal but his decision created tremendous repercussions and controversy. Calcutta, which was the city of communal harmony and peace and a big centre of anti-imperialist movements, became the first victim of communal blood-bath as the leaders of both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha added fuel to the fire by delivering their fanatic speeches. 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 circulated inflammatory leaflets and pamphlets (mostly in Urdu) to provoke the Muslims to violence against the Hindus in the name of religion. On the other hand, the Hindu Mahasabha leaders and the Hindu press strongly reacted against the inflammatory speeches and activities of the Leaguers, considered their statements as threats 'to 'Pakistanise' the whole of Bengal forthwith'<sup>49</sup> and totally went against the observance of *hartal* on 16 August. As a result, Calcutta witnessed a 'reign of terror' for four days (16-19 August 1946) and on those days, the administration totally failed to maintain law and order and to control the hooligans. A massive communal riot broke out in Calcutta leading to havoc massacre (over 4000 people died and 10,000 injured) which came to be known as "the Great Calcutta Killing". But it was not only limited to Calcutta, within a few days, communal disturbances broke out in Noakhali, Tippera and extended upto Bihar, U.P. and other parts of India.

The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress and a section of the press put the blame absolutely on Suhrawardy and his Ministry for the massacre that was taken place in Calcutta. *The Statesman* severely criticized the role of the Bengal Government and its complete failure in the judgement of the situation and its complete inefficiency in the running of administration. Sarat Chandra Bose, the then member of the Congress Working Committee, demanded for the dissolution of the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawardy and proposed for the formation of an all-party ministry in Bengal. Amidst these allegations and demands, a twelve-member Congress-dominated Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in on 2 September 1946 without having any League representative. Meanwhile, some Muslim League members of Bengal felt the necessity of bringing back its erstwhile members and leaders and likely a Muslim League deputation went to the residence of Fazlul Huq on 1 September 1946 and requested him to rejoin the League. This prompted Fazlul Huq to write a letter to Jinnah on 3 September 1946 requesting him to lift the ban imposed on him in December 1941. Jinnah immediately responded to his appeal and lifted the ban. He allowed Fazlul Huq and his followers to join the League once again and conveyed this message to the press on 8 September.<sup>50</sup> All these developments exerted pressure upon Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier, who also came out with a new plan and expressed his desire to form a coalition government with the Hindus. In order to get necessary approval for this scheme, he met Jinnah on

5 and 6 September but failed to convince the League Supremo. On his return to Calcutta, Suhrawardy had to face tremendous attacks from the Opposition in the House. On 19 September, Dharendra Nath Dutta, Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, moved the no-confidence motions against the League Ministry in general and the Chief Minister in particular. After much heated debate (which went for two days), the Speaker put both the motions on the voting. The motion against the Ministry was defeated by 131 to 87 votes and the other against the Chief Minister was defeated by 130 to 85 votes. The European Group (numbering 20), 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.<sup>51</sup> Although Suhrawardy was able to save his Ministry for the time being, few days later he got a tremendous blow from Jinnah who ultimately gave his consent to join the Interim Government and submitted his list of five Muslim League nominees (4 from North India and 1 from Bengal) to the Viceroy on 15 October 1946. Surprisingly, that man from Bengal was not any Muslim League leader like Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin or Fazlul Huq, but he was Jogendra Nath Mondal, the Scheduled Caste leader.<sup>52</sup> Although this decision of Jinnah infuriated and frustrated the BPML leaders, the League Supremo did not make any change in his decision and the League finally joined the Interim Government on 26 October 1946.

Within seven weeks of the great Calcutta tragedy, another massive communal riot broke out in Noakhali, a Muslim-dominated district of East Bengal where hundreds of Hindus were massacred by the Muslim hooligans. Gandhiji rushed to Noakhali in early November 1946 in order to restore communal peace and harmony. From Noakhali, the riot gradually broke out in Tippera and thereafter in Bihar, U.P., Punjab, Bombay and other parts of India. Meanwhile, in the Bengal Assembly, Fazlul harshly criticized the Suhrawardy Ministry in general and the police forces in particular for their complete failure in tackling the situation in Calcutta. He took up the cause of the Muslims who became the victims of the riots and came forward in support of them. He also went to Bihar to help the victims of the riots. It was during this time, Fazlul Huq was elected the President of the All Bengal Relief and Welfare Society<sup>53</sup> and monitored relief activities in the riot-affected areas. He was so critical about the Suhrawardy Ministry (in the fields of administration, civil supplies, education etc.) that he went to Noakhali to meet with Gandhiji to have a talk about the

formation of a coalition government in Bengal. But neither Gandhiji nor the Congress High Command showed any interest in this scheme which not only disheartened Mr. Huq but also made him more critical about Gandhiji. When Gandhiji, along with his followers, started his walking tour on 2 January 1947 to calm down the situation in Noakhali and Tippera, Fazlul Huq criticized Gandhiji at a public meeting held at Comilla on 12 February 1946 for spreading further communal hatred and advised him (Gandhiji) to leave Noakhali as soon as possible. Few days later, Mr. Huq understood his mistake and wanted to 'have a heart to heart talk' with Gandhiji which ultimately took place at Haimchar where both the leaders had a very healthy discussion and resolved their differences.

Meanwhile, the Suhrawardy- Hashim Group and the Khwaja Group 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, the existing Secretary of the BPML, declared himself as a willing candidate for the party presidentship whereas the Khwaja Group projected Fazlul Huq for that post. Mr. Huq who was willing to be the President of the BPML, requested Abul Hashim to withdraw his candidature in his favour but Hashim refused to do so. As both the candidates did not belong to his camp, Jinnah interfered in this matter and gave necessary instructions to Suhrawardy who convened a meeting of the League Parliamentary Party on 8 February 1947 wherein a resolution was adopted urging the League Council to request Maulana Akram Khan to withdraw his resignation and continue the presidentship of the BPML. Accordingly, Maulana Akram Khan withdrew his resignation on 12 February which was a major setback for Fazlul Huq (though he gave the clarification that he was not in that race). Side by side, the British Government took certain important decisions in the month of February. On 20 February 1947, the British Government made two very important official announcements – firstly, it decided to appoint Lord Louis Mountbatten as the new Viceroy of India (who assumed the office on 24 March 1947) instead of Lord Wavell and 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'. Jawaharlal Nehru hailed the announcement of the date for the transfer of power and on the very next day of the official announcement (i.e. 21

February), he met with Lord Wavell and told him about 'the possible partition of the Punjab and Bengal, if agreement was not reached'. Many Hindus in Bengal and Sikhs in Punjab who were alarmed at the prospect of compulsory grouping which might lead them in Pakistan, relentlessly launched campaign for the partition of their provinces. The All-India Hindu Mahasabha (which stood for and fought for an *Akhand Hindustan*), under the enthusiastic leadership of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, initiated 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) in its meeting (held from 6 to 8 March 1947) raised the demand for the partition of Punjab into a predominantly Muslim part and a predominantly non-Muslim part. Similarly the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) in its meeting, took a resolution on 4 April 1947 in favour of the partition of the province and the formation of a new state of West Bengal within the Indian union.<sup>54</sup> Not only the Hindu Mahasabha and the BPCC were thinking in the same line but also the leading Hindu non-Bengali business tycoons (like Birla, Goenka, Jalan) of Bengal and some leading newspapers (like *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Hindusthan Standard* etc.) were in favour of a separate West Bengal province.

But the growing support and demand for the partition of Bengal was not a universal demand of all the Bengali Hindus and there was a different voice raised by a section of the Bengali Hindus and Congressites like Akhil Chandra Dutta, Sarat Chandra Bose, Kamini Kumar Dutta etc. Akhil Chandra Dutta, former Vice-President of the Central Legislative Assembly and a veteran Congress leader sent a telegram to Sardar Patel on 27 February 1947 saying that "partition of Bengal is fundamentally wrong on all grounds, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, social. It is outcome of defeatist mentality and is misconceived remedy against communal Government in Bengal".<sup>55</sup> On 23 March under his initiative, a conference of prominent persons, including some M.L.A.s, was convened in Calcutta which considered the partition scheme 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.<sup>56</sup> At the end of April

1947, Sarat Chandra Bose formed the All-Bengal Anti-Pakistan and Anti-Partition Committee with himself as its President and Kamini Kumar Dutta, M.L.C., as its Secretary to raise voice against the scheme of Pakistan and the partition of Bengal. Jogendra Nath Mondal, a prominent Bengali Scheduled Caste leader and ex-Minister of Bengal, supported this anti-partition stand and told at New Delhi on 21 April 1947 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”.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, some Muslim politicians of Bengal (like Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim and so on), raised their voice against the partition of Bengal and stood in favour of a united and greater Bengal. On 8 April 1947, in 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”.<sup>58</sup> He reiterated his conviction in another press conference in New Delhi on 27 April that the “partition would be suicidal even from the Hindus point of view”.<sup>59</sup> In giving a reply to the question of one of the reporters on whether he got the approval from the League High Command for his scheme, Suhrawardy said in New Delhi: “I speak for myself. I speak for Bengal. I am visualising an independent, undivided, sovereign Bengal in a divided India”.<sup>60</sup> Khwaja Nazimuddin, an important member of the League Working Committee, at that point of time, also spoke in favour of an independent sovereign Bengal which would be ‘in the best interest of its people, whether Muslim or non-Muslims...’<sup>61</sup> Fazlul Huq who always stood for Bengal, fought for Bengal and its people, surprisingly remained almost silent (except few of his writings in the *Nabayug*) when there was growing movement for United Independent Bengal. He neither raised his voice (like those of Suhrawardy, Sarat Chandra Bose, Abul Hashim and Kiran Sankar Roy) in favour of United Independent Bengal nor did he issue any public statement in support of the scheme. It is still a matter of debate that why did he take this stance. There was a general opinion that he was seriously ill at that time which prevented him to play a very active role in this movement. But this could not be a sufficient excuse. The political developments for the last few years before partition would show that Fazlul Huq at that time was the most dejected, frustrated, disheartened and humiliated man and he almost lost his will-power to be in the forefront of the movement for United Independent Bengal. The man who was the Premier of Bengal from 1937-1943, who was simultaneously the President of the BPML and his section of the KPP and an important member of the Working

Committee of the AIML, surprisingly in 1947, lost his political dominance and he was almost nowhere apart from being a member of the Bengal Assembly and an ordinary member of the League. As a veteran politician, Fazlul Huq probably would have read the pulses of the League High Command and understood the fact that it would not finally approve the scheme of United Independent Bengal. However, he loved Bengal and its people. Seeing the outbursts of communal violence and holocaust in different parts of Bengal vis-à-vis India, he opposed to the partition and stood in favour of the continuation of the British rule in India in order to keep India united: "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".<sup>62</sup> This statement of Fazlul Huq completely went against his Lahore speech (1940) and the decision of the League Council (29 July 1946).

Jinnah, the League Supremo did not support the move for partitioning Punjab and Bengal not in the line of Suhrawardy, Sarat Chandra Bose or Abul Hashim but he took this stand as it would give the Muslims 'a truncated or mutilated Pakistan'. At New Delhi on 30 April 1947, 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".<sup>63</sup> Maulana Akram Khan, the President of the BPML, firmly stood behind the Quaid-i-Azam and on 4 May unequivocally said: ".....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".<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, the Congress and BPML leaders (who stood in favour of United Sovereign Bengal), met in a meeting in the last week of April 1947 and formed a joint committee for drafting the salient features of the Constitution of sovereign Bengal which was speedily completed by 19 May 1947. Next day, Sarat Chandra Bose and Abul Hashim signed the draft Constitution of united Bengal.

Though Jawaharlal Nehru stood against the scheme of 'Sovereign Bengal', he said that the Congress would be ready to support the move for a 'United Bengal' if the province was kept within the Indian Union.<sup>65</sup> On the same day, the Working Committee of the BPML denounced its any connection with the published Constitution of 'Independent Bengal' and affirmed its support towards the League demand for Pakistan.

Lord Mountbatten, the new Viceroy who went to London on 18 May 1947 (carrying with him the new plan drafted by V.P. Menon) to make discussions with the HMG and the British Cabinet gave him the green signal to go ahead with his plan for the partition of the country. He returned to Delhi on 28 May and five days later (i.e. 2 June 1947), announced his Plan for the transfer of power on the basis partition. In this Plan of Mountbatten, Bengal (or any other Indian province) was not given the choice to remain undivided and stay outside Hindustan or Pakistan. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1947, the High Commands of both the Congress and the Muslim League finally accepted the Plan. Suhrawardy who finally succumbed to the pressure of the League High Command, withdrew his support to a United Bengal independent of Hindustan and Pakistan and extended his support towards the League demand for partition. Sarat Chandra Bose, the chief exponent of United Sovereign Bengal, at last expressed his disappointment on the non-fulfillment of his dream by saying: "... if Bengal is rent in twain, the two provinces of Bengal will be exploited more and more by exploiters, white and brown.... 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".<sup>66</sup> But his cry for Bengal and his concern for Bengal went in vain and the partition became more and more visible. Jinnah convened a meeting of the League Council at the Imperial Hotel, Delhi, on 9 June 1947 to persuade the Council members to agree with the Mountbatten's Plan. From Bengal Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmed and other members of the Council, attended the said meeting. In that meeting, Jinnah placed his proposal before the Council members for accepting the partition plan and accordingly a resolution was passed by a majority of votes (only 11 Council members cast their votes against it as counted by Suhrawardy)<sup>67</sup> only after a debate of two and half hours. The Congress Working Committee, on the other hand, in its meeting held on 14 June, also took the decision (For – 157, Against – 28, Neutral – 32) in favour of 'three partitions' – partition of India, partition of Bengal and partition of Punjab. On

20 June 1947, a joint meeting of the members (other than the Europeans) of the Bengal Legislative Assembly was held to decide whether they would join India or Pakistan. On that day, the voting in the afternoon session (3 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.) took place in the presence of 219 members and the Speaker Mr. Nurul Amin presided over the meeting. In that voting, 90 members voted in favour of joining the existing Constituent Assembly (i.e. to remain in India) and 126 members voted in favour of a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. to join Pakistan).<sup>68</sup> Fazlul Huq deliberately kept himself away from joining this session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly 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.<sup>69</sup> In another voting of the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly representing the Muslim majority districts (East Bengal), 34 members voted in favour of joining the existing Constituent Assembly and 107 members voted in favour of joining a new and separate Constituent Assembly (i.e. Pakistan).<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the representatives of the Hindu majority areas (i.e. the Western part), voted for the partition of the province by a majority of 37 votes (by 58 to 21 votes).<sup>71</sup> It should be mentioned here that four Scheduled Caste M.L.A.s voted against partition and stood in favour of joining a new Constituent Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

Although Fazlul Huq remained absent from this session of the House and declined from voting, ultimately failed to stop or control the course of events that led to the partition. When the partition became inevitable, he probably realized his mistake, created a 'safe distance' from his Lahore Resolution (1940) and came forward to stand against partition and condemned the events that took place in India in recent past which was clearly reflected in his press statement of 26 July 1947: "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".<sup>73</sup> He claimed himself to be the last person to 'accentuate communal feeling between Muslims and non-Muslims'. This prompted him to go to his own district Barisal where Fazlul Huq addressed a crowded public meeting at Aswini Kumar Hall on 1 August 1947 and appealed the Hindus not to leave Barisal. He also urged both the Hindus and Muslims not to indulge in fratricidal war and delivered a long speech which was published in the *Hindusthan Standard*. But it was too late. The situation was beyond his control and

the people of Bengal almost divided amongst themselves at that time and they had no other option but to swallow the bitter pill of partition. For the second time, Bengal was partitioned into two halves – East Bengal and West Bengal. East Bengal (where the bulk of the population was Muslims) went to Pakistan (renamed as East Pakistan in 1955) and West Bengal (which had a Hindu-majority population) remained within the boundaries of India. When the fate of the Bengalis was decided and partition of the province became inevitable, Fazlul Huq surprisingly went against his latest stand and argued before the Radcliffe Commission for the cession of disputed districts in favour of Pakistan. Not only that, he also bargained for the inclusion of Calcutta, or of one-half of it, in East Pakistan simply because he simultaneously wanted to live in Calcutta (the city which gave him education, adulation, love and respect) and Pakistan which was only possible if Calcutta was ceded to Pakistan.<sup>74</sup> But his desire did not come into reality. Thereafter, Fazlul Huq regretfully decided to depart for Pakistan to try his fortune in its future politics. But there were doubts in the minds of the people of Bengal about his destination and they became curious enough to know about his selection of place (i.e. which part of Pakistan would he prefer to move). As he was an “out-and-out Bengali”, he did not select Karachi rather he opted for Dacca<sup>75</sup> where he started a new journey of his political career and spent the final years of his life.

Thus Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq who was popularly known as *Sher-e-Bangla* (Tiger of Bengal) and regarded as *Ganatantrer Atandra Prahari* (Vigilant Watchman of Democracy) and *Daradi Neta* (Sympathetic Leader) of the *krishaks* and *prajas* etc., who dominated Bengal politics for almost three decades and led two successive coalition ministries (1937-1943), turned into a tragic hero in 1947. His emergence in Bengal politics in the first half of the twentieth century was a very significant event and was highly remarkable for various reasons. Before his entry into Bengal politics, the majority of the Muslim leaders (like Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Salimullah etc.), though they were born in Bengal, hesitated to identify themselves as Bengalis. Many of these leaders, who mostly belonged to aristocratic families, were not Bengali-speaking people and used Urdu in their day-to-day life. They kept ‘safe distance’ from the masses and most of them were very ‘loyal’ to the British. Here Fazlul Huq stands out as an exceptional one. He broke this trend and added a new dimension to Muslim politics in Bengal. By heart he was a true Bengali and he was very proud of his Bengali identity and was very sincere in promoting Bengali

language and culture. As a *bhumiputra* (son of the soil), he always thought for Bengal, dreamt for Bengal, fought for Bengal and tried to put it on a high pedestal. Having an Ashraf origin and being born in a talukdar family with an outstanding academic and professional career, Fazlul Huq (unlike others who were in his own camp or in the Opposition camp), ‘de-classed’ himself and embraced the ‘subalterns’, the *krishaks* and *prajas* of Bengal. In spite of his ‘elitist’ background, he found no problem at all (unlike the other Muslim politicians of Bengal) in mixing up with the poor, illiterate and impoverished people of rural Bengal. He was very down-to-earth and could easily hug a *krishak* (peasant) or a *praja* (tenant) at any place, any time whether on a stage before thousands of people or in his own house. His residence (in Barisal or Calcutta) was always open for the poor and destitute and many people belonging to his home town Barisal or East Bengal even stayed in his Calcutta residence. Like that of Gandhiji, he could easily mix up with the common people, spoke to them in a very simple language (which the commoners could easily understand) and sympathetically listened to their basic needs, demands, complaints and sufferings and compassionately tried his best to solve their problems at an earliest. The common masses of rural Bengal on the other hand, also felt very comfortable to talk to Mr. Huq and considered him as their friend who would fight for their cause. As he was humane, he often generously donated money to the needy students, poor and impoverished people, orphans and widows and also to the shrines for which he was turned into, as pointed out by renowned scholar A.S.M. Abdur Rab, “the benevolent insolvent”. Thus he became a very popular and charismatic leader of the depressed people of Bengal who extended their support spontaneously in his favour (also in favour of the KPP) to achieve unexpected results in the Assembly Elections of 1937.

But it was one side of the coin. The other side of the coin was marked by Mr. Huq’s inconsistency, restlessness, volatility and his lust for power. He was very casual and flexible and was not inclined to any fixed political principle. Throughout his political career, he could never stick to any particular political ideology and frequently changed his political stand, party and colour according to his necessity, to remain in power and to fulfill his own purpose like the political leaders of modern times. He was one of the founder members of the All-India Muslim League, joined the Indian National Congress and the Swarajya Party as an important member and the

last but not the least formed the Krishak Praja Party (K.P.P.). But Mr. Huq's profit-making policies, mode of action and political stances incurred criticisms from various corners which finally paved the way for the splits within the KPP and his expulsion from the League. In politics, quite naturally, the leaders would try their best and make earnest attempt to come to power and to remain in power as long as possible and in that sense, Fazlul Huq was not an exceptional one. But in doing so, on several occasions, he had to bid farewell to his own political principles and ideologies and he had to make compromise even with the Opposition camp or with the opposite political forces or parties which was clearly observed during the tenure of his two successive Coalition Ministries (1937-1943). Fazlul Huq did not have any guilty feeling for his mode of action and considered that his 'changes of policy' were not 'deviations from principle'. He once stated that: "policies were mere means, and could be likened to an umbrella. The end was to save one's body from the sun and the rain". To do this one had to "hold the umbrella in different directions according to necessity".<sup>76</sup> When the Muslim League (his coalition partner) withdrew its support from the Praja-League Coalition Ministry in December 1941 and Jinnah expelled Fazlul Huq from the League, he held his 'umbrella in different directions' and he was able to secure the support from the rival political parties like the Hindu Mahasabha. He was fond of chair and power and always wanted to be in the limelight and on several occasions he proved it. Whenever he suffered from an 'insecurity feeling', Fazlul Huq felt the urgency of booking a job, a berth for him elsewhere. This prompted him to send his proposals or to express his willingness time to time to the Bengal Governor (like R.G. Casey) or the Viceroy (like Lord Linlithgow) to appoint him to the post of an ambassador in Australia, Canada or in Arabia which ultimately did not materialize. Just few months before the final partition (1947) when Fazlul Huq became fatigue and almost lost his power and prominence and was suffering from an 'existential crisis', he wrote a letter to Jinnah (on 3 September 1946) requesting him to lift the ban (imposed on him in December 1941 by the League Supremo) and expressed his desire to return to the Muslim League (which was ultimately lifted by Jinnah in early September 1946). This also exposed Fazlul Huq's political – bankruptcy, inconsistency and opportunism. It is to be pointed out that as he was 'undependable', 'unpredictable', 'unprincipled', and 'trusted by nobody', Viceroy Wavell did not accept Nehru's offer to induct Fazlul Huq into the central government.<sup>77</sup> Throughout his political career, he was simultaneously an 'asset' and a 'liability' to any

government or political organization which he belonged. It is to be mentioned here that he was not only an opportunist, 'a robust optimist' (as he called himself) but also he was highly ambitious who wanted to see him on the top. Like others, he was also in search of a safe and secured life. Having an exceptional academic record, Fazlul Huq, like his father, chose law as his profession. He also decided to join in the government services and he was at first appointed Deputy Magistrate (recommended by Nawab Salimullah) and later, in 1908, Assistant Registrar of Rural Cooperative Societies in the new province of East Bengal and Assam. After the annulment of the partition of Bengal, he applied for the post of the Registrar of the All-Bengal Cooperative Societies. Being denied promotion to that post (which was given to an I.C.S.), Fazlul Huq became very much frustrated and disgruntled and decided to test his luck in another field. He left the job and thereafter, following the advice of Nawab Salimullah, decided to join active politics. So it can be said that politics was not his automatic choice or first preference rather he came to this field by default.

Although Fazlul Huq was labelled as *Ganatantrer Atandra Prahari* (Vigilant Watchman of Democracy), *Ganatantrer Agradut* (Pioneer of Democracy) or 'Edmund Burke of Bengal', his role in democracy and in the establishment of universal suffrage was not beyond of criticism. Different examples can be cited here. In 1924 when the Francis Enquiry Committee was judging public opinion on the introduction of 'adult suffrage' in India instead of a 'limited franchise', Fazlul Huq in his interview with the Committee members, spoke against of 'adult suffrage' and gave the explanation that the country was not at all fit for its introduction at that point of time. Before the Committee, he also expressed his belief that it would not be a wise step to give the right of 'adult suffrage' to the illiterate rural masses (which he also put forward later in the Round Table Conference in London). Not only that, in the 14-point election *Manifesto* of the KPP (adopted in July 1936), there was no reference to the introduction of 'universal suffrage' in Bengal. All these reveal the fact that Fazlul Huq did not sincerely or strongly believe in 'universal enfranchisement' (which he thought would be rather mishandled by the poor, illiterate people). Probably he had more faith in Aristotelian model of a 'limited franchise' which stood for the rule of the fittest upon the disqualified people for their all-round development and welfare. On this logic, he supported the Lucknow Pact (1916) and opposed to the Simon Commission's recommendations. He only believed in the 'Welfare' concept (by

competent leadership) and following the path of the Utilitarians, he wanted to do ‘greatest good for the greatest number’.

Although Fazlul Huq believed in communal harmony, Hindu-Muslim unity and peaceful co-existence, he, on several occasions, deviated from all these principles and revealed his communal character and showed his inclination, commitment and responsibility only towards the people of his own community (i.e. the Muslims). He supported the partition of Bengal in 1905 (which he thought would remove the economic backwardness of the Muslims in the new province), played a very significant role in the foundation of the All-India Muslim League (1906), delivered several firing speeches in the Bengal Legislative Council (1913-1916) for the spread of education among the Bengali Muslims, demanded more recruitment of the educated Muslims in government services (which he also tried to implement when he became the first elected Premier of Bengal by reserving 60% posts in government offices for the Muslims) and pleaded for separate communal electorate in the Round Table Conferences in London. After rejoining the Muslim League (on 15 October 1937), Fazlul Huq went on tours to different Indian provinces, addressed public meetings and Muslim League Conferences where he delivered communal speeches to appease the Leaguers particularly Jinnah. By his unique oration, he infused communal sentiments at the Mohammad Ali Park in Calcutta (1938), at Satana near Lucknow (1938), at Patna and published a pamphlet called ‘*Muslim Sufferings Under Congress Rule*’ (1939) cataloguing the alleged injustices and oppressions meted out to the Muslims in the Congress-governed provinces’. As a ‘true’ Muslim, Fazlul Huq observed 22 December 1939 as the ‘Day of Deliverance and Thanksgiving’ as a mark of relief as the Congress governments of different provinces resigned in protest against the British Government’s unilateral declaration of the War against Germany. Above all, he moved the Lahore Resolution popularly known as the ‘Pakistan Resolution’ which stood in favour of the formation of ‘*Independent States*’ in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India where the Muslims were numerically in a majority. In his speech given at the Lahore session of the AIML (held on 22-24 March 1940), Fazlul Huq declared: “I am Muslim first and Bengali afterwards. I will take revenge on the Hindus of Bengal if Muslims are hurt in Congress-ruled provinces”.<sup>78</sup> This completely exposed his communal character and he used the ‘communal card’ whenever and wherever needed as a catalyst to get political

dividends, to add fuel to the Muslim sentiment in order to have their support in his favour in provincial vis-à-vis national levels, to establish himself at the all-India politics and above all, to win the confidence of the leaders of the BPML and the AIML and especially Jinnah. But everything did not go in his favour. Huq's endeavour to mark his footprint and establish himself in the national politics vis-à-vis in the League leadership, side by side, his movements, stances and course of action ultimately led him into a clash with the League Supremo who took very severe action against him and expelled him from the League (on 10 December 1941). It is quite clear that Fazlul Huq became a victim of intra-party politics and leadership rivalry and he was confronted with different cross-currents within the League. It was quite unexpected to him as few months earlier he was given a standing ovation at the Lahore session of the AIML (22-24 March 1940) where Jinnah was forced to stop his speech and resume his seat by saying: 'when the tiger appears, the lamb must give way'.<sup>79</sup> But the irony of fact was that just within a short period, there was complete reversal of their previous role and positions – the 'lamb' actually became the 'tiger' and the pioneer of the 'Pakistan' movement while the 'tiger of Bengal' (*Sher-e-Bangla*) who was the mover of the Lahore Resolution, fell prey to circumstances and almost turned into a 'lamb' and he was considered as 'useless' by the Leaguers. After his expulsion from the League, Fazlul Huq tried to reorganize the KPP but it was too late. Since his rejoining the League (in 1937), Mr. Huq devoted his whole-hearted effort to promote the League ideals throughout the country and did not spend much of his time in strengthening the KPP while he was in power. It obviously helped the League gradually to establish its strong foot-hold over Bengal and the KPP, on the other hand, failed to capitalize the situation. It not only suffered from splits but also gradually lost its support-base (as most of the Muslims became the supporters of 'Pakistan') which Mr. Huq later failed to retrieve. The KPP finally lost its momentum and faced a major setback in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1946. The election results completely proved that the KPP became a 'microscopic minority', a political signboard in Bengal. This probably prompted Huq to rejoin the League (in September 1946) and to make the last bid to retain his power and prestige. When Akram Khan, the existing President of the BPML tendered his resignation in early November 1946, Fazlul Huq became very ambitious to be in that post. But it did not materialize as Akram Khan (requested by Suhrawardy according to the instruction of Jinnah), decided to withdraw his resignation. A dejected and frustrated Fazlul Huq thereafter

decided strongly to raise his voice against the partition of India, to devote the rest of his life in restoring peace and communal harmony and rescue life in the riot-affected areas of Bengal.

In spite of all his shortcomings, Fazlul Huq who called himself 'the living history', undoubtedly secures an esteemed place in the history of Bengal by dint of his sheer ability, efficiency, sincerity, wisdom, eloquence, honesty, integrity, dedication, simplicity, his dynamic personality and above all, his love and affection for the hundreds and thousands of have-nots, the *krishaks* (peasants) and *prajas* (tenants) and his struggle for their betterment. As he was human and humane, he extended his helping hand towards the distressed and downtrodden people of rural Bengal. It was for their cause Fazlul Huq led the Praja Movement and founded the Krishak Praja Party, demanded for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and raised the slogan of *dal-bhat* (rice and pulse) for the common people which gave him political dividends in the Bengal Assembly Elections of 1937. Forming the first Coalition Ministry in 1937, Fazlul Huq dedicated his life to the service of the common people and took initiatives to improve the living conditions of the toiling masses. His Praja-League Ministry introduced several remarkable and progressive pro-peasant and pro-tenant legislations and economic reforms which placed his Ministry into a high pedestal. In this field, Fazlul Huq's greatest contribution was the formation of a number of *Rin Salishi* (Debt Reconciliation) Boards in different districts of Bengal which helped a large number of peasants to get back their lands from the hungry usurers. His Ministry not only protected the rights of the *krishaks* and *prajas* but also passed different Acts to provide benefits for the working class people and to prevent the employment of the child labours and their exploitation in factories and elsewhere. Not only that, going much ahead of his time, Fazlul Huq passed the Maternity Benefit Act (1939) to provide certain benefits to the women workers in the factories which is presently followed in India by both the Central and State Governments. Following the path of the nineteenth century social reformers, he came forward to introduce many social and educational reforms. Under his guidance, his Ministry placed the Bengal Marriage Dowry Prevention Bill (1940) in the House to put an end to the 'dowry system' at the time of marrying a girl. Though he failed to stop this obnoxious practice (which shamefully still exists in our society), at least he showed his intensity and goodwill to uproot this social evil which is quite commendable. Being the

Premier cum Education Minister of his Praja-League Coalition Ministry, Fazlul Huq brought revolutionary changes, introduced several reforms and sanctioned huge grants for the advancement of education in Bengal particularly among the Muslims. It was during his tenure, so many educational institutions (including technical) and hostels (for both Medical and Engineering) were built. But in this field his greatest contribution (like that of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Derozio, D.W. Bethune, Begum Rokeya and the like), was the promotion of female education particularly among the Muslims (who were quite conservative and reluctant at that time to send their girls to the schools and colleges to take education). Going against the conservative Muslims, Fazlul Huq came forward to establish many schools and colleges absolutely for the girls like the Wajid Memorial Girls' High School, the Lady Brabourne College (at Calcutta) and Eden Girls' College at Dacca which helped to bring significant changes in the existing Muslim society.

Fazlul Huq was a distinguished member of the Bengal Legislature, a top-notch politician, a whole-hearted anti-imperialist and a great patriot. Though he had many contradictions and ambiguities, he was the only person who showed his guts not only to raise his voice and criticize the autocratic attitude of the Quaid-e-Azam (Jinnah) towards the League members of the National Defence Council (who had been invited by the then Viceroy to join the Council not as members of the League but as Premiers of their respective provinces) but also to administer 'a mild warning' to his Governor (for the H.E.'s improper behaviour and indecent language which the Governor used in his letter to Huq when he was in the chair of the Premier). Leading from the front the two successive Coalition Ministries, Fazlul Huq showed his zeal and commitment to do something for the people of Bengal. It is true that he failed to meet up all the expectations of the people of Bengal and fulfill all his promises (published in the election *Manifesto*). We have to keep it in our mind (inspite of his contrasting, volatile and ambivalent character) that he worked within certain constraints and headed a coalition ministry and not a one-party government (as his KPP alone did not enjoy absolute majority in the House) and he had to depend largely on the support of his co-partners for running the government. It is very clear that Mr. Huq was under the compulsion of coalition politics and did not enjoy that absolute freedom to fulfill his or his KPP's commitments. It is a tragedy of his life that the world only recognizes Fazlul Huq as the mover of the Lahore Resolution (1940) or the *Pakistan Prastab*

(Pakistan Proposal) and shamefully it does not consider his opposition to the partition of India or does not recognize his earnest attempt and his appeal to the people of Barisal vis-à-vis Bengal to maintain brotherhood and communal harmony and restore peace immediately before the final partition of Bengal (1947) and above all, does not pay any heed to his remarkable contributions in socio-economic and educational fields. It was only because of him that the Bengali *krishaks* and *prajas*, men and women, to a great extent, got certain reliefs and they were freed from the feudal exploitation and social prejudices. Thus Fazlul Huq, inspite of all his limitations, will ever be remembered as one of the greatest sons of undivided Bengal for his untiring fight for the toiling masses, his constant effort for ameliorating their living conditions, his 'battle-cry' for having their basic needs i.e. *dal-bhat* (rice and pulse), his formation of a number of *Rin Salishi* (Debt Reconciliation) Boards to help the poor *krishaks* and *prajas* and the last but not the least, for his remarkable contribution in the field of education particularly for the establishment of many educational institutions, schools and colleges, hostels absolutely for the Muslim girls and for all these, his name will ever be written in golden letters in the history of undivided Bengal.

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## *Appendix 'A'*

### **Aims and Programme of the Nikhil Banga Krishak Praja Samity:**

#### **Aims and Objects:**

1. Full responsible Government for India with adequate and effective safeguards of Mussalmans, and with end in view work for the immediate replacement of the present Provincial Constitution and the proposed Central Constitution by a democratic full self-government.
2. To protect and advance the political and religious and other rights and interests of the Indian Mussalmans.
3. To promote friendship and union between the Mussalmans and other Communities of India.
4. To maintain and strengthen brotherly relations between the Mussalmans of India and those of other countries.
5. Abolition of the present zamindary system (Permanent Settlement) which is highly detrimental to the interests of the people at large by legal and constitutional means.

#### **Programme :**

1. To protect the religious rights of the Mussalmans. In all matters of purely religious character, due weight shall be given to the opinions of Jamait-ul-Ulema Hind and the Mujahids.
2. To make every effort to secure the repeal of all repressive laws e.g. the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Public Security Act etc.
3. To resist all measures which are detrimental to the interest of Bengal and of India, which encroach on the fundamental liberties of the people and lead to economic exploitation of the country.
4. To reduce heavy cost of the provincial administrative machinery and allocate substantial funds for the nation building departments.
5. To encourage development of industries, including cottage industries through (a) immediate steps for the fixing of a minimum price for jute, (b) the organization of marketing and sale of local commodities on a provincial scale, (c) the adoption of Indian products to be used for all Government purposes and (d) the provision of loans, against the security of the Government for the expansion of large-scale and heavy industries.
6. To regulate currency, exchange and prices in the interest of the economic development of the country.
7. To stand for the social, educational and economic uplift of the rural population e.g. state provision and control of public utilities and social welfare services.

8. To sponsor measures for the relief of agricultural indebtedness by raising loans, if necessary.
9. To make elementary education free and compulsory immediately without the imposition of any fresh tax or cess on the tenantry.
10. To protect and promote Urdu language and script, but with proper safeguards for the development of the vernacular.
11. To devise measures for the amelioration of the general conditions of the Mussalmans specially of Bengal.
12. To take steps to reduce the heavy burden of taxation, particularly on the poor.
13. To create a healthy public opinion and general political consciousness throughout the country.
14. Thorough overhauling of the Bengal Tenancy Act in the interest of the agriculturists ensuring the vesting of proprietary rights in the tillers of soil and including.
  - (i) The abolition of the Zamindar's right of 'nazar' and 'Salam/ right of pre-emption.
  - (ii) Tenants right of mutation of name without additional payment.
  - (iii) Reduction of rate of rent.
15. To take adequate and effective measures against illegal exactions by the Zamindars, moneylenders and their representatives.
16. To take steps for securing from the Government of India the entire amount realized on account of the duty on jute, and to earmark the amount for expenditure on the improvement of agriculture and rural sanitation.
17. To adopt measures for the improvement of agriculture and cattle.
18. To provide for adequate water supply in villages.
19. To resuscitate the dead and dying rivers of Bengal.
20. To take steps for the adequate representation of Muslims and the scheduled castes in the services with a view to ensuring justice to all the Communities.
21. To devise ways and means for the solution of the unemployment problem.
22. To introduce measures for the amelioration of the condition of labourers by the provisions of minimum wages, and control of the condition of sanitation and housing.

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Source: *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10th September, 1936.

## Appendix 'B'

### BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

#### *Alphabetical List of Members*

**[Elected in the General Election of 1937, held under the Act of 1935]**

#### A

- Abdul Aziz, Maulana Md. (Narayanganj East—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Bari, Maulvi (Berhampore—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hafeez, Khan Bahadur Syed (Dacca Central—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hafiz, Mr. Mirza (Tangail West—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hafiz Mia, Mr. (Kurigram South—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hakeem, Mr. (Khulna—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hakim, Maulvi (Mymensingh West—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hakim, Vikrampur, Maulvi Md. (Munshiganj—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hamid, Mr. A.M. (Pabna West—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Hamid Shah, Maulvi (Kishoreganj North—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Jabbar, Maulvi (Dinajpur Central East—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Jabbar Palwan, Mr. Md. (Jamalpur North—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Kader, Mr. (Patuakhali South—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Karim, Mr. (Jamalpur cum Muktagacha—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Latif Biswas, Maulvi (Manikganj West—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Majid, Maulvi (Mymensingh North—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Majid, Mr. Syed (Noakhali South—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Wahab Khan, Maulvi (Bakarganj West—Muhammadan)
- Abdul Wahed, Maulvi (Mymensingh East—Muhammadan)
- Abdulla-Al Mahmood, Mr. (Serajganj North—Muhammadan)
- Abdur Rahaman, Khan Bahadur, A.F.M. (24-Parganas North East—Muhammadan)
- Abdur Rahaman, Siddiqu, Mr. (Muslim Chamber of Commerce)
- Abdur Rasheed, Maulvi Md. (Birbhum—Muhammadan)
- Abdur Raschid Mahmood, Mr. (Serajganj North—Muhammadan)
- Abdur Rauf, Khan Sahib Maulvi S. (Howrah—Muhammadan)
- Abdur Rauf, Mr. Shah (Rangpur South—Muhammadan)

Abdur Razzak, Maulvi (Feni—Muhammadan)

Abdus Shaheed Maulvi Md. (Dacca North Central—Muhammadan)

Abidur Reza Chowdhury, Khan Bahadur (Chandpur West— Muhammadan)

Abu Hossain Sarkar, Maulvi (Gaibandha North—Muhammadan)

AbulFazl, Mr Muhammadan (Madaripur West—Muhammadan)

Abul Hashim, Maulvi (Burdwan—Muhammadan)

Abul Hosain, Mr. Ahmed (Netrokona North—Muhammadan)

Abul Quasem, Maulvi (Hooghly—Muhammadan)

Acharyya Choudhury, Maharaja Sashi Kanta, of Muktagacha, Mymensingh (Dacca Landholders)

Aftab Ali, Mr. (Water Transport Trade Union)

Aftab Hossain Joardar, Maulvi (Nadia East—Muhammadan)

Ahmed Ali, Khan Sahib Maulana, Enayetpuri (Jhenidah— Muhammadan)

Ahmed Ali Mridha, Maulvi (Goalundo—Muhammadan)

Ahmed Hosain, Mr. (Gaibandha South—Muhammadan)

Ahmed Khan, Mr. Syed (Noakhali South—Muhammadan)

Alfazuddin Ahmed, Khan Bahadur (Midnapore—Muhammadan)

Aminullah, Maulvi (Noakhali Central—Muhammadan)

Amir Ali, Md. Mia (Rajshahi South—Muhammadan)

Anderson, Mr. J.P. (Calcutta and Suburbs European)

Anwarul Azim, Khan Bahadur, Md. (Chittagong South— Muhammadan)

Armstrong, Mr. W.L. (Burdwan Division—European)

Ashraf Ali, Mr. M. (Natore—Muhammadan)

Asimuddin Ahmed, Mr. (Tippera Central—Muhammadan)

Aulad Hossain Khan, Maulvi (Manikganj East—Muhammadan)

Azahar Ali, Maulvi (Pabna East—Muhammadan )

Azizul Haque, the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur M., C.I.E. (Nadia West—Muhammadan)

## **B**

Bannerjee, Dr. Suresh Chandra (Calcutta and Suburbs—Registered Factories)

Banerji, Mr. P. (24-Parganas North-West—General)

Banerjee, Mr. Pramatha Nath (Burdwan North-West—General)  
Banerjee, Sibnath (Howrah—Registered Factories)  
Banerji, Mr. Satya Priya (Rajshahi—General)  
Bannerjee, Mr. Manoranjan (Dacca East—General)  
Bannerman, Mr. H.C. (Indian Tea Associatipn)  
Barat Ali, Mr. Mohammad (Serajganj Central—Muhammadan)  
Barma, Babu Premhari (Dinajpur— General)  
Barma, Mr. Puspajit (Rangpur—General)  
Barman, Babu Shyama Prasad (Dinajpore—General)  
Barman, Babu Upendra Nath (Jalpaiguri cum Siliguri—General)  
Basu, Mr. Jatindra Nath (Calcutta North—General)  
Basu, Mr. Santosh Kumar (Calcutta East— General)  
Bell-Hart, Miss P. B. (Anglo-Indian Constituency)  
Bhawmik, Dr. Gobindra Chandra (Midnapore East—General) Biswas, Babu  
Lakskmi Narayan (Nadia—General)  
Biswas, Mr. Rasik Lai (Jessore—General)  
Biswas, Mr. Surendra Nath (Faridpur—General)  
Blomenstok, Mr. L. M. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)  
Bose, Mr. Sarat Chandra (Calcutta South—General)  
Brasher, Mr. F. C. (Calcutta and Suburbs—European)

## C

Campbell, Sir George (Calcutta and Suburbs—European)  
Chakrabarty, Mr. Jatindra Nath (Rangpur—General)  
Chakrabarty, Mr. Narendra Narayan (Bogra cum Pabna— General)  
Chattopadhyay. Mr. Haripada (Nadia—General)  
Chaudhuri, Rai Harendra Nath (Nadia— General)  
Chippendale, Mr. J.W. (Anglo-Indian)  
Crosfield, Mr. L.M. (Chittagong Division—European)

## **D**

Das, Mr. Mahim Chandra (Chittagong-General)  
Das, Mr. Radha Nath (Hooghly North-East—General)  
Das, Mr. Anukul Chaudra(24-Parganas North-East—General)  
Das, Mr. Kirit Bhusan (Murshidabad—General)  
Das, Mr. Monomohan (Mymensingh East—General)  
Das, Mr. Debendra Nath (Birbhum—General)  
Das Gupta, Mr. Khagendra Nath (Jalpaiguri cum Siliguri— General)  
Das Gupta, Dr. J. M. (Calcutta Central—General)  
Das Gupta, Sj. Narendra Nath(Bakarganj South-West—General)  
Datta, Mr. Dharendra Nath(Tippera—General)  
Dolui, Mr. Harendra (Jhargram cum Ghatal—General)  
Dutt, Mr. Sukumar( Hooghly South-West—General)  
Dutta Gupta, Miss Mira (Calcutta—General—Women)  
Dutta Mazumdar, Mr. Niharendu (Barrackpore—Registered Factories)

## **E**

Edbar, Mr. Upendranath (Bakarganj South-West—General) Emodul Haque, Kazi  
(Kurigram North—Muhammadan)

## **F**

Farhad Raza Chowdhury, Mr. M. (Jangipur—Muhammadan)  
Farhut BanoKhanarn, Begum (Dacca— Muhammadan--Women)  
Fazlul Huq the Hon'ble Mr. A. K. (Patuakhali North—Muhammadan)  
Fazlul Quadir, Khan Bahadur Maulvi (Chittagong North-West— Muhammadan)  
Fazlur Rahman, Mr. (Jamalpur East—Muhammadan)  
Fazlur Rahman, Mr. (Dacca University)  
Ferguson, Mr. R. H. (Rajshahi Division—European)

## **G**

Ghose, Babu Atul Krishna (Jessore—General)  
Giasuddin Ahmed, Mr. (Jamalpur West—Muhammadan)

Golam Sarwar Hosaini, Mr. Shah Syed (Ramganj cum Raipur—Muhammadan)  
Gomes, Mr. S. A. (Dacca Division—Indian Christian)  
Goswami, Mr. Tulsi Chandra (Burdwan Division North Municipal-General)  
Griffiths, Mr. C. (Anglo-Indian)  
Gupta, Mr. Jogesh Chandra (Calcutta South Central—General)  
Gupta, Mr. J. N. (Railway—Trade Union—Labour)  
Gurung, Mr. Damber Singh (Darjeeling—General)  
Gyasuddin Ahmed Choudhury, Al-Hadj (Madaripur East— Muhammadan)

## **H**

Habibullah, the Hon'ble Nawab Bahadur K. of Dacca (Dacca Municipal—Muhammadan)  
Hafizuddin Chowdhuri, Maulvi (Thakurgaon—Muhammadan)  
Hamiduddin Ahmad, Khan Sahib (Kishoreganj East—Muhammadan)  
Hamilton, Mr. K. A (Calcutta Trades Association)  
Hasan Ali Chowdhury, Mr. Syed (Tangail North—Muhammadan) Hasanuzzaman, Maulvi Md. (Tippera South—Muliammadan) Hashem Ali Khan, Khan Bahadur Maulvi (Bakarganj North— Muhammadan)  
Hasina Murshed, M. B. E., Mrs. (Calcutta—Muhammadan— Women)  
Hatemally Jamadar, Klian Sahib (Pirojpur South—Muhammadan)  
Hawkings, Mr. R. J. (European—Calcutta & Suburbs)  
Hirtzel, Mr. M. A. F. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)  
Homan, Mr. F. T. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)

## **I**

Idris Ahmed Mia, Mr. (Malda South—Muhammadan)  
Ispahai, Mr. M. A. H. (Calcutta South—Muhammadan)

## **J**

Jalaluddin Ahmad, Khan Bahadur Maulvi (Cox's Bazar—Muhammadan)  
Jalaluddin Hashemy, Mr. Syed (Satkhira—Muhammadan)  
Jalan, Mr. I. D. (General Constituency—Calcutta West)  
Jasimuddin Ahmed, Mr. (24-Parganas, South—Muhammadan)  
Jonab Ali Majumdar, Maulvi (Chandpur East—Muhammadan)

## **K**

- Kabiruddin Khan, Khan Sahib Maulvi (Netrokona South— Muhammadan)
- KazemAli Mirza, Sahibzada Kawan Jah Syed (Murshidabad South— Muhammadan)
- Kennedy, Mr. I.G. (Indian Jute Mills Association)
- Khaitan, Mr. Debi Prosad (Indian Chamber of Commerce)
- Khan, Mr. Debendra Lall (Midnapore Central—General)
- Kumar, Mr. Atul Chandra (Malda—General)
- Kundu, Mr. Nishitha Nath (Dinajpur—General)

## **M**

- MacGregor, Mr. G. G. (Indian Tea Association)
- Mafizuddin Ahmed, Dr. (Bogra North—Muhammadan)
- Mafizuddin Ahmed, Maulvi (Tippera North—Muhammadan)
- Mafizuddin Choudhury, Maulvi (Balurghat—Muhammadan)
- Maguire, Mr. L.T. (Anglo-Indian)
- Mahtab, Maharajkumar Uday Chand (Burdwan Central—General)
- Mahatabuddin Ahmed, Khan Bahadur (Dinajpur Central West —Muhammadan)
- Maiti, Mr. Nikunja Behari (Midnapore South-East—General)
- Maitra, Mr. Surendra Mohan (North Bengal Municipal—General)
- Maji, Mr. Adwaita Kumar (Burdwan Central—General)
- Majumdar, Mrs. Hemaprova (Dacca—General Women)
- Mazumdar, Mr. Birendra Nath (East Bengal Municipal—General)
- Mal, Mr. Iswar Chandra (Midnapore South-West—General)
- Mandal, Mr. Amrita Lal (Mymensingh West—General)
- Mandal, Mr. Banku Bahari (Burdwan North-West—General)
- Mandal, Mr. Birat Chandra (Faridpur—General)
- Mandal, Mr. Jagat Chandra (Tippera—General)
- Mandal, Mr. Jogendra Nath (Bakarganj North-East— General)
- Mandal, Mr. Krishna Prasad (Midnapore Central—General)
- Maniruddin Akhand, Maulvi (Rajshahi North—Muhammadan)

Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Maulana Md. (Chittagong South- Central—Muhammadan)

Maqbul Hosain, Mr. (Tippera North-East—Muhammadan)

Masud Ali Khan Panni, Maulvi (Tangail South—Muhammadan)

Millar, Mr. C. (Calcutta and Suburbs—Muhammadan)

Mohammed Ali, Khan Bahadur (Bogra West—Muhammadan)

Mohsin Ali, Mr. Md. (Meherpur—Muhammadan)

Mookerjee, Mr. Syamaprasad (Calcutta University)

Morgan, Mr. G., C.I.E. (Presidency Division—European)

Moslem Ali Mollah Maulvi (Rajshahi Central—Muhammadan)

Mozammel Huq, Maulvi Md. (Bhola North—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Afzal, Khan Sahib Maulvi Syed (Pirojpur North—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Ibrahim, Maulvi (Noakhali North—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Ishaque, Maulvi (Bogra South—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Israil, Maulvi (Kishoreganj South—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Siddique, Dr. Syed (Bankura—Muhammadan)

Muhammad Solaiman, Khan Sahib Maulvi (Barrackpore Municipal—Muhammadan)

Mukerji, Mr. Dharendra Narayan (Hooghly North-East)

Mukherjee, Mr. B. (Colliery—Coal Mines—Labour)

Mukherji, Dr. H. C. (Calcutta cum Presidency Division—Indian Christian)

Mukherji, Dr. Sarat Chandra (Birbhum—General)

Muilick, the Hon'ble Mr. Mukunda Behari (Khulna—General)

Muilick, Mr. Pulin Behary (Howrah—General)

Muilick, Srijut Ashutosh (Bankura West—General)

Musharruff Hossain, the Hon'ble Nawab, Khan Bahadur (Jalpaiguri cum Darjeeling—Muhammadan)

Mustagawsal Haque, Mr. Syed (Bagerhat—Muhammadan)

Mustufa Ali Dewan Sahib, Mr. (Brahmanbaria North—Muhammadan)

## N

Nandy, the Hon'ble Maharaja Sris Chandra of Cossimbazar (Presidency Landholders)

Nasaruilah, Nawabzada K. (Brahmanbaria South—Muhammadan)  
Naskar, Mr. Hem Chandra (24-Parganas South-East—General)  
NausherAli, Mr. Syed (Jessore Sadar— Muhammadan)  
Nazimuddin, the Hon'ble Khwaja Sir, K.C.I.E. (Calcutta North —Muhammadan)  
Nooruddin, Mr. K. (Hooghly cum Howrah Municipal—Muhammadan)  
Norton, Mr. H. R. (Calcutta Trades Association)

## **P**

Pain, Mr. Barada Prosanna (Hooghly cum Howrah Municipal— General)  
Patton, Mr. W. C. (Darjeeling—European)  
Paul, Sir Hari Sankar (Bengal National Chamber of Commerce)  
Pramanik, Mr. Tarinicharan (Malda—General)

## **R**

Rahman, Khan Bahadur A. M. L. (Rajshahi Central— Muhammadan)  
Raikut, The Hon'ble Mr. Prasanna Deb (Jalpaiguri cum Siliguri— General)  
Rajibuddin Tarafdar, Maulvi (Bogra East—Muhammadan)  
Ramizuddin Ahmed, Mr. (Tippera West—Muhammadan)  
Ray Choudhury, Mr. Birendra Kishore, (Mymensingh East —General)  
Razaur Rahaman Khan, Mr. (Dacca South Central— Muhammadan)  
Roy, Babu Patiram (Khulna—General)  
Roy, the Hon'ble Sir Bijoy Prasad Singh (Burdwan Landholders)  
Roy, Kumar Shib Shekhareswar (Rajshahi Landholders)  
Roy, Mr. Charu Chandra (Mymensingh West— General)  
Roy, Mr. Dhananjoy (Dacca East—General)  
Roy, Mr. Kamalkrishna (Bankura East—General)  
Roy, Mr. Kiran Sankar (Dacca West—General)  
Roy, Mr. Kishori Pati (Jhargram cum Ghatal—General)  
Roy, Mr. Manmatha Nath (Howrah—General)  
Roy, Rai Bahadur Kshirod Chandra (Chittagong Landholders)

## S

- Sadaruddin Ahmed, Mr. (Bakarganj South—Muhammadan)
- Safiruddin Ahmed, Haji (Rangpur North—Muhammadan)
- Salim, Mr. S. A. (Narayanganj North—Muhammadan)
- Sanaullah, Al-Haj Maulana Dr. (Chittagong North-East— Muhammadan)
- Sanyal, Dr. Nalinaksha (Presidency Division Municipal— General)
- Sanyal, Mr. Sasanka Sekhar (Murshidabad—General)
- Sarkar, Babu Madhusudan (Bogra cum Pabna—General)
- Sarkar, the Hon'ble Mr. Nalini Ranjan (Bengal National Chamber of Commerce)
- Sassoon, Mr. R. M. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)
- Sen, Babu Nagendra Nath (Khulna—General)
- Sen, Rai Bahadur Jogesh Chandra (24-Parganas South-East— General)
- Serajul, Islam, Mr. (Bongaon—Muhammadan)
- Shahabuddin, Mr. Khawaja, C. B. E. (Narayanganj South— Muhammadan)
- Shahedali, Mr. (Matlabazar— Muhammadan)
- Shamsuddin Ahmed, Khandkar, Mr. (Gopalganj—Muhammadan)
- Shamsuddin Ahmed, Mr. M. (Kusthia—Muhammadan)
- Shamsul Huda, Maulana (Mymensingh South—Muhammadan)
- Singha, Babu Kshetra Nath (Rangpur—General)
- Sinha, Srijut Manindra Bhusan (Bankura West—General)
- Sirdar, Babu Litta Munda (Bengal Dooars (Western) Tea Garden, Labour)
- Steven, Mr. J. W. R. (Dacca—European)
- Suhrawardy, the Hon'ble Mr. H. S. (24-Parganas Municipal— Muhammadan)
- Sur, Mr. Harendra Kumar (Noakhali—General)

## T

- Tamizuddin Khan, Maulvi (Faridpore West—Muhammadan)
- Tapuriah, Rai Bahadur Moongru Lall (Marwari Association)
- Thakur, Mr. Promatha Ranjan (Faridpur—General)
- Tofel Ahmed Choudhury, Maulvi Haji (Bhola South—Muhammadan)

## **W**

Waliur Rahman, Maulvi (Jessore East—Muhammadan)

Walker, Mr. J. R. (Hooghly cum Howrah—European)

Walkar, Mr. W. A. M. (Indian Jute Mills Association)

Warren, Mr. P. F. S. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)

Whitehead, Mr. R. B. (Indian Mining Association)

Wordsworth, Mr. W. C. (Bengal Chamber of Commerce)

## **Y**

Yusuf Ali Choudhury, Mr. (Faridpur East—Muhammadan)

Yusuf Mirza, Mr. (24-Parganas Central—Muhammadan)

## **Z**

Zahur Ahmed Choudhury, Maulvi (Malda North—Muhammadan)

Zaman, Mr. A. M. A. (Hooghly cum Serampore—Registered Factories, Labour)

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(Source: Gautam Chattopadhyay, Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle 1862-1947, pp. 224-232.)

*Appendix 'C'*

Voting Pattern on Tenancy Bill, 1937

	1	2	3	4
	Muhammadan	General	Organisations, Landholders and Labour	European and Anglo-Indian
Total	119	80	20	31

MOTIONS						
Anti-landlord	1	18	37	4	0	
Pro-landlord	1	72	11	5	12	
Pro-raiyat	2	19	46	2	1	
	3	17	36	3	1	
	4	19	33	3	0	
Anti-raiyat	2	73	21	8	13	
	3	78	22	4	9	
	4	69	15	3	11	
Pro-underraiyat	5	29	37	6	0	
Anti-underraiyat	5	65	13	5	4	
Anti-noncultivating raiyat	6	0	3	5	26	
Pro-noncultivating raiyat	6	101	61	11	1	
Anti-government	7	1	19	5	3	
Pro-government	7	83	2	5	19	

Source: *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (1937), Vol. 51, Nos. 3-4.

*Appendix 'D'*

**Number of Appointments of Muslims made in the various  
Branches of Government Services during the Year 1937-1938**

<i>Service</i>	<i>Number of appointments made</i>	<i>Number of Muslims appointed</i>
<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>
<i>Bengal Senior Educational Service (Men's Branch)</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Bengal Educational Service (Men's Branch)</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Bengal General Service Subordinate Educational Service</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Nil</i>
<i>Lecturers, Demonstrators</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Assistant Headmasters</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Sub-divisional Inspectors of Schools</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Assistant Masters</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Sub-Inspector of School</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Classical Teachers</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Nil</i>
<i>Vernacular Teachers</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Drawing and Drill Master</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Guru Training Pandits</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Nil</i>
<i>Miscellaneous Appointments</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Clerical Appointments</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>12</i>

Source: *Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 1938, Vol. LII, No.5, p. 321.*

## *Appendix 'E'*

### **Resolution of the Muslim League at Lahore, 24 March, 1940:**

1. While approving and endorsing the action taken by the Council and the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, as indicated in their resolutions dated the 27th of August, 17th and 18th of September and 22nd of October 1939, and 3rd of February 1940 on the constitutional issue, this session of the All-India Muslim League emphatically reiterates that the scheme of Federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935 is totally unsuited to and unworkable in the peculiar conditions of this country and is altogether unacceptable to Muslim India.

2. It further records its emphatic view that while the declaration dated the 18th of October 1933 made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government is reassuring in so far as it declares that the policy and plan on which the government of India Act 1935, is based will be reconsidered in consultation with the various parties, interests and communities in India. Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered de novo and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it is framed with their approval and consent.

3. Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that a constitutional plan would be workable in the country if ...that constitutional plan would be workable in the country if acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, viz, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign: that adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in the units and in the regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them and in other parts of India where the Muslims are in a minority adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards shall be specifically provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

This session further authorizes the Working Committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary.

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*Source: File No. F. 163/40-R, National Archives of India, New Delhi.*

## *Appendix 'F'*

### **Extracts from a Letter of Fazlul Huq written to the Bengal Governor, John Herbert, dated 2 August 1942**

At a time when the implications of the Congress Resolution have filled all our hearts with the deepest anxiety for the future of India, I feel unfortunately compelled to write this letter to Your Excellency. I wish I could avoid this correspondence. But circumstances have left me no other alternative, and it pains me much to have to say very bluntly that you have contributed not a little to the creation of the situation which has forced me to take this unpleasant step. You are the Governor of the Province and I am your Chief Minister and your principal adviser. Our mutual relations impose on both of us reciprocal duties and obligations, and I can never shirk the responsibility of intervening by means of friendly, but frank, advice whenever I find you are treading the wrong path. If I allow things to drift, I will be failing in my duty to you and to the people of this Province. I am convinced that the time has come when I must speak to you quite openly what I feel in, order to avoid a constitutional crisis in Bengal. More than once have I sounded a note of caution and have told you that you have been following a policy which cannot but have the inevitable effect of practically suspending the constitution in Bengal, . . . As the head of the Cabinet I cannot possibly allow this attitude on your part to go unchallenged .... I am writing with the stern resolve to assert myself as the Chief Minister, and I can assure you that if it leads to a constitutional struggle between you as the Governor and me as the Chief Minister, I will not shirk from doing my duty regardless of consequences.

Broadly speaking, there are two classes of cases .... In the first category I will put that class of cases wherein I have detected your personal interference in almost every matter of administrative detail, including even those where your interference is definitely excluded by the Government of India Act. A little reflection will convince you how unwelcome must be such an interference, and how bitterly Ministers must resent impediments in the way of the exercise of the very limited powers which they possess under the Act. As it is, the Act is bad enough and is no better than a clever subterfuge by which the permanent officials have got all the powers but no responsibility, whereas the Ministers have all the responsibility and no powers. But the camouflage with which the Act abounds is so transparent that it is not difficult to detect that, beneath the pretentious device of Ministers functioning in a system of Provincial Autonomy, the real power is still vested in the permanent officials; the Ministers have been given a mockery of authority, and the steel frame of the Imperial Services still remains intact, dominating the entire administration, and casting sombre shadows over the activities of Ministers .... In the second category I would put those classes of cases in which you have, directly or indirectly, encouraged sections of permanent officials to flout the authority of Ministers, leading them to ignore Ministers altogether, and to deal directly with you as if the Ministers did not exist ....

Let me now come to facts. As regards your personal interference in total disregard of Ministerial responsibilities, I will briefly refer to only a few. There is first

of all the case of your mandate to the Joint Secretary, Commerce and Labour Department, in April last in the matter of the rice removal policy. Here you acted as if the Government of India Act in Bengal had been suspended, and you were at the head of an administration under Section 93 of the Act. In a matter of such vital importance, affecting the question of the food-stuffs of the people, you should have called an emergent meeting of the Cabinet and discussed with your Ministers the best means of carrying out the wishes of the military authorities and of the Central Government. But you did nothing of the kind. You did not even send for the Minister in charge of the Department, although he was readily available, but you sent for the Joint Secretary instead. You gave him orders to take up the work of removal at once, without caring to find out the exact position regarding the excess of rice and paddy in different areas and the best means of removal and the cheapest method of carrying out the scheme. The Joint Secretary says that when he was arranging to carry out your orders, you grew impatient and gave him definite directions to arrange for the removal of excess rice from three districts within 24 hours. Even then you did not consult your Ministers, because presumably you thought you could not trust them. The result has been a dismal failure so far as this particular policy is concerned. The Joint Secretary in his haste and hurry to oblige you, advanced twenty lakhs of rupees to a nominee of a friend to begin the work, without any terms having been settled, or without any arrangements having been made for the safety of public money, .... At the present moment we are faced with a rice famine in Bengal mainly in consequence of an uncalled for interference on your part, and of hasty action on the part of the Joint Secretary. ...

Then I come to the boat removal policy. In this you have all along been acting under the advice and guidance of some permanent officials without taking your Ministers into confidence. You have even ignored one who happens to be not merely your Chief Minister but also the Minister in charge of the Home Department. You seem to have been consulting the Military authorities in secret and discussing plans with the permanent officials; .... The most outstanding instance of blunder which has been committed by the permanent officials, apparently with your knowledge and concurrence, has been the case of the prevention of boats from going out into the Bay of Bengal for the purpose of cultivation of lands in the various islands lying at the mouth of the Delta. ... It is enough for me to emphasize that the whole scheme was planned in consultation with the Military authorities and some permanent officials, without the knowledge not merely of the Cabinet but even of the Home Minister.

I will now say a few words about the manner in which you have all along resisted my efforts for the expansion of the Cabinet and the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries. Whatever may be your powers under the Act, it is evident that as the Chief Minister I should have the final say in the matter of the composition of the Cabinet and in parliamentary appointments, .... But your attitude has been one of definite disregard of my wishes in these respects. You seem to have taken up this attitude, perhaps in the forlorn hope of getting Sir Nazimuddin and his group into the Cabinet. . . .

During the last few days I have discovered that orders have been passed by Secretaries either on their own responsibility or with your approval, explicit or implicit, by totally ignoring the Ministers. For instance, orders have been passed that the Government of India should be requested to send back to Bengal all officers lent to them by the Bengal Government; orders have been passed that the powers exercisable by the Provincial Government under section 76(B) of the Defence of India Act and Rules be delegated to local officers, I was not consulted in these cases although they affect vital matters of policy. . . .

I now come to the class of cases in which permanent officials have acted in defiance of Ministers by completely ignoring their authority. Let me begin with the case of the outrages alleged to have been committed on women at Sanoa in the district of Noakhali. There was a Deputy Collector at Feni who happened to be the Additional Subdivisional Officer at the time, who had sent a telegram to the District Magistrate apprising him of what had occurred and asking for instructions how to proceed. This action on the part of the Deputy Collector was resented by some of the officials, presumably because they thought that the telegram might be a very important piece of evidence against the guilty persons. This officer who had only tried to do his duty, was transferred from Feni, by a telegram, at the bidding of the local officials, by the Chief Secretary. And the Chief Secretary passed orders without consulting me who happened to be the Chief Minister and the Home Minister! I came to know of this transfer several days after it had taken place when I went to Feni to find out what the facts of the alleged outrage actually were. . . .

May I in this connection remind you that when you came to know of my programme to visit Feni, you advised me not to go because you thought that my visit would embarrass the local officials? I explained to you that I had no intention of embarrassing anybody, but I considered it my duty to pay a visit to an area where the people seemed to be so much distressed. When I went there I found that practically all the officials of the Chittagong Division had gathered at Feni with a view to prevent my visit to the place of occurrence. The Commissioner of the Division plainly told me that he had received a telephonic message from your Secretary asking him to persuade me to abandon my visit. I did not go to the village because I did not want to quarrel with the officials but met relations of most of the women said to have been outraged and the relations of their deceased husbands. I had also certain documents brought up to me which left no doubt in my mind as to what happened. The reasons for the telegraphic transfer of the Deputy Collector, and for the anxiety shown by you and the local officials to prevent my visit to the locality are abundantly clear. . . .

You should act as the constitutional Governor and not as the mouthpiece of permanent officials, or of any political party. In other words, you should allow Provincial Autonomy to function honestly rather than as a cloak for the exercise of autocratic powers as if the Province was being governed under section 93 of the Act.

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Source: Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 5 July 1943, Vol. LXV, pp. 46-54.

## *Appendix 'G'*

### **Letter of A. K. Fazlul Huq, 2 February, 1943 addressed to *The Statesman*:**

In his weekly contributions to the columns of your journal 'Shahed' under the caption 'Dar-el-Islam' lately made the astounding remark that I and my party in Bengal have been carrying on agitation against the Pakistan scheme of the Muslim League.

It is a most atrocious lie and part of the programme of vilifications carried on by the so-called Muslim Leaguers in order to rouse Muslim feelings against me throughout India. Ever since I moved the Pakistan resolution at the open session of the Muslim League at Lahore on March 24, 1940, I have most scrupulously avoided making any observations against the Pakistan scheme. I have realized ever since, that confusion has been made worse confounded by theorists who have from time to time expounded most fantastic ideas about the Pakistan scheme. But I challenge anyone to quote a single word, either in any of my speeches or statements, which may be interpreted as my opposition to the Pakistan idea as such.

On many occasions I felt that the Muslims of Bengal were being misled by false ideas as to the scheme itself, 'but I have intentionally kept silent, because I thought my comments may be misunderstood. I desire to state categorically that I have never said anything against Pakistan far less doing anything, which may be interpreted as hostility towards the Idea of Pakistan. The remarks of 'Shahed' in 'Der-el-Islam' are most mean and mischievous, and have been made without the slightest regard for truth. I write to contradict the atrocious statement that he has made, and if he has regard for truth, he will, I hope, openly acknowledge that he had no justification for his remarks.

I want to make one comment regarding recent utterances about this scheme. Let me quote from the resolution itself : "Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute "independent states, in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign/' We have to remember that the 3 provinces geographically adjacent to Bengal are Assam, Bihar and Orissa. In Assam, the Muslims are only 35%; in Bihar, 10%; and in Orissa barely 4%.

It is, therefore, evident that Bengal, as constituted, cannot form autonomous states with the geographically adjacent provinces. If, however, Bengal has got to be divided into two, the result will be that the Eastern zone which will be a predominantly Muslim area will be surrounded by 4 Provinces in which Hindus will be in a majority. It is, therefore, no use hoodwinking the Muslims of Bengal that the formula which may hold good in the Punjab will

also hold good in Bengal. At the same time, Bengal Muslims realize that they have got to fall into line with the rest of India.

We depend upon the Quad-i-Azam to modify the Pakistan idea so as to enable the Muslims of Bengal also to assert their self-determination along with the Muslims of other provinces and also members of other communities in all the provinces.

Meanwhile, let me once more assure Mr. Shahed of 'Dar-el-Islam' that, far from organizing and continuing any agitation against the Pakistan idea, I have done nothing either by thought, word, or deed to deserve the atrocious remarks that he had made about me.

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Source: *The Statesman*, 3 February, 1943.

*Appendix 'H'*

**BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**Alphabetical List of Members**

**[Elected in the General Election, 1946]**

**A**

Abdul Ahad, Dr. (Satkhira)

\*Abdul Aziz, Maulana Md. (Narayanganj East)

Abdul Aziz Munshi, Mr. (Madaripur East)

Abdul Hafiz, Mr. Mirza (Tangail West)

Abdul Hai, Maulana (Noakhali South)

Abdul Hakim Mia, Mr. (Noakhali West)

Abdul Hakim Vikrampuri, Mr. Md. (Munshiganj)

Abdul Halim, Mr. Molla Mohammad. (Nadia West)

Abdul Hamid, Mr. (Rajshahi South)

Abdul Hamid, Mr. A.M. (Pabna West)

Abdul Hannan, Mr. (Meherpur)

\*Abdul Karim, Mr. (Jamalpur North)

\*Abdul Khaliq, Maulvi (Dacca South Central)

Abdul Mannan, Mr. Fakir (Dacca North Central)

Abdul Momin, Mr. (Tippera Central)

Abdullahel Baque, Maulana Md. (Dinajpur Central East)

Abdur Rahman, The Hon'ble Mr. A.F.M. (24-Parganas North- East)

Abdur Rahman Khan (alias Nuru Mia), Mr. (Patuakhali North)

Abdur Raschid Mahmood, Mr. (Serajgunge South)

Abdur Rashid Khondkar, Maulana (Sarajgunge Central)

Abdur Rauf Mr. Syed (Jessore East)

Abdus Sabur Khan, Mr. (Khulna)

Abdus Salam, Mr. Md. (Matlabazar)

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Source: Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle 1862-1947*, pp. 232 – 240.

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