

CHAPTER-V

PERIOD OF MARGINALIZATION (1967-1971):

A. NON-CONGRESS COALITION GOVERNMENT AND

B. PRESIDENTIAL RULE

A political reconstruction throughout the country and the All India Congress Party started unfolding the strategies in the late 1960s. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's various steps regarding economic stance were not appreciated by the senior Congress leadership those who were popularly known as 'syndicate'. The so called 'syndicate' group had started asserting themselves in post Nehru era on the ground of their seniority and experience which was counted more than important that of the political novice of Indira Gandhi. The senior as well as prominent Congress leaders like – K. Kamraj Nadar, S. Nijalingappa, S. K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh, C. Subramaniam, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy etc. collectively had formed an unconventional group at the aim of pressuring on Indira Gandhi to work on their advice.¹

New Era- The All India Scenario

Before the election of 1967 the so-called syndicate group leaders were sometimes succeeded to compel Indira Gandhi to act according to their advice. In that context, it may be mentioned that in case of the removal of G. L. Nanda from the portfolio of Home Ministry and Prime Minister had to resign regarding the keeping of Finance Minister Sachin Choudhury and Commerce Minister Munabhai Shah in their respective portfolio due to the pressure of syndicate group.² But, the target of the syndicate group however, was not fulfilled as because most of these leaders were defeated in the election of 1967. The fourth general election was so detrimental for Congress party in India that for the first time after independence Congress had failed to form Governments in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala due to lack of majority. Not only that many prominent Congress leaders who had the reputation of huge sacrifice during the freedom movement had been dismissed from the Congress before the proposed general election to be held in 1967 and encasing their popularity as well as strong support base they had formed regional party which

had played a very crucial role in the field of the defeat of Congress party in that election. For example, as like as Ajoy Mukherjee and his Bangla Congress in West Bengal, Mahamaya Prasad Sinha in Bihar, Pabitra Mohan Pradhan in Orissa, Chaudhury Charan Singh in Uttar Pradesh and Govinda Narayan Singh in Madhya Pradesh had become the main factor behind the defeat of Congress party and unable to form Ministry in their respective States.³ Out of sixteen, as many as eight States had detached from Congress hold. But the only glimpse of hope for the Congress party was the outcome of the Parliamentary elections. The Congress Party had won by a very thinner majority, because Congress had secured only 277 Lok Sabha seats out of 503 seats declared till 26th February. Though, In 1962 Congress had the number of strength in Lok Sabha 364.⁴

Excitement centering on Ajoy Mukherjee

It may be noted that when the big bosses of the Congress party were introspecting their root causes behind the electoral debacle in many States of India particularly in West Bengal then people of Calcutta had witnessed one of the biggest victory procession which was started with the arrival of Ajoy Mukherjee at Howrah Station on 24th February after winning from Tamluk in the highest margin of vote in West Bengal and defeating 'Arambagh Gandhi' i.e. Prafulla Chandra Sen from his home constituency in Arambagh.⁵ In that procession the peoples were in so joyous mood that they followed and walked Ajoy Mukherjee miles after miles with the temperament of dancing and jovial mood.⁶ The peoples of Calcutta were as if turned into mad in joy due to the electoral debacle of Congress party specially the defeat of Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen.⁷ So, after the election of 1967 it was found that except on the floor of the Assembly House the Congress was almost disappeared from the cities as well as districts. Due to the wave of defeat of Congress party in West Bengal particularly its top boss Atulya Ghosh the Congress Empire as if crumbled down.

New Leader- Ajoy Mukherjee

Though after the come out of the election result many people had spoken many words regarding the debacle of Congress party, but before election only two persons i.e. Professor Humayun Kabir and Promode Dasgupta firmly uttered that congress would certainly defeat and not be able to form the Ministry. Humayun Kabir had strong conviction that 'Congress would certainly defeat and Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Sen had to take farewell'.⁸ As from the beginning Humayun Kabir had the deep impression regarding the debacle of Congress in West Bengal, so it was he who first took initiative to form a non-Congress coalition Government. As a preparation of forming non-congress Government, in the very first day of election result i.e. 22nd February 1967 Humayun Kabir first contacted with Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh and both of them tentatively decided that-Ajoy Mukherjee should be the Chief Minister of West Bengal, C.P.I.(M) would be inducted in the Government and in the first discussion of Government formation parties like CPI (M), CPI, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc and RSP would be called invited. On the question of Chief Ministership Humayun Kabir had expressed the view that as Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh could not run the administration along with all, so he should not be suitable for the Chief Minister.⁹

Keeping in mind the antipathy between CPI and CPI (M), whether CPI (M) would be agree or not to join with CPI in the proposed non-congress Government, in that case Humayun Kabir took the help of Tridip Chowdhury of RSP who had intimacy with CPI (M) leader Jyoti Basu. On 24th February in presence of P.Sundariya, General Secretary of the party CPI (M) State Committee decided that CPI (M) would support the non-congress Government but would not show eagerness to join in the Government. It also decided that if the situation demands they would also join the Government actively so that there would not be any impression among the masses that due to the non co-operation of CPI (M) the effort of the formation of non-congress Government face problems. However, on 24th February at around 11 a.m. a meeting of five parties was held at Humayun Kabir's residence in Calcutta i.e. in room no. 4 of Central Government Hostel. Present leaders of that meeting were- Jyoti Basu and Niranjana Sen of CPI (M), apart from Humayun Kabir, Jahangir Kabir and Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal of Bangla Congress (Ajoy Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara- two main leaders of Bangla congress till not reached in Calcutta), Somenath Lahiri of CPI, Hemanta Basu, Ashok Ghosh and Amar Chakrabarty of Forward Bloc, Tridip Chowdhury and Jatin Chakrabarty of RSP. In that meeting it was almost decided that

Ajoy Mukherjee would be Chief Minister and also decided to form Ministry by the seven persons from the big parties. The formulas of dividing the ministry portfolio were- each two from CPI (M) and Bangla Congress, and each one from CPI, Forward Bloc and RSP.¹⁰

On 25th February an all party meeting was held in Indian Association Hall at Bowbazar, Calcutta. In that meeting United Left front (ULF) consisting of seven parties (CPI(M), RSP, SSP, SUC, Workers Party, Marxist Forward Bloc and RCPI); People United Left Front (PULF) being presented by four parties namely Bangla Congress, CPI, Forward Bloc and Balshevic Party; along with Paoja Socialist Party i.e. leaders of political parties twelve in number were present. Within a very short discussion it was decided instead of two fronts there would be only one front in the Assembly and Ajoy Mukherjee would be leader of that front. As per the suggestion of Humayun Kabir, the name of Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee was officially proposed by the Forward Bloc leader Hemanta Basu and seconded by CPI (M) leader Jyoti Basu.¹¹ Amidst of huge clapping and the cry of joy the present peoples supported the move. But after that it was Biswanath Mukherjee of CPI and younger brother of Ajoy Mukherjee suggested that since the name of Jyoti Basu as the leader of the front had the reservation of somebody in spite of becoming the leader of the largest party (43 MLAs) of the front, so he should be the 'Deputy leader' as well as deputy Chief Minister of the non Congress Government. That move of Biswanath Mukherjee was supported by all except Samar Guha of PSP.¹² According to the proposal of Humayun Kabir in that meeting the leaders of the eleven parties separately sent letters to Governor Padmaja Naidu claiming that since they were majority, would be allowed to form the Ministry. On this issue they appeal to the Hon'ble Governor to invite Ajoy Mukherjee as the leader of the Majority group to take the responsibility as Chief Minister of West Bengal. Accordingly Padmaja Naidu is said to have gone to Delhi to consult with the President of India for a final decision.

At this hour there was a speculation among the non-congress leaders whether Delhi based central leaders would allow them to form a non-congress coalition Government in West Bengal or not. But the non-congress leaders became astonished when on 27th February Governor Naidu wanted to talk not only to Ajoy Mukherjee but also to the leaders of different parties. Therefore, at first Ajoy Mukherjee went to Raj Bhavan along with a list of 146 MLAs and after submitting to the Governor he

claimed that the listed MLAs would extent support to him as leader of the Assembly. Then Jyoti Basu, Somenath Lahiri, Hemanta Basu, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Samar Guha, Makhan Pal and Arun Ghosh one by one went to meet the Governor and everybody expressed opinion in favour of Ajoy Mukherjee as their leader. The leaders had come back with an impression that Central congress leadership accepted the verdict of West Bengal and would not create any hindrance in the way of the formation of non-congress Government. Only some cautions were given by Governor Naidu to the non-Communist leaders in the form that “As West Bengal was a border State, so it had a great importance from various sides. You were going to form Government with the Communists, so countrymen expected special alertness from you”.¹³

Birth of United Front

After the meeting with Governor Naidu on 27th February when it was clear to all that non-congress Government would be formed then the very next day i.e. on 28th February the leaders of the 14 parties (ULF-7, PULF-4, PSP, Gorkha League and Lok Sevak Sangha) along with many independent members again assembled in Indian Association Hall, Calcutta. In that meeting according to the proposal of Humayun Kabir, it was decided that the collective group of non-congress parties would be known as ‘United Front’ in the Assembly. In order to maintain coordination among the 14 parties and with the people of West Bengal a committee would be formed by the representatives, one from each partie under the convenorship of two small party leaders- Barada Mukutmani of Bolshevik Party and Sudhin Kumar of RCPI. Another very important decision was also taken up in that meeting regarding the number of Minister those who would take the oath. The name of the proposed Ministers were Ajoy Mukherjee and Jahangir Kabir of Bangla Congress, Jyoti Basu of CPI (M), Somenath Lahiri of CPI, Hemanta Basu of Forward Bloc and Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh of Independent.¹⁴

Stands of the Congress Party in West Bengal

In the fourth general election of 1967, Congress party had lost its majority as because it only got 127 seats out of 280. Before the announcement of the result of all

the Assembly seats on 23rd February it was clear that Congress party in West Bengal would not get the majority. On that day result of Arambagh was announced and Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen himself was defeated by Ajoy Mukherjee. After becoming sure of his defeat as well as the defeat of Congress party Chief Minister P.C. Sen communicated with Governor Padmaja Naidu and offered his resignation. On that fateful day of 23rd February the top Congress leaders of West Bengal Pradesh Congress committee (WBPCCC) i.e. Atulya Ghosh, Prafulla Chandra Sen, Bijayananda Chattopadhyay, Asoke Sen, Siddhartha Sankar Ray, Saila Kumar Mukherjee, Rabindralal Singha and Nirmalendu Dey were assembled in Congress Bhavan at night to discuss the future and course of action of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress. Prafulla Chandra Sen had communicated with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and informed her in details about the position of West Bengal Congress through telephone from the Congress Bhavan on that day. After prolonged discussion it was found that as Congress party had failed to become majority so, it had three options such as: 1) accepting the verdict of the people they might sit on the opposition bloc, 2) defecting the MLAs from other parties Congress could try to form Government and 3) Mixing with other parties to form a coalition Government. But at last it was decided that as the Congress party would not get majority, so it would not take any initiative to form the Government. A draft statement was prepared regarding that matter which was approved by all along with Prafulla Chandra Sen. In the name of the General Secretary of PCC, Nirmalendu Dey alias Bodu Babu a statement on behalf of the WBPCCC was published in news paper on 24th February in the following way-“West Bengal Pradesh Congress had accepted the verdict of the people. According to the procedure of the parliamentary democracy the leader of the Congress Legislative party as leader of the single largest party might be invited to form the Government. But as Congress did not get the majority therefore in order to give the appropriate honour of peoples’ verdict it would sit on the opposition block and play the role of the responsible opposition party for the betterment of West Bengal.”¹⁵

Though, Atulya Ghosh was confident in favour of sitting the Congress party on the opposition bloc, but many congress leaders after enjoying the Government power since 15th August 1947 did not want to remain far away from the power of the Government. At this juncture, having been published the above statement by Nirmalendu Dey, general secretary of PCC in various news papers on 24th Februar, some local provincial congress leaders assembled at the residence of Prafulla Chandra

Sen at and decided that Ajoy Mukherjee would be requested to form the Ministry with the support of the Congress party. As congress party had the 127 members, but in order to form Ministry it was needed additional 14 members to prove majority to form the Government. Ajoy Mukherjee was an ex-congressman who was driven out from Congress due to the interest of so called group politics, naturally there were many sympathizers within the congress party who were forced to side with the move against Ajoy Mukherjee on 20th January 1966 in spite of the fact that they had some soft corner for Ajoy Mukherjee. So, in that changing atmosphere one Byomkesh Majumdar was given the responsibility to manage Ajoy Mukherjee who had 34 MLAs {Note: Bangla Congress won 35 seats, but as Ajoy ukherjee alone won from Tamruk and Arambag Constituency) and if he would agree to form Ministry then Congress would support him. It was known to all that Ajoy Mukherjee had formed Bangla Congress on 1st May 1966 after suffering humiliation from the ruling faction of the Congress protesting against their corruption and as he protested against many corruption and illegal activities, he became a victim of the political atmosphere and in the long run he was expelled from the provincial congress party. So, Ajoy Mukherjee's formation of Bangla Congress and his fight in the general election of 1967 may be considered as the crusade against the misuse of power and corruption of the top Congress leader for their own personal interest ignoring the corporate interest of the congress party. Needless to say that in that struggle for dignity Ajoy Mukherjee became successful and as a bonus Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen who was popularly known as 'Arambagh Gandhi' in his home Constituency Arambagh had been defeated by Ajoy Mukherjee and another boss of Congress party in West Bengal Atulya Ghosh also defeated in Bankura Parliamentary Constituency by J.M. Biswas in a margin of 29,770 votes.¹⁶ In that changing circumstances, when proposal came to Ajoy Mukherjee as to the formation of ministry by the support of Congress party then that proposal was simply rejected by Ajoy Mukherjee on the ground that he went to his "Supreme Court" i. e. Janatar Darbar against the corrupt leadership who were dominating the Congress party in West Bengal.¹⁷ Atulya Ghosh, main dominating voice of WBPC at that time mentioned in his Political Memoir- "Kasta Kalpita" that –'there was victory and defeat in democracy. In spite of speaking democracy in our language, we had some hesitation in our mind to accept defeat. He had differences of opinion with many at that time. He had also many supporters those who would think that if non-Congress parties wanted to form Ministry, they should be obviously given

that opportunity. In democracy the role of opposition was also very prestigious.’¹⁸ But in later on Atulya Ghosh himself understood that the number of his supporters of his temperament was limited and naturally there was no whole hearted support in his line of thinking.

A. NON-CONGRESS COALITION GOVERNMENT

First United Front Ministry - (2nd March, 1967 to 2^{1st} November, 1967 - 8 months 19 days)

Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee who was officially selected leader of the non-Congress alliance parties along with independent MLAs on 25th February 1967. Ajoy Mukherjee had his first meeting with Governor Padmaja Naidu on 27th February, when he handed over to Governor a list of 146 MLAs who supported him as their leader and claimed to form the Ministry. The second and final meeting between Ajoy Mukherjee and the Governor was held on 1st March and an hour long discussion he presented a list of six names including himself for inducting as Minister in his proposed Ministry. Apart from Ajoy Mukherjee himself the other names were- Jyoti Basu, Somnath Lahiri, Hemanta Basu, Jehangir Kabir and Dr. P. C. Ghosh. It would be appropriate to mention that Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was the College teacher of Ajoy Mukherjee and the first Chief Minister of West Bengal. The Governor of West Bengal after accepting the recommendation of Ajoy Mukherjee i.e. leader of the United Front communicated the proposed date of the swearing-in ceremony of the new Ministry on 2nd March 1967.

Maidan Meeting of United Front

In the afternoon of that 1st March a gigantic gatherings of 12 lakhs people were held in Maidan of Calcutta which as if given the final shape of United Front. In the huge gathering the leaders of each and every party had delivered their valuable speeches from the well decorated rostrum. The meeting continued for four hours with the scenes of enthusiasm. When the would be Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister along with other four Ministers were garlanded the people were exulted by clapping and shouting ‘Vande Mataram’ and ‘Leftist Unity Zindabad’. The principal

tone of the speech from all the leaders was to work unitedly avoiding dissensions for the interest of the people. Giving a suitable example Somenath Lahiri, CPI leader said, 'As mother had given lesson to her son by catching ear, the people in the same way had given the lesson- you be united and take the administrative responsibility unitedly. We had accepted the lesson lowering our heads given by mothers.'¹⁹

Swear-in Ceremony

The Oath taking ceremony of six Ministers along with Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee was administered by Governor Padmaja Naidu on 2nd March 1967 at Raj Bhavan. There was a huge crowd in front of the Raj Bhavan gate and Writers Buildings at the time of swear-in-ceremony. Thousands of people had come only to see the new Ministers of the United Front Government. The crowd was so dense in front of the gate of the Raj Bhavan that the cars of would be ministers could hardly move inside the Raj Bhavan campus. Some of them came in cars but others had to come on foot. The great hope and expectations were felt among the people on the spot in such a way that every sort of political crisis would be over and a new era of political atmosphere would come for the welfare of the people.²⁰ Their entrance into Raj Bhavan was marked by joyous shouting. Calcutta had never seen such astonishing outburst of popular enthusiasm and energy. After the end of the ceremony six Ministers of the new ministry at first went to three selected places of the city to offer wreaths at the martyrs' columns which were constructed in memory of the people who were killed in the time of food and other movements during the period of Congress regime.

An equally big crowd had congested before the main entrance gate of the Writers' Buildings at the aim of becoming witness of the entry of the new Ministers there. Ajoy Mukherjee's arrival was responded by overwhelming shouts of 'Vande Mataram' and 'Leftist Unity Zindabad'. Ajoy Mukherjee had responded to the cheering crowd with his natural smile on his lips by raising his hands. As a devotee of Gandhian philosophy he used to wear a white *khaddar Panjabi* and *dhoti* so as to show his simplicity as a leader of the people. Incidentally, he was an ardent follower of Gandhiji from the days of Non-Cooperation movement. As a freedom fighter Ajoy Mukherjee was behind the British prison for many years and went under-ground for a

long time during quit India movement. He was inducted as an Irrigation Minister in the Cabinet of Dr. B. C. Roy's Government. The 66-year old bachelor Chief Minister when entered into his official room, then again he was welcomed by a cheering crowd of Government employees.²¹

However after entering into the office of the Chief Minister, the first and delicate task before Ajoy Mukherjee to settle the question of distribution of portfolios and to fix up as well as to induct the number of Ministers from United Front partners as per their respective strength in the Assembly. According to the earlier decision of United Front meeting the distribution of portfolios were as follows:- 1) Shri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee of Bangla Congress—Chief Minister and Home, 2) Shri Jyoti Basu of CPI(M)—Deputy Chief Minister, Finance and Home (Transport), 3) Shri Somenath Lahiri of CPI—Parliamentary Affairs, Information and Public Relations and Local Self Government. 4) Shri Hemanta Kumar Basu of Forward Bloc—Public Works and Housing, 5) Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh of Independent— Food and Supplies and Agriculture and 6) Shri Jehangir Kabir of Bangla Congress— Development and Planning and Forest.²² As the United Front was formed by 14 non-Congress parties along with Independent parties, so according to the demand of all parties it was decided in the Front regarding the incorporation of more Ministers in the first United Front Ministry. On 4th March Ajoy Mukherjee had prepared a list of 10 names of prospective Ministers accordingly. In case of the expansion of the Ministry in the second phase, the number of Ministers became 16 and the party-wise distribution of Ministerial portfolios in the Cabinet were as under:- Bangla Congress and CPI (M) three each, CPI and Forward Bloc two each, R.S.P., S.S.P., P.S.P., S.U.C., Progressive Party and Gorkha League, one each, and one to an Independent.²³ However, more 10 Ministers were taken their oath on 4th March. The name and portfolios of that Ministers were- 7) Shri Hare Krishna Konar of CPI(M)—Land and Land Revenue, 8) Shri Niranjana Sengupta of CPI(M)—Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation and Home (Jails), 9) Shri Sushil Kumar Dhara of Bangla Congress— Commerce and Industries and Community development, 10) Shri Biswanath Mukherjee of CPI ---Irrigation and Waterways, 11) Shri Amar Prasad Chakravorty of Forward Bloc—Excise, Judicial and Legislative and Press and Passport, 12) Shri Nani Bhattacharya of RSP—Health, 13) Shri Subodh Banerjee of SUC—Labour, 14) Shri Kashi Kanta Moitra of SSP—Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Fisheries & Cottage & Small Scale Industries, 15) Shri Nishitha Nath Kunda of PSP—Co-

operation and Relief, 16) Shri Deoprasad Rai of Gorkha League—Tribal Welfare. The other Ministers of the First United Front Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee were- 17) Shri Jyoti Bhusan Bhattacharya of WPI—Education, 18) Shri Bibhuti Bhusan Dasgupta of LSS—Panchayat, Relief and Social Welfare and 19) Shri Charu Mihir Sarkar of Bangla Congress—Civil Defence and others.²⁴

It was noteworthy that at the time of the selection of the third Minister of Bangla Congress some sort of crisis was created over that question in that party. Three persons i.e. Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal, Shri Haridas Mitra and Shri Sushil Kumar Dhara were the claimant for the third Minister of Bangla Congress. At last the contest was going on between Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal and Sushil Dhara. CPI and Forward Bloc had supported Sushil Dhara. Besides, President and Secretaries of various district committees had sent letters to the President of Bangla Congress, Ajoy Mukherjee demanding the inclusion of Sushil Dhara as the Minister for the interest of the organization. As Ajoy Mukherjee had no problem to take up Sushil Dhara in his Cabinet, so that letters from district President and Secretaries had strengthened his hand. Therefore, Ajoy Mukherjee announced that Sushil Dhara would be the third member of the ministry of the Bangla Congress. In that way Sushil Kumar Dhara got a berth in the cabinet under Ajoy Mukherjee.²⁵

After settling down the names and portfolios of the Ministers of the different parties of the United Front, the next question came out for the consideration of the selection of Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the House. As Nalinakshya Sanyal of Bangla Congress party could not be the Minister, so he wanted to become the Speaker. Though his demand was supported by Humayun Kabir and Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh but when Jyoti Basu proposed the name of Shri Bijoy Kumar Banerjee, a CPI (M) supported independent MLA, then with the support of the other members, the name of Bijoy Banerjee was final as the Speaker of the First United Front Ministry headed by Ajoy Mukherjee.²⁶ After the Speaker's issues then another problem remained unsolved regarding the confirmation of the name of Deputy Speaker. Forward Bloc wanted Apurba Lal Majumder as the Deputy Speaker on the ground that failing to become Minister he was very angry. Though at first he did not want to become Deputy Speaker and later when he had given his consent of willingness then it was found that there was another candidate for the same post. He had the same problem i.e. failing of becoming Minister Sri Haridas Mitra of Bangla

Congress was very aggrieved. On behalf of Bangla Congress, Sushil Dhara was handling the matter in favour of Haridas Mitra. Whenever the both parties were not agreed to leave their demand, then it was decided through votes. As the Forward Bloc already got two Ministers as per its strengths in the Assembly and along with that Shri Kamal Kanti Guha, popularly known as Kamal Guha had become the Chief Whip from the same party, so many members of the front had reservation to give Deputy Speaker again to Forward Bloc. After voting it was found that Sri Harida Mitra of Bangla Congress got the majority and ultimately became the Deputy Speaker of the first United Front Ministry. After the confirmation the names of both Speaker and Deputy Speaker in the front level then they took the responsibilities of their respective office on 8th March 1967.²⁷

First Cabinet Meeting

With the oath taking ceremony of the United Front Government, most of the people had the impression that now West Bengal would be developed. The common people also felt that the authority of the wealthy people would be subsided and the dignity of the poor people would be onward. They also hoped that corruption would be stopped and the price of the essential commodities be reduced and altogether a very happy as well as a brotherly atmosphere would be prevalent during the tenure of the United Front Government (hence forth U.F.). In that congenial atmosphere the U.F. Ministry started its work. In one hand it was very positive sign but on the other there was also a negative sign. As people were with the Government which might be considered as positive but the expectation of the people were sky level that might be regarded as negative sign. Thousands of people would believe that their all miseries would be abolished, but neither the Government nor the common people know how that would be happened. Moreover, except Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Ajoy Mukherjee all the Ministers had no previous experience regarding Writers Buildings as well as administration. When they were in the opposition side and developed such an ideas of which there were no connection with the realities. Therefore, keeping in mind the above matters the first cabinet meeting was held on 6th March 1967 in a very enthusiastic mood, whose main matter of discussion was food.²⁸ In the first meeting it was found that there was a gulf of difference between their promises during election and existing condition of food position in West Bengal. There would be no problem at

all in case of providing adequate food according to the necessity to all-that was the statement of the present Ministers years after years. But, now the officers would say that the existence limit of ration quota be short cut.

The next day i.e. 7th March again the Cabinet meetings was held but as per the earlier promises of the leaders it was became impossible to adopt any revolutionary food policy. It was also decided that the existence food policy of the previous Prafulla Chandra Sen Ministry would be followed until further discussion was taken up. In that meeting the Ministers had taken two decisions regarding the salary of the Ministers and air-conditioned machine in the office of the Ministers. In order to welfare of the State as well as people the Cabinet Ministers thought since we were the Ministers of poor country so we would draw our salary within limits. It was found that the Chief Minister himself reduced his monthly salary from Rs. 1,150 to Rs. 700 and all other Cabinet Ministers were also decided to take Rs. 500 as monthly salary instead of Rs. 900.²⁹As per the decision of that Cabinet meeting the United Front Ministers removed all the air-conditioned machine from their room in order to save money that might be used for the development of the State of West Bengal.³⁰At the aim of reduce expenses regarding the use of Government vehicles, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee himself had set an example. In spite of becoming a Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee would bring his midday meal at the time of his coming to office in a small tiffin box at around 9 a. m. in order to save petrol costing for bringing his lunch at noon by second trip. He had continued that practices as long as he was the Chief Minister during the time of two U.F. Governments. Since Ajoy Mukherejeehe was living in the Government Officers of his nephew's at Belvedere, therefore, he instructed his personal assistant not to draw the house rent allowances which was fixed for the Chief Minister as Rs. 350/-. In the financial matter he was furiously honest for which Ajoy Mukherjee attained universal respect not only from the officials but also from the public.³¹

In a multi-party system of administration i.e. United Front Government, the task of any Chief Minister was huge difficult than the Chief Minister of a single party majority Government. The Chief Minister would open his lips only according to the situation yet, he had been pursued an interminable discussions in his office room whenever MLAs and Ministers was facing problem regarding their departmental issues and to seek his help in order to adjust in settling in the inter-party differences

which took a lot of passing of time. From the very beginning, Ajoy Mukherjee had played his role fairly well. As the strength of the Congress in the Assembly was 127, so any division within the United Front in case of ministerial rank or ideological grounds automatically would be seized by the Opposition at the aim to reduce the majority into a minority. Therefore, keeping in mind the above circumstances, Saroj Chakrabarty, personal assistant of the Chief Minister had written, “The valuable time of the C. M. was thus consumed to play the role of an arbitrator rather than as an administrator.”³²

The first non-Congress Ministry in West Bengal headed by Ajoy Mukherjee had advised the Governor Padmaja Naidu to summon the legislature on 8th March 1967. The Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister had done several joint meetings in order to prepare drafts for the Address of the Governor setting the tune of the political significance of the U.F. victory and its determination to work for the people at the aim of redressing the miseries of the masses.³³ Two important leaders of the united Front Ministry-Ajoy Mukherjee and Jyoti Basu were never so intimate as they were in the initial days of the first U.F. Government. They were so close that in fact no important decision would be taken by Ministry without prior consultation between the two. Both of them were concerned to give a reasonable trial to the system of multi-party Government which was a new experiment in the political scenario of the country.

Indira Gandhi Re-elected as the Prime Minister of India

Meanwhile, in the midst of the serious electoral debacle for the Congress party after independence as well as post Nehru era, as many as eight States throughout the country where first non-Congress Government installed. In spite of that after defeating the top leaders of the Congress party including its President K. Kamraj Nadar, Atulya Ghosh and others, in Parliamentary election Congress had ensured its position to form the Government securing altogether 277 seats out of 503 instead of 364 lok Sabha seats in 1962.³⁴ As Congress party was in the majority in Lok Sabha, so on 12th March 1967 Indira Gandhi, care taker Prime Minister was again unanimously re-elected Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. The President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan invited Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party i.e.

Indira Gandhi to form a new Government. In the meantime, resignations of outgoing Ministers already been accepted. At the initial stage, Indira Gandhi's new three-member Cabinet took oath in office, though in later time, the Cabinet was expanded and its strength was raised from 3 to 19. Morarji Desai, one of the expecteants for the post of Prime Ministership became the Deputy Prime Minister along with the charge of Finance portfolio. Since the Syndicate leaders as well as pressure groups had been thrown out by the electorates, so it was possible for Mrs. Indira Gandhi to form her new Cabinet which was her own handiwork in lieu of a superimposed one like the 1966 Cabinet. The number of Council of Ministers at the Centre was further enlarged to 51.³⁵

Khagendra Nath Dasgupta—Leader of the Opposition: Some Measures Taken by the Govt. to Gain in Strength among the Employees

In West Bengal, Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, a senior parliamentarian and temperamentally less aggressive was elected as the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly by the Congress Parliamentary party. In that connection it might be mentionable that Atulya Ghosh suggested the name of Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, a highly educated, cultural minded with good reputation as the son of Nirmal Chandra chunder, one of the big five of the Bengal politics, as the Opposition leader. But due to the controversy between Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen over the name of the opposition leader, at last Khagendra Nath Dasgupta,(henceforth K.N.Dasgupta) choice of Prafulla Chandra Sen ultimately became the leader of the opposition party.³⁶On 16th March at the commencement of the proceedings of the Assembly, K.N. Dasgupta leader of the opposition accused regarding the assaults and threat on Congress members within the Assembly building by outsiders. He complained that the withdrawal of Section 144 was a motivated move and as a protest against that steps Congress members staged a 10 minute walk-out. After that the debate in Assembly became very lively when Jyoti Basu had brought an allegation in the case of misuse of Chief Minister's fund by Prafulla Chandra Sen, the former Chief Minister. Jyoti Basu alleged that a cheque of Rs. 2 lakhs was issued by former Chief Minister (Prafulla Chandra Sen) for election purpose in favour of the General Secretary of the Pradesh Congress Committee. The another serious allegation was relating to distribution of bus permits by Saila Kumar Mukherjee, the former

Transport Minister on the basis of the recommendation of a higher officer of the Transport Department. Not only that before the fall of the Congress Government said officer after his retirement was subsequently elevated in the post of the Chairman of the P.S.C. Thereafter the House had passed all the supplementary demands. Non-gazetted employees affiliated by the left parties were rapidly gaining their strength. Some of the top leaders of the left parties affiliated employees were dismissed by the previous Congress Governments on various pretexts. The Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee in his capacity as Home Minister had assured in a large gathering of the State Government employees that the democratic rights of the employees would be recognized. That assurance of Chief Minister indicated the revision of Rules of Conduct and barring the Government servants from indulging in political activities. All those employees who were dismissed or discharged during Congress rule would be reinstated as far as possible.³⁷

Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and Food Minister's Anxiety Over Food and Their Visit to Delhi

As the United Front Government had promised to reduce the prices of necessary commodities as well as would give the people sufficient rice through rationing system, therefore in their first Cabinet meeting food was the foremost agenda of discussion. But it was found that the food situation in the state was not upto satisfaction. When after the discussion to solve the food problem a number of times and failing which the leaders took a decision in a Cabinet meetings held on 15th March 1967 about their visit to Delhi with a view to pursuing the Central Government regarding the alarming food situation in West Bengal along with some other problems. Therefore, a three member Ministerial committee was formed and the members were-a. Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee; b. Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu; and Food Minister c. Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. These members left for Delhi on March 22nd March 1967 accordingly. Apart from food problem, larger Central allocation for the Fourth Five Years Plan, demand for some development plans for Calcutta in case of water supply and sewerage and sanctioning of Rs. 8 crores instead of building the second Hooghly Bridge were some of their main objectives. In Delhi a long discussion was held mainly with the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Food Minister Babu Jagjivan Ram. In course of discussion the state

Ministers after briefing the food situation demanded more allocation of food grain for West Bengal. The Central Food Minister after informing the present status of food stock in the hands of Central Government, informed that though it became possible to give to West Bengal 1,20,000 tonnes per month in the previous years, but in view of present situation it would not be possible to provide more than 70,000 tonnes per month. The Prime Minister also assured the State Ministerial team headed by its Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee that though food condition in Central was really deplorable, in spite of that the Central Government would certainly extend its helping hand as much as possible. So, the State Ministerial team had to come back with empty hand excepting being able to get assurance of central help tie to time as per demand.³⁸

***Gherao* and its Impact on Industries**

Whenever food situation was alarming then the State Government had to face another two devastating problems. The first problem was created in the industrial field and another one was in the agricultural sector. At that time there was a sign of depression in industries particularly in engineering industries throughout the countries. In West Bengal as many as 2,50,000 workers were engaged in the engineering industries. On the pretext of depression in industries as the profit of the industrialists were not up to the mark, so the industrialists started reducing the number of workers from their industries. In that context, the workers would not adopt the path of strike or indignation procession. The industrial workers followed a new weapon '*Gherao*' initiated by Subodh Banerjee, the then labour Minister of West Bengal Government to protect the interest of the working class people curbing the activities of dubious industrialists. Though the *Gherao* movement was not something new in West Bengal, but it would continue generally for two-four hours in the head offices in a limited way for the demand of bonus. But that time the *gherao* movement would continue hours after hours for an indefinite period and mainly in the working places i.e. in the industries. It was not however, a peaceful way of movement because some coercive method of physical and mental torture was followed by the agitators so that the morale of the '*Gheraoed*' person might break with fear and would compel to accept the demand of the agitating workers. That method of agitation was considered as an easy application and the initial results were very speedy and gainful. Due to the encouragement of the use of that *gherao* method with immediate result, within a few

months in 1967 the number of 'Gheraos' in industrial field was reached the record figure of 811.³⁹ In that time, the gherao process was so barbarous that the industrial officers were not allowed to go into toilet and no interference of police regarding the rescue of the gherao persons from that critical condition. In that context, the only alternative action of the industrialists to go for only with closure and lock-out etc. to give a suitable lesson to the offending workers and their leaders to blunt the weapon of 'Gherao'.⁴⁰ That action and counter action of both sides soon landed the whole of the State into a destabilize condition of industrial unrest which was unprecedented in the industrial atlas of West Bengal. Naturally, the climate of confidence which was considered in all time as the most essential criterion for industrial growth in any State was completely shattered. Therefore, flight of capital from the State became an inevitable consequence and within a very short time the annual industrial growth rate of the State of West Bengal was fall down to a zero level.⁴¹

At the aim of the ending of the deadlock in the industrial field a delegation of the engineering industrialists met the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee. In that meeting Ajoy Mukherjee with the consultation of Somenath Lahiri and others Ministers of United Front decided that Government would not allow any kind of violence activities in the name of agitation in the industries. As per the decision of the meeting it was instructed to the industrialists not to closure and lock out prior to the tripartite meeting among the workers, industrialists and Governments. However, in case of the disturbances of the industrial field police interference was prohibited without the permission of Labour Minister Subodh Banerjee. But some parties within the United Front, those who were more concern about the interest of the country than the party came to the conclusion that if that condition would continue then the situation would be gradually out of control.⁴²

Forcefully Land Occupation

Amidst of the ongoing turbulent situation in the industries, another alarming situation was found in the agricultural sector. This was centered on the forcible occupation of agricultural land. Vested land of the Government, surplus land of the Zamindars and disputed land which was connected with judiciary as well as open land and houses were started to grab. Most of the cases some partners of the United Front

Government would lead the occupancy or indirectly support it. In that circumstances, in a statement on behalf of the Cabinet Ministry on 25th March 1967, circulated which contained, “If there were any lawful complaints of anybody, then they could communicate with the Government and Government would try to solve the problem by giving utmost priority. In the meantime, who had already forcefully acquired land or occupied houses or land out of mistake was directed to hand over the right of occupation to the concerned authority. Illegal activities and forceful occupation would not be allowed and in that cases Government would take legal as well as police action to end the ongoing anarchy.”⁴³ But the cautioned statement of the Ministry could not bring expected result because nobody would give up the so called right of occupation at that point of time. Not only that, the tradition of illegal forceful occupation would continue bypassing the circulation of the statement issued by the Ministry. In the face of the resistance of that activities a pure heartiest combined efforts were not seen among the political parties of United Front.⁴⁴

New Food Policy of First United Front Government

Returning from Delhi the Front leaders met time and again but failed to reach a satisfactory solution about food problems. The prices of rice and other essential commodities gradually started to high. In some places people in their own responsibilities at the aim of helping the Government started campaign for collection of secret stock of food grains from the hoarders. In rural areas, in the name of collection of secret stock of food grains and to stop the contraband plundering and cordoning of food graining in a large scale were started. In that pretext, Food Minister Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh announced the food policy of United Front Government on 29th March 1967.⁴⁵ The main features of his food policy were abolition of inter-district cordons as well as levy system and declaration of higher rates of procurement of rice and paddy. Due to heavy drought the rice production of that year's was 71,000 tonnes less than that of the previous year. Under the new food policy the statutory rationing system in Calcutta would continue as before. In case of paddy procurement, according to quality price was fixed between Rs. 21/- to Rs. 23/- and rice Rs. 35/- to Rs. 36/50 per maund. The responsibilities of procuring rice and paddy were given to the Food Corporation of India. After that the procured food grain would go to the mills and after milling F.C.I. would store them in its godowns. On 7th April, 1967

after six hour debate on food problems in the assembly, Dr. Ghosh summerising his speech with an announcement of some modifications of the government's new food policies. These were- declaration of surplus stocks within 15 days by land owners who had over 10 acres in irrigated and 12 acres non-irrigated land after keeping 9 mounds of paddy per head of the family and 2 maunds for seeds and labour. The language of his warning was "I will not hesitate to bring compulsion upon 500 persons to feed 5 lakhs of people", In the case of the non-producers including traders, the Government policy was that they would have to make declaration about their stocks beyond 50 maunds of paddy or same quantity of rice instead of 100 maunds which were suggestrd earlier. The milling charges of food grains were brought down from Rs. 2/50 to Rs. 2/- per maund and as a result of which the millers had to agree reluctantly.⁴⁶

On 18th April 1967 it was declared that whole production of the rice mills would be taken by the Government. But that declaration became ineffective as because there were no rice or paddy in the mills. After seven days, in an another order it was said that without prior written permission of the Block Development Officers or local authority of Food Department it was not allowed to carry above 25 maunds of rice or paddy from one place to another in West Bengal. In spite of taking the above measures along with all precautionary steps within four months of United Front Government the food situation virtually became alarming. The prices of essential commodities were so high that even per kg rice would sell then Rs. 5, though the United Front leaders had given false assurance to the voters before election to supply 2 kg rice instead of Rs. 1.⁴⁷ In that context, the United Front Committee ordered Government to stop price hike of essential commodities and supply adequate food grains to the village areas.⁴⁸

In spite of holding meeting after meeting in the Cabinet as well as in the United Front level, it was found that there was no sign of development of ongoing food situation in West Bengal. As a protest against the failure of food policy of the Government people started blockading train and other transport. At that point, some leaders within the United Front deliberately and sarcastically criticised the Food Minister, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and his policy and he was made responsible for the crisis going on all over West Bengal. When Prafulla Chandra Ghosh refused to comment against the central government behind the food crisis and naturally an anti

Ghosh propaganda was hatched out by some front leaders within and outside the government. Incidentally, some of the contemporary archival records identified the propagandists being supported by the CPI (M) party of the United Front government.⁴⁹ At last in a press statement from Darjeeling on 25th May 1967, P. Sundariya, all India leader of CPI (M) said, “Dr. Ghosh should be resign, he had failed.” Fanning the fire of the complicated situation, Ajoy Mukherjee in a press conference remarked, “Who was P. Sundariya to claim the resignation of Dr. Ghosh? Dr. Ghosh was Minister of United Front, and as long as he was enjoying the confidence of United Front would remain Minister.”⁵⁰ In response to the comment of P. Sundariya, Pafulla Chandra Ghosh remarked, “The comment of P. Sundariya was unjustified. That food policy was the outcome of the decision of all parties belonged to the United Front. Therefore, the accountability of that food policy would not of any individuals or any party.”⁵¹

The food situation of West Bengal further worsened as a result of the unkindness of nature i.e. outbreak of famine in certain parts of Bihar. As a neighbouring State, West Bengal could not escape from that severe drought. Bankura District of West Bengal with a population of 1.8 million had to face the impact of drought from April. Considering the urgency of the situation, the District Magistrate immediately had to send an S.O.S. seeking extension of gratuitous and relief operations. Nishit Nath Kundu, the Relief Minister rushed to the district at once for an on the spot study of the distress and arrange for relief.⁵²

CPI (M)’s Attitude towards Allied Partners of the United Front Government

At the time of the blame and counter blame among the United Front partners centering the food condition of West Bengal, the Politbureau of CPI (M) in its session held in Calcutta about this time. Surprisingly, it passed a resolution accusing the West Bengal Ministers for adopting their weak and ineffective policy which manifested in the failure of unearthing food stocks from the hoarders and administered a sharp criticism to the Centre for discriminatory treatment regarding the supplies of food grain. P. Sundaraya, Secretary of the Party, later on advised the Party Ministers of CPI (M) to criticize the statements of United Front Ministers belonging to other political parties if there were anything against the directive of the Party. This was in that

context 'Industries and Commerce' Minister as well as General Secretary of Bangla Congress Sushil Dhara's statement against 'Gherao' and Pafulla Chandra Ghosh's food procurement policy was their main target. It was thus the CPI (M) leaders who first sown the seeds of division within United Front Ministry. The Politbureau resolution concluded with "Do not walk out of the Ministry but pursue party politics within the Cabinet,"⁵³

The Naxalbari Episode

Apart from severe food crisis and blaming and counter blaming against each other within the leadership of United Front and by that time the ongoing Gherao culture in one hand and termination of workers from industry, closure, lock out on the other had collectively shattered the prospect of industrial development in West Bengal. The chaotic situation in the industries of the state had drawn the attention of Prime Minister of India and other leaders as well and particularly the excessiveness of Gherao strategy exercised by the leftists for their party interest ignoring the interest of the state as well as country shook up the central leaders to look into the affairs of West Bengal. Though Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee and some parties were not favoring that practice, but failed to take any appropriate measures to quell that unfortunate hapennings. At the same time, the forceful occupation of land and open houses were going on and Governments circulation time and again regarding the disallowing that activities and threatening to take police action were also unheeded. In that context, for some times back the State Government had been receiving reports about the growing discontent from some rural areas at the foot hills of Himalayas Mountain. The areas were under Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district and known as Naxalbari, Kharibari, Phansedea. The reports revealed about the forcible cultivation of vested and other peoples lands that intimidation of violence and leading to the cases of murder. On the 24th day of May 1967, four Police officers were attacked by the Naxalites. Among the injured police personnel one died in the next day. When that reports of Naxalbari had reached in the Writers Buildings' as well as Chief Minister, then aggrieved Ajoy Mukherjee immediately called in the Chief Secretary and Home Department officials and issued a specific instructions at once to the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling district to take appropriate action against persons those who were charged with law and order violations. In the police action on

25th May 1967 those who were killed were-Dhaneswari Devi (Adivasi peasant woman), Fulmati Devi (Adivasi peasant woman), Nayaneswari Mallick (Adivasi peasant woman and wife of a Rail worker), Sonamati Singh (Adivasi peasant woman), Simaswari Mallick, (Adivasi peasant woman), Surbala Barman (Rajbangshi peasant woman), Graudau Sairani and Samaswari Sairani (both Mech peasant woman). Another youth named Kharsingh Mallick (Adivasi) was killed on that day due to police firings. Apart from the above mentioned names those who were killed at that time were-Tribeni Kanu, Sovan Ali, Barka Manjhi and other three persons whose name are still untraced.⁵⁴

In that burning stage of Naxalbari, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee rushed to North Bengal, the very next day i.e. on 26th May. Some very influential political leader of North Bengal like Deoprasad Rai, Kamal Guha and Sunil Dasgupta collectively apprised Ajoy Mukherjee regarding the furiousness of the Naxalite activities and informed, “If you did not handle the situation in a strong hand, then the security of North Bengal would be in the face of danger.”⁵⁵ On 27th May Ajoy Mukherjee warned from an open public gathering at Naxalbari saying, “Each and every citizen had the right to enjoy life and property. The owner of the land might be big or small, forcible occupation of land would be treated as the anti-social activities.”

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First differences of opinion openly manifested in the Cabinet over the question as to the way out of the resistance of violence activities at Naxalbari. Ajoy Mukherjee and his party Bangla Congress, Gorkha League, S.S.P. and P.S.P. wanted to take the matter as a law and order problem. But CPI (M), CPI and some others party did not agree with the Ajoy Mukherjee. As the Naxalbari movement was the manifestation of the internal chaos of CPI (M) that was why the CPI alone wished to make a hue and cry over the issues.⁵⁷ In that situation, as per the Cabinet decision a six-man Ministerial delegation was sent to study the condition and make on the spot decisions about law and order problems. Apart from other parties, both CPI and CPI (M) Ministers were also comprised the Ministerial delegation. After reaching that Cabinet team on 12th June 1967 held a series of meetings with local officials, side by side political leaders and lastly authorized the Police personnel to fire if necessary at the aim to quell disturbances and maintain law and order by doing round the clock police patrol. Another three-man Cabinet team had visited Naxalbari on June 29.⁵⁸

By centering the police firing at Naxalbari, the internal conflict of United Front was again disclosed. In a press statement CPI (M) Secretary P.Sundariya accused Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee for sending police at Naxalbari ignoring the decision of the Cabinet. Three CPI (M) Ministers- Jyoti Basu, Harekrishna Konar and Niranjana Sengupta supported the statement of their leader. But Ajoy Mukherjee refuted the false charges of CPI (M) leader P. Sundariya saying that under any circumstances he never ignored any decision of the Cabinet. In that way the initial relation of brotherhood of United Front leaders gradually wiped out and blame game in between one group against another continued sometimes directly and indirectly.⁵⁹

All India Focus on Naxalbari

Meanwhile the news of violence in Naxalbari area spread all over India. The Cabinet Mission's visit at Naxalbari virtually failed to improve the situation. The picture of lawlessness was equally bad in some other districts also. In that circumstances the West Bengal Congress Members of Parliament had written the following letter to the Chief Minister on 15th June 1967, expressing their grave concern.

Their letter was as follows:

“New Delhi

15th June, 1967

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned Congress Members of Parliament from West Bengal have learnt with grave concern the situation that is now existing in Naxalbari and other places in the district of Darjeeling. The law and order is deteriorating in the district of 24 Parganas also. We therefore feel that unless firm and positive steps are taken immediately to maintain law and order the situation in West Bengal would go completely out of control.

Yours sincerely,

Surendra Mohan Ghosh & Others.’’⁶⁰

Seven Members Parliamentary team

The Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi could not but had to draw the attention of the West Bengal Chief Minister towards the lawlessness which was prevailing in the State and suggested about the sending of a perusal team of Parliamentary delegation to evaluate the situation in Naxalbari. In response to the Prime Minister's suggestion, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee sent a decorous but negative reply, asserting his stand that law and order was the initial concern of the State Government and as a head of the administration of the State he was taking all possible remedial measures. However, on 19th June in 1967, seven Members of Parliament who were belonging to non-Congress party including M.R. Masani, A.B. Bajpayee and Hem Barua jointly had addressed a letter to the Chief Minister of West Bengal which inter alia stated:

“It cannot be maintained that normal conditions exist in the Naxalbari part of Darjeeling district. Nor can it be denied that certain extremist elements have taken to violence and sought to create a sense of fear and insecurity among the people there. In “The Statesman” of 17th June, 1967, there are reports that the villagers in areas where the S.S.P. and Forward Bloc have some following have decided to take to arms in self-defence. We have also seen statements of certain West Bengal Ministers threatening dire action against the anarchist elements which persist in disturbing the peace. In short, the situation is extraordinary and, while we do not deny the right of the State Government to deal with the situation in the area, we feel that Parliament cannot ignore the existence of these abnormal conditions.

After all, this area is strategically important for India's security. This narrow neck which connects North Eastern India with the rest of the country is a vital link in India's defense system.

Our object was to prevent a situation developing in which the Central Government might feel called upon to invoke the *Emergency provisions of the Constitution*. J

Parliament is the custodian of the nation's territorial integrity and it cannot ignore the threats that the Chinese pose to our Northern frontiers. We, therefore, thought that a representative delegation of Members of Parliament would be welcomed by the State Government.

Yours sincerely

M.R. Masani & Others”⁶¹

The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi requested the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee in the 3rd week of June 1967 to come Delhi for the discussion on West Bengal problems. Ajoy Mukherjee went to Delhi on 24th June, along with Jyoti Basu and Biswanath Mukherjee. Next day i.e. 25th June Ajoy Mukherjee alone met the Prime Minister and discussed the matter for 40 minutes over the question of law and order and food condition. The Prime Minister did not hide her worry as regards to the unusual law and order situation in West Bengal. Ajoy Mukherjee assured her about State government's capacity to tackle the ongoing situation provided West Bengal's quota of food supplies from Central were on time. "Give us more food and we would control the situation", Ajoy Mukherjee told the waiting Pressmen. Explaining the adopting measures of his Government at Naxalbari Ajoy Mukherjee informed that in the meantime 1,500 armed police personnel were operating in the disturbed area in order to deal with the unusual situation of violence. Jyoti Basu and Biswanath Mukherjee met the Prime Minister separately to state their point of view.⁶²

On 30th June a very grave and alarming situation along with murder and rape in Naxalbari area again echoed in the Upper House. Congress Members of Parliament apprehended the hands of Pakistan and China behind the unfortunate incidents and mentioned it as 'Peking style Communist revolt in India'. Peking Radio in that time announced that a spot had been selected in West Bengal in order to prepare the ground for the bloody revolution.

In that context, Deo Prakash Rai (Goorkha League), one of the Ministers of United Front had threatened to resign from Cabinet unless Government would adopt appropriate policy and measures to curb violence. There were two different groups within the Cabinet-one group was favoring all out police action to arrest the hard core extremists against whom already arrests warrants were issued and even if necessary such action had to be taken through bloodshed. The Forward Bloc and P.S.P. Ministers of United Front Government were in favor of that policy, but the Chief Minister was some sort of less aggressive as he had to maintain a balance within the different groups for adopting a united policy. The other group i.e. Marxist and their

allies opposed that form of action. After prolonged discussion, lastly a compromise formula was adopted. According to that at the aim of isolation of the extremists, a quick land reform programme was initiated in the disturbed areas to restore normalcy.⁶³

Attacked of a Police Camp by Naxalites

Meanwhile the extremist Naxalite leaders warned “the struggle would continue and any amount of police repression would not be able to crush the upsurge” through their weekly mouth piece ‘Deshabrati’ which had started to publish on and from 6th July 1967. The newly published weekly ‘Deshabrati’s first editor Sushital Ray Chowdhury who was expelled from CPI (M) on the charges of adventurist deviation. In the meantime, 75 Naxalite extremists were arrested from the disturbed Naxalbari area by July 13 after a successful police operation. After two days, the Police took a stern action under the leadership of A.P. Mukherjee, S.P. and as a result of that completely displaced the extremists from their hidden place. On the contrary, under the leadership of Kanu Sanyal, Kadam Malik and Khokan Majumdar (he is a Muslim), as many as 2,500 people attacked a Police camp in Kharibari Thana. In that encounter altogether 54 people including policemen were injured and 290 of the agitators courted arrest. Though, 600 policemen had tried to encircle the agitators but the top leaders helped them to skip. The total numbers of arrest rose to 367 within two days.⁶⁴

Dharma Vira as New Governor of West Bengal

Whenever, the Naxalbari was boiling then the appointment of Dharma Vira as the new Governor was the important turning point in the political history of West Bengal. As the tenure of Governor Padmaja Naidu was going to expire on 1st of June 1967, so the question of the appointment of her successor drew the attention of the Central Government. In case of the appointment of new Governor, the State Government insisted that no Congressman would be acceptable as the Governor. The Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister jointly demanded for the post of Governorship of a person who would be selected from the three names recommended by them.⁶⁵ But, the Government of India ignoring the three names recommended by

the State Government ultimately announced the name of Dharma Vira as the successor of Padmaja Naidu. Naturally, this announcement created a discontent in the Ministerial circle. Dharma Vira was the former Indian Civil Service and had the experiences of holding many high posts in Central Government. As the Secretary of the Rehabilitation Ministry Dharma Vira was very much aware about some of the problems of West Bengal and showed his firmness in case of handling difficult problems. Dharma Vira took his Oath of office on June 1.⁶⁶

U.F. Ministers vis-à-vis the New Governor

As Dharma Vira was appointed as Governor of West Bengal bypassing the recommendation of the State Government, so from the very outset the ministerial circle looked upon him as ‘an agent of the Central Government out to wreck the Ministry’. The resentment of U.F. was revealed publicly on 15th July 1967 when a demonstration was held outside the Raj Bhavan by C.P.I. demanding “Dharma Vira be recalled and replaced by a person who would rigidly stick to his constitutional role and refrain from disruptive activities against West Bengal Government”.⁶⁷

Division in the United Front and Role of the Congress Party Behind the Dislodging of Ministry

It has already been mentioned that the Congress Party in West Bengal accepted the defeat in the general election of 1967 and officially declared that it would play the role of responsible opposition party in the Assembly as per the verdict of the election. But the fact was that the Congress party and its leaders both from Central and State level (West Bengal) were not mentally prepared to accept the unexpected defeat of the party in the last general election held in 1967. Therefore, the Congress party of West Bengal with the blessing of Central leadership started defecting the MLAs from other parties in order to form as like a Ministry which would be completely depended upon Congress party. In that case the Congress party in West Bengal took its first step projecting Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, an Independent MLA as well as Food Minister of United Front Ministry as their (Congress leaders) Chief Ministerial candidate.⁶⁸ Though there was a background behind Prafulla Chandra Ghosh’s leaning to the proposal of the Congress party for alternative

Ministry headed by him. It was well known to all that the United Front Government was not able to solve the food problem according to their pre-election manifesto. It was no doubt the failure of the food problem might be considered as the failure of United Front Ministry as a whole. But unfortunately, sometimes in and outside the Cabinet the Food Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was persistently heckled and criticized openly by left parties for failure of his food policy. Even P. Sundariy, General Secretary of CPI (M) demanded the resignation of Pafulla Chanda Ghosh from the Ministry. Naturally misunderstanding and grievances gradually increased into the partners of the United Front. In that context, Congress party in West Bengal followed two separate policy to undermine the ruling United Front Ministry. Firstly, the Congress party in the Assembly severely criticized the various policies adopted by the United Front Ministry. The failure of the food policy became the main target of criticism of the opposition Congress party. In that respect a procession under the caption of 'Khadya Michhil' (Food Procession) was organized by the Congress party under the leadership of former Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen from Wellington to Writers Buildings' via Bowbazar.⁶⁹ The second strategy of the Congress party of West Bengal was to encourage the defection of the MLAs from United Front and brought them into the Congress camp so that Front Ministry would be in Minority and another Ministry would be installed with the help of the Congress MLAs. The first one was openly but the second policy was conducted very secretly. Ashu Ghosh, Congress MLC, had taken the responsibility of secret activities on behalf of Congress party and Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, leader of the opposition and Bijoy Singh Nahar, a congress leader would maintain connection with him. However, when it was found that, Dr. P.C. Ghosh, the first Chief Minister of West Bengal and a front ranking nationalist as well as diehard follower of Gandhiji was being humiliated by the Communists in the first United Front Ministry, then three important Congress leader of West Bengal namely- Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, Khagendra Nath Dasgupta and Bijoy singh Nahar jointly after a prolonged discussion with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had given the proposal of defection from United Front Ministry and requested him to form Ministry under his leadership. The Congress leaders also promised to extent their whole hearted support behind his move. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was also assured if he would defect then more 18 – 19 MLAs from United Front under the control of Congress MLC Ashu Ghosh would defect and support his Ministry. In that context Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had made up his mind to resign from United Front

Ministry on 26th July 1967. But the secret news of the resignation of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was somehow leaked and published in various news papers. In that pretext, the some other Ministers of the United Front along with Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee who was the direct student of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh at Presidency College met Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and requested him not to resign from the Ministry. The Ministers expressed their accord with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh's grievances against the behavior of the Communists and very disgusted and aggrieved Chief Minister expressing his sympathy and solidarity remarked, "Why you are leaving alone, we would all leave together, so there is no hurry at all."⁷⁰

However, after receiving the green signal from Prafulla Chandra Ghosh of his resignation on 26th July along with other 18-19 MLAs, the Governor of West Bengal, Dharma Vira was communicated accordingly on behalf of the Congress party in West Bengal. The preparation of forming alternative Government headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh with the support of Congress MLAs was also communicated to Delhi. Governor Dharma Vira called on General Manekshaw to become ready for the changing political atmosphere of West Bengal. Upananda Mukherjee, I.G. and P.K. Sen, Police Commissioner were also alerted by General Manekshaw for their course of action in the changing situation. But whenever the news of defection of the MLAs from Front to Congress was published in news papers on 'Today is test of strength',⁷¹ then a large procession of United Front blocked the Assembly gates for six hours demanding resignation of defected MLAs. The procession of three hundred people who were supporting Naxalbari movement and claimed themselves as anti-jotedar and anti-Capitalist were demonstrating outside the gate of the Assembly. In that situation, due to insecurity feelings of the intending defectors and lack of adequate preparation as well as providing security to the defectors on behalf of the Congress party, at last the plan of dislodging the United Front Ministry was postponed for the time being.⁷²

Rift Widened in United Front and Role of the Congress party

In the third week of July in 1967 both in the Assembly and outside a sharp division within the U.F. came to the forefront. In the Assembly on the issue of law and order the Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc and S.S.P. had strongly supported the

Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee while the C.P.I. (M) and some others took a different line. On July 20 rival student groups those who belonged to CPI and CPI (M) altercated amongst themselves at the time of holding the demonstrations on 'Vietnam Day'.⁷³ It is noteworthy that after the formation of the United Front Government, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee was very much aggrieved with the Communists due to various irresponsible comments and highhandedness of its leaders and violent activities of its followers which continuously tarnishing the image of the Front Ministry. In that context some unfortunate happenings of the Left CPI (M) added the fuel behind the disillusioned of Ajoy Mukherjee towards Communists, were as follows:

The Chief Minister was Assaulted by the Non-Gazetted Employees Affiliated to the Left CPI (M)

The West Bengal Government Employees Federation which was a rival Employees organization of the left dominated Coordination Committee sought time for an interview with the Chief Minister in order to place their demands. After hearing that news, some of his Cabinet Ministers straightly approached the Chief Minister to refrain from the entertaining to the Employees Federation. The Chief Minister however, turned down their request and decided to receive the deputation of the Employees Federation under the impression that every branch of the Government employees had the right to place their demand before the Chief Minister irrespective of party affiliations. The interview was fixed on 3rd August, 1967.⁷⁴ The subsequent events that followed were as such that at about 11 a.m. on the very day some employees of Coordination Committee met the Chief Minister and pleaded to him to cancel the proposed interview with the Employees Federation. They argued with the Chief Minister in the way that, "They are black-sheeps, a creation of P.C. Sen's Congress Government", so as a Head of the U.F. Government he should not give any attention to them. Needless to say that, the leaders of the Coordination Committee failed to convince the Chief Minister in favour of their opinion. In the afternoon the representatives of the Employees Federation as usually entered the Chief Minister's room headed by a woman leader. Naturally, the Chief Minister gave them a patient hearing. At that time of meeting between Chief Minister and representatives of the Employees Federation, two Cabinet Ministers namely Hemanta Kumar Basu and

Nishit Nath Kundu were also present there. Whenever the meeting was going on then outside the Chief Minister's chamber i.e. in the corridor facing the gathering of the number of people basically the supporters of the Coordination Committee were gradually swelled up. When the members of the deputation came out from the Chief Minister's room they were surrounded and flouted. Soon a scuffle between the two groups occurred. Hearing the shouting the Chief Minister came out in the corridor and firmly asked the employees of the two groups to stop the demonstration and fighting. But not only his interference as well as cautious voice was unheeded but he himself was subjected to be jeered at and hackled. The most important side of the incident was that whatever it happened close to the room of the Deputy Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu who preferred to remain in his room instead of coming out to stop the scuffle as well as to rescue the humiliated Chief Minister. However, the personal security of the Chief Minister and on duty Police officers escorted the deputationists out of the Writers' Buildings. That incident created a commotion in the Secretariat of Writers Buildings'. It was for the first time that a Chief Minister himself was being humiliated by a group of non-gazetted employees inside the corridor of the Writers' Buildings'. Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee were so close to each other at the initial stage of the formation of the United Front Ministry that even some security Guards of the Chief Minister would say, "See the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister are like two brothers, Rama and Lakshmana. Alas, they are now drifting apart!"⁷⁵

The Pay Commission and Difference of Opinion in U.F.

The Cabinet of its meetings held on 5th August 1967 approved the appointment of a Pay Commission but was not finalised the terms of reference or the number of members. But Jyoti Basu as Finance Minister announced the terms of reference and appointed a three men commission of whom late K.G. Basu, the veteran Marxist trade union leader was one of them. After constituting the three members commission Jyoti Basu gave it for Gazette notification, but Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee gave the directive to stop the Gazette notification on the ground that Jyoti Basu did this without the consultation with the Cabinet.⁷⁶ There was a hue and cry over the Finance Minister's unilateral appointment of the member of the Commission. Non-Marxists specially Nishith Nath Kundu, Relief Minister after severely criticizing

the activities of the CPI (M) remarked, “If the left Communists thought that the policies whichever were taken in the Cabinet did not come out from their consideration, then their only alternative was to withdraw their representatives from the Council of Ministers.”⁷⁷ Jyoti Basu’s reaction to the press was: “I am not going to resign from the Cabinet because I am not here in my personal capacity. I would explain my stand to the people and would go by their verdict”. A massive demonstration was organized by Marxist supported trade union workers in favour of Jyoti Basu’s stand in Dalhousie Square area.⁷⁸ However, later on due to the interference of Biswanath Mukherjee, CPI, MLC and Minister of united Front, the State Cabinet raised the number of members of the pay Commission from 3 to 7 through the voting system and appointed K. K. Hajra, ex-I.C.S. as its Chairman.

Chief Minister – Prime Minister Meeting and Plan for the Decline of the United Front Ministry

Under the given circumstances in the mediation of Surendra Mohan Ghosh, former President of WBPC and leader of Jugantar group a communication was made for a confidential discussion between Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India and Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Actually after serving the Congress Organisation for nearly half a century when Ajoy Mukherjee had to quit the Congress and make alliance with the anti-Congress parties then Ajoy Mukherjee’s only one intention was to do welfare activities for the people of Bengal. But he was disillusioned when it was found that some parties and their leaders wanted to establish the influence of their parties at any cost bypassing the interest of the country then Ajoy Babu decided that it would be no longer possible for him to work with them together. After his frustration about the Communists particularly the left Communists Ajoy Babu looking for the path of a way out leaving his political career in an uncertain condition. In his very close circle Ajoy Mukherjee remarked, “If I go for with them then an irreparable loose of the country would take place. I do not want that. If I am ruined, no matter. Country is much greater than an individual.”⁷⁹ In that pretext in the name of the discussion of food problem of West Bengal Ajoy Mukherjee met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 7th August 1967. In that an hour long discussion a future plan of action was prepared as per the proposal of the Prime Minister. A very open discussion was held between Chief Minister and Prime

Minister and decided that Pradesh Congress committee had to be changed. Ajoy Mukherjee categorically stated that as long as Pradesh Copngress would be dominated by Atulya Ghosh it would not be possible for him (Ajoy Mukherjee) to reconcile with him (Atulya Ghosh). Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself was also then disgusted on Atulya Ghosh. At last it was said that Gulgarilal Nanda would be sent to Bengal to investigate the situation of West Bengal Pradesh Congress and political condition of West Bengal. After thorough investigation Nandaji would submit a report to Congress Working Committee. Prior to his arrival at Calcutta it was also decided that in his report Nandaji would mention that in order to rid the Pradesh Congress from group rivalries an ad-hoc Committee should be formed. After its formation the power of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee be transferred and obviously the power from Atulya Ghosh be handed over to the committee under consideration and thereafter Ajoy Mukherjee would come out breaking the United Front Ministry and form a new Ministry with the support of the Congress party.⁸⁰

Role of Governor Dharma Vira: Prafulla Chandra Sen - Ajoy Mukherjee Meet

As per the planning of Ajoy Mukherjee and Indira Gandhi, Dharma Vira, the Governor of West Bengal was called in Delhi dated 20th August 1967 in order to convey his role as well as activities in the coming political doldrums in West Bengal. Ajoy Mukherjee met Governor Dharma Vira on 30th August and discussed the pros and cons of the whole matter. After two days of the meeting with Dharma Vira, Ajoy Mukherjee invited four important officers in his residence namely Chief Secretary M.M. Basu, Home Secretary S.B. Roy, I. G. of Police Upananda Muiykerjee and Police Commissioner P.K. Sen. Ajoy Mukherjee informed them about the whole planning and gave directives for preparing accordingly. Before arrival of Gulgarilal Nanda in Calcutta on 19th September, meanwhile on 16th September 1967, Dharma Vira as the Governor of West Bengal arranged a post-lunch meeting at Raj Bhavan between Ajoy Mukherjee, Chief Minister and Prafulla Chandra Sen, former Chief Minister in order to mitigate the ill feeling which developed between the two at the time of the oust of Ajoy Mukherjee from the Congress party on the eve of fourth general election held in 1967. During the post-lunch meeting at Raj Bhavan, Nityananda Kanungo, Governor of Gujarat, was then on a visit to the city invisibly for the purpose of effecting the political discussion between the two for changing the

character of the Government.⁸¹ The two leaders talked openly for an hour about the planning of Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister and Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister and in that meeting Prafulla Chandra Sen invited Ajoy Mukherjee to come back in the congress party. It was almost decided that upcoming 2nd October i.e. the birth day of Gandhiji Ajoy Mukherjee would resign from the post of Chief Minister of the United Front and on the same day he would form another Ministry with the support of the Congress party. From 16th September to 2nd October, four secret meetings were held between Ajoy Mukherjee and Prafulla Chandra Sen.⁸²

Prafulla Chandra Sen and Atulya Ghosh Rupture on Ad-Hoc Debate

However, as per the instruction of the Congress High Command Guljarilal Nanda and Sucheta Kripalini came to Calcutta on 19th September 1967 on a six-day visit for reorientation of the Congress party in West Bengal which was in a moribund condition after the general election of 1967. It was a great opportunity for Guljarilal Nanda in the factional politics of the Congress party to undermine Atulya Ghosh, the old enemy of Nanda with the support of Prime Minister and help of the former and present Chief Minister of his (Atulya Ghosh) own state i.e. West Bengal. After arriving in Calcutta on 19th September to 24th September 1967, Nanda talked to all concerned except Atulya Ghosh. When the preparation was completed then Prafulla Chandra Sen talked to Atulya Ghosh face to face and informed him that an ad hoc committee would be constituted and be announced by Nanda. But Atulya Ghosh responded very angrily and remarked “who was Nanda? On what basis he would form an ad-hoc? It would never happen whenever I am here.” In response of Atulya Ghosh’s remark Prafulla Chandra Sen promptly responded then are you a dictator?.⁸³ In spite of differences of opinion between Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen, strong opposition of Atulya Ghosh- once supreme commander of the PCC, Guljarilal Nanda announced the formation of an Ad-hoc Committee for the West Bengal P.C.C. on 24th September 1967. Prafulla Sen, Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, Bijay Singh Nahar, Purabi Mukherjee and others congress leaders were also present at that Press Conference where Nanda made his announcement and remarked, “After considering all aspects of the matter I think that formation of an Ad hoc Committee will further strengthen the West Bengal Congress Committee”. Mrs. Gandhi was keen on announcing the appointment of an Ad hoc Committee.⁸⁴ Though Guljarilal Nanda did

not announce the name of the members of the proposed ad hoc committee and told that names would be announced from Delhi later on.

After announcing the decision of the formation of an ad hoc Guljarilal Nanda went back to Delhi on 24th September by night flight and Ajoy Mukherjee also went to Delhi in the morning flight of 25th September 1967. Though at the hope of the formation of the alternative Government tentatively on 1st October 1967 and Ajoy Mukherjee's coming back to the vicinity of the Congress,⁸⁵ but arriving at Delhi Guljarilal Nanda faced a serious trouble as because due to the opposition of K. Kamraj, the then All India Congress President Nanda did not able to announce the names of the ad hoc committee. Kamraj instructed Sadic Ali, one of the General Secretaries of the Congress over telephone to stop the announcement of the ad hoc committee.⁸⁶ By this time, Atulya Ghosh communicated the whole matter to K. Kamraj by writing a long letter. So, the announcement of ad hoc committee was postponed for the time being. Nanda's report regarding the formation of an ad hoc committee of West Bengal was circulated in the Working Committee meeting held on 7th October 1967. In his reports G.L. Nanda mentioned that Prime Minister and some others Congress leaders tried to fall a non Congress Government in West Bengal which was however ultimately revoked. Congress Working Committee did not take any decision about an ad hoc and Congress President K. Kamraj was entrusted to take the decision about the formation of the same. After five days of that Working Committee meeting Kamraj announced that West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee would remain as it was. An ad hoc executive committee would be constituted by six members and Prafulla Chandra Sen would act as the convener of that committee.⁸⁷

Unrevealed Story of Resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee

The negotiation between Ajoy Mukherjee and Indira Gandhi as well as congress party was kept secret to any Minister of the United Front Government. Even Humayun Kabir, Vice President of Bangla Congress and Sushil Kumar Dhara, General Secretary of Bangla Congress and very close associates of Ajoy Mukherjee had no any information about the impending serious move of Ajoy Mukherjee. But some newspapers were publishing the news of the formation of an ad hoc committee

along with the possibility of the resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee from United Front Government and the formation of an alternative Government with the support of the Congress party headed by Ajoy Mukherjee. In that context, Ajoy Mukherjee at the way of the finalization of his planning to quit United Front and coming back from Delhi on 28th September 1967 he divulged his planning for the first time to his Cabinet colleague Nishith Nath Kundu, Hemanta Basu and requested them to join his upcoming new Ministry. The next day i.e. on 29th September 1967 at the evening Ajoy Mukherjee in a meeting of the secretariat of Bangla Congress specially in presence of Sushil Dhara, Sukumar Roy and Kanai Bhattacharya expressed his entire planning and urged them to join with him. Ajoy Mukherjee firmly told them that “I would not like to destroy the country remaining with CPI (M). I could not give any opportunity to the CPI (M), the enemy of the country. I must dislodge that Ministry and form a new one. So, if you want to come, you are most welcome; if you are not to come I must go alone”.⁸⁸ When it was cleared that Ajoy Mukherjee was going to take serious decision then in order to dissuade Ajoy Mukherjee from that move in the early morning on 30th September 1967, Ashok Ghosh, leader of Forward Bloc communicated Biswanath Mukherjee, CPI leader and younger brother of Ajoy Mukherjee. After being informed Biswanath Mukherjee and his wife Geeta Mukherjee rushed to Belvedere, residence of Ajoy Mukherjee.⁸⁹ Both Biswanath and Geeta Mukherjee tried to influence on Ajoy Mukherjee so that he could postpone his attempt to resign from united front, but failed.

After being failed Biswanath Mukherjee communicated to Sushil Dhara, General Secretary of Bangla Congress. It became clear to Biswanath Mukherjee that without the active support of Sushil Dhara he would not be able to do anything. In that situation only hope was that Sushil Dhara was also against the move of his leader Ajoy Mukherjee. However, on 1st October at 8 a.m. in course of telephonic conversation Biswanath Mukherjee told Sushil Dhara to dissuade Ajoy Mukherjee from his firm decision to resign on 2nd October 1967. In response Sushil Dhara told Biswanath Mukherjee that you could talk to your ‘chhor Da’ (elder brother) so that he could not resign. Biswanath Mukherjee categorically informed him that, “Sushil Da, Chhorda might affectionate me, but did not believe me, he believes you.”⁹⁰

Postponement of the Resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee

In that circumstances, Sushil Dhara and Biswanath Mukherjee jointly requested Satish Chandra Samanta, M.P. of Tamluq and was the Sarbadhinayak of Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar during the time of Quit India Movement, to dissuade Ajoy Mukherjee from that move. Though, Satish Chandra Samanta was also the intimate friend of Ajoy Mukherjee who did not take any major steps without the consultation with Satish Chandra Samanta, yet he did not able to communicate any positive response. In that context Sushil Dhara in consultation with Biswanath Mukherjee convened a meeting of the old PULF groups and some Gandhian groups at night on 1st October 1967 in the house of Kanai Bhattacharya, treasurer of Bangla Congress at Chetla, Calcutta in order to convince Ajoy Mukherjee so that he could not resign on 2nd October. The meeting was held accordingly under the Presidentship of Hemanta Kumar Basu, old Forward Bloc leader and a Minister of United Front Ministry. Hemanta Kumar Basu and Ajoy Mykherjee had great respect to each other. They had together suffered imprisonment and anguish during freedom struggle and were comrades and courageous soldiers. Both of them had to quit Congress on principle. Both of them were extensively known for their transparency, honesty and sincerity. They had no any kind of adversity. In the U.F. Cabinet the Chief Minister had received full support and cooperation from the Forward Bloc leaders. So, when Hemanta Basu told Ajoy Mukherjee to say something before them why he had taken that harsh decision, then Ajoy Mukherjee very nicely elaborated his bitter experiences, sorrowness and grudge against some partners of United Front particularly CPI (M) and SUCI. After that each speaker from every party requested Ajoy Mukherjee not to resign on 2nd October and at least continue the Ministry for some days. Then as per the request of the President of that meeting i.e. Hemanta Kumar Basu, on behalf of Bangla Congress Sushil Kumar Dhara told that as the highest leader of Bangla Congress i.e. Ajoy Mukherjee had already delivered his speech, so he had nothing to say. But, due do the request from the other members of the meetings Sushil Dhara openly told them that he did not accord with the decision of Ajoy Mukherjee and also said if you could refrain him from that move then he (Sushil Dhara) himself would be the most happiest person. In course of discussion Biswanath Mukherjee asked him that if Chhorda i. e. Ajoy Mukherjee would go to heal then would you follow him? In response to that question of Biswanath Mukherjee, Sushil Dhara in a very emotional voice assured him and remarked, “Damu, (Small name of Biswanath Mukherjee) since the last 38 years that man (Ajoy

Mukherjee) is my leader, commander as well as path-faindar. I am nothing but his followers only. In spite of all effort to refrain him from the decision of his resignation, I shall follow his path. I can not leave him as well as allow him to go alone.”⁹¹ After that heartfelt speech of Sushil Dhara, President of that meeting Hemanta Basu once again requesting Ajoy Mukherjee not to resign from the post of Chief Ministership on 2nd October 1967 and declared the end of the meeting. Next day i.e. 2nd October, after short telephonic conversation between President of Bangla Congress i.e. Ajoy Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara, General Secretary of the party and later on meeting with Ajoy Mukherjee at his residence, at last Ajoy Mukherjee had taken the decision of postponement of his resignation for at least 7 to 8 days. In the meantime, in spite of huge arrangement as well as preparation on behalf of Congress party and Governor Dharma Vira, Ajoy Mukherjee went to Raj Bhavan at 8 p.m. along with Sushil Dhara and told Governor that he would not resign on that day i.e. 2nd October according to the pre-plan and want few days more time to resign.⁹²

Four Points Reason as Revealed by Ajoy Mukherjee Behind the Decision of His Resignation From the Seat of Chief Minister

As Ajoy Mukherjee wanted remedies to the leaders of Forward Bloc, CPI and Bangla Congress within 24 hours about the destructive activities in United Front at noon on 2nd October 1967. Naturally after the postponement of the resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee, the very next day i.e. on 3rd October at the aim of reunited the United Front leaders like- Hemanta Basu, Jyoti Basu, Biswanath Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara entered into the room of Chief Minister in order to sort out the differences of opinion among themselves and to soothe the temperament of frustrated Chief Minister. The Chief Minister made a frank and full confession regarding the secret negotiations with Congress leaders and formation of an alternative Government. At the time of explaining the reason in a tearful eyes Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee told them that the main four points which led him to come to the decision to resign were- disorderly behavior, ineffectiveness of his circular in case of prohibiting cultivators to occupy land by force from the Jotedars, ejection by force of share croppers by the Jotedars and open invitation by some political parties to China to bring about an armed revolution.⁹³ Jyoti Basu repeated his assurance and requested him not to give the importance of the story of blood-revolution. In that

meeting in order to assure Ajoy Babu, it was also decided that in the field of the internal conflict among the partners of United Front the Chief Minister would use the police force as Home Minister.⁹⁴ Not only that in order to make happy to Ajoy Mukherjee the Cabinet in its meeting held on 5th October 1967 unanimously decided that in the conflict of the industries between workers and owners, police would interfere properly. A Cabinet sub-committee was constituted to restore normalcy as well as peaceful environment in industries. The members of that committee were- Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee, Jyoti Basu, Somenath Lahiri and Sushil Dhara. In that context, on 5th October 1967, in a brief statement Ajoy Mukherjee said, “It is a pleasure to announce that United Front Government would remain as it was and try to serve the people according to its highest capacity.” In the night of 5th October, Ajoy Mukherjee also informed the Governor that he would not resign. On 7th October a meeting was convened under the Monument in the name of United Front and in that open meeting Ajoy Mukherjee announced, “We are the same, what we had been”⁹⁵

Role of the Congress Party behind the Toppling of United Front Government and Formation of an Alternative Government with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh

Congress leaders of West Bengal particularly the leaders like former Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Sen, Leader of the Opposition Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, Tarun Kanti Ghosh and others had a great hope that due to the resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee, the United Front Government would fall and then with the help of Ajoy Mukherjee they again come back to power. Though, as a result of the changing decision of Ajoy Mukherjee it would not happened, but they were not ready to leave the game very easily. So, in that changing scenario, the Congress leaders followed the policy of defection the MLAs from United Front in order to oust the Government from power and in that case Ashu Ghosh, Congress MLC, played a vital role on behalf of Congress party in West Bengal as well as Centre. It was the Ashu Ghosh against whom Prafulla Chandra Sen during his tenure of Chief Ministership brought a litigation of misappropriation of funds.⁹⁶ However, Ashu Ghosh along with the joint effort of Kabir brothers i.e. Humayun Kabir and Jehangir Kabir were able to reach their goal regarding the fall of United Front Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee, projecting Prafulla Chandra Ghosh as Chief Ministerial candidate. It was found that 15 MLAs of the B.K.D.⁹⁷ group of the Bangla Congress headed by Kabir brothers had

started negotiations with the Congress leaders and ultimately fulfilled their task (Congress—132 plus 15 in a house of 280). There was a story behind the rift between Humayun Kabir and Ajoy Mukherjee- which were as under:

Rift between Humayun Kabir and Ajoy Mukherjee

Bangla Congress had two groups from its inception one led by Ajoy Mukherjee and another group was under the influence of Humayun Kabir. Actually, at the very outset behind the formation of United Front, Humayun Kabir played a very significant role. Humayun Kabir thought that it was due to his effort the United Front Government was formed and Ajoy Mukherjee had become its Chief Minister. So, naturally Humayun Kabir had the expectation of gratitude from the leaders of united Front and particularly from Ajoy Mukherjee. But after returning from Europe Humayun Kabir found that the leaders of the United Front were not giving him the due importance. Not only that at the time of selecting the 3rd Minister from Bangla Copngress i.e. by centering the selection of Sushil Dhara as Minister the difference of opinion between the two groups of Bangla Congress gradually increased.⁹⁸ But, the altercation between Humayun Kabir and Ajoy Mukherjee accentuated by centering the opening of a B.K.D. office in Calcutta under the domination of Humayun Kabir's group. Ajoy Mukherjee insisted that Bangla Congress was being recognized as the sole agent of B.K.D. in West Bengal. Naturally, there was a sharp division on that issue among Bangla Congress MLAs, although the majority members supported the Chief Minister's stance. The differences turned intensified regarding the question of sending delegates to the Indore session of the B.K.D. because, both the factions started claiming to represent Bengal. It was from that time and onwards quick political changes took place in Bengal. Humayun Kabir determined to set in toppling the Ministry and initiated his spade work from September 1967. He met Prafulla Chandra Sen to explore the possibilities of forming an alternative Government with his followers from Bangla Congress MLAs who were disillusioned about the performance of the U.F. Ministry in respect of law and order in addition to food and industrial relations. In the meantime, Food Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was humiliated and 'gheraoed' by Communist supporters in the third week of August 1967 and was equally aggrieved against the performance of the Government. He did not

attend the meeting of the U.F. until or unless the CPI (M) would apologize for their misbehavior to him.⁹⁹

Rift in B.K.D. and Bangla Congress and Creation of Atmosphere of an Alternative Govt. with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh

In spite of the above differences of opinion between Humayun Kabir and Ajoy Mukherjee group, Humayun Kabir and Ajoy Mukherjee came back from Delhi by the same flight and Ajoy Mukherjee drove Humayun Kabir in his Central Government Hostel on 28th September 1967 and thereby relation between the two leaders seems to be improved. But When Humayun Kabir came to know that Ajoy Mukherjee intended to decline the United Front Ministry on 2nd October without giving any hints to him who was still the Vice-President of Bangla Congress. So, Humayun Kabir became very much aggrieved to Ajoy Mukherjee and decided not to go with him anymore and if any opportunity would come he (Ajoy Mukherjee) must be given appropriate lesson. Fortunately, the opportunity of taking revenge against Ajoy Mukherjee came to Humayun Kabir on 3rd October 1967. It has already been mentioned that due to the changed decision of Ajoy Mukherjee about his postponement of resignation from Chief Ministership on 2nd October, the very discontented Congress leaders i.e. Prafulla Chandra Sen and Tarun Kanti Ghosh rushed to Humayun Kabir in Central Government Hostel early in the morning on 3rd October and requested him to do something regarding the oust of the United Front Ministry as well as Ajoy Mukherjee with the help of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. Humayun Kabir assured the Congress leaders regarding the fulfillment of their earnest desire.¹⁰⁰

In that point of time, Humayun Kabir along with Hare Krishna Mahatab, a very important leader in Orissa, went to meet Governor Dharma Vira in the evening of 3rd October. After chalking out some planning then Humayun Kabir went to the flat of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and brought him under the confident that after deposing Ajoy Mukherjee, he would be the next Chief Minister of West Bengal within very short time. In the meanwhile the fracture that developed among the Bangla Congress leadership started widening. A group of dissident MLAs for an alternative Government became very active under the leadership of Humayun Kabir who was

master-minded that plan. But the main instrumental work had done by Ashu Ghosh with the help of his two trusted associates namely-Rabi Chaudhury and Ranadhir Barman regarding the setting up the whole drama in consultation with Governor Dharma Vira, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and as per demand of the situation of West Bengal Pradesh Congress as well as the approval of the Central Congress leadership.¹⁰¹

About that time in the afternoon of 3rd November 1967, Governor Dharma Vira informed the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee over telephone from Darjeeling that he had received a letter over the signature of 18 MLAs including Prafulla Chandra Ghosh withdrawing their support to the U.F. Ministry. The Governor also informed him that due to the withdrawal of support of 18 MLAs, the Ministry would lose its majority in the Assembly and thereupon would not be able to continue the Government.¹⁰²The Governor however did not divulge the names of the MLAs who were expected to withdraw their support. Cutting short his staying in Darjeeling, Governor Dharma Vira returned to Calcutta by a special plane on 4th November. After coming back to Calcutta Governor Dharma Vira first met Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and then wanted to meet defectors who had written him as to the withdrawal of support from United Front Ministry. In the afternoon, 12 of the 17 defectors arrived at Raj Bhavan with Ashu Ghosh to meet the Governor in order to remove any doubt in his mind by physical checking. On 4th November 1967, the Press headlined the news regarding the resignation of Food Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh which was confirmed by Dr. Ghosh himself on the same day i.e. 4th November. The Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee met the Governor immediately after his arrival at Raj Bhavan on the same day when the Governor reiterated the confirmed decision of resignation of 17 MLAs and virtually the minority position of his Ministry. At this hour he wanted to know about his next step.¹⁰³The chief Minister wanted some time for the consultation of the emerging situation with his Cabinet colleagues. A hurriedly summoned Cabinet meeting held on at night on 4th November and accepted the resignation of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh who did not attend his office in the Writers' Buildings on that day. In that Front meeting it was also decided that there was no question of the resignation of the Chief Minister. The Front claimed that they were the majority and prior to the trial of strength in the Assembly Chief Minister would not resign.¹⁰⁴Prafulla Chandra Sen and Khagendra Nath Dasgupta on behalf of the Congress party met Dr. Ghosh at his residence in the evening of 4th November and

assured him regarding the full support of the Congress Legislature Party in his attempts to form an alternative Government. Humayun Kabir was also present in that meeting. On 6th November the Chief Minister along with six U.F. Ministers met the Governor and urged him to summon the Assembly for trial of strength instead of taking any decision of his own. It was also hinted the mid-term poll at that meeting.¹⁰⁵

The Birth of Progressive Democratic Front

Prafulla Chandra Ghosh in a statement on 6th November 1967 announced the formation of the new Party named the 'Progressive Democratic Front' with himself as its leader and claiming the support of 17 MLAs who had already joined his Party. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh demanded the termination of the U.F. Government as because it had lost majority and mentioned that the U.F. was a conglomeration of many warring groups and that is why resigning from the U.F. Cabinet he did a great service to the nation.¹⁰⁶

Dismissing the First U.F. Government by Governor Dharma Vira, November 21, 1967

On 6th November 1967, the Chief Minister met the Governor to inform him that as per the decision of the Cabinet it would not be possible to summon the Assembly on or before 18th December 1967. Though Governor persistently wanted to summon the Assembly as early as possible specially within 20th November. Actually, the Chief Minister himself was aware that due to lose of the support of 18 MLAs, the U.F. Government was reduced to a minority and in that case the only alternative was to save it to enforce the defectors so that they could withdraw their support to Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. In the meantime, demonstrations started to create public pressure violating Section 144 every day in front of the Writers' Buildings in favour of United Front parties.

Meanwhile, Governor Dharma Vira went to Delhi in order to consult as well as to take direction about the ongoing complicated political situation in West Bengal. There was a speculation over the situation of West Bengal, whether Governor could convene the Assembly against the desire of the decision of the Cabinet, or Governor

could force the Cabinet to go for trial of strength. At last the experts of the Central Home and Law Ministry jointly gave the decision that in case of convening the Assembly Governor was bound to follow the advice of the Cabinet; but Governor had the right to dismiss the Ministry.¹⁰⁷ Governor Dharma Vira returning from Delhi to Calcutta on 14th November, 1967 gave a letter to Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee and urged him to convene Assembly within 23rd November 1967. After the meeting of the United Front held on 16th November and that of the Cabinet meeting on 17th November, the Chief Minister communicated to Governor in writing that prior to 18th December 1967 it would not be possible for him to convene Assembly. In the meantime, according to the decision of the Cabinet meeting specially as per the advice of Kashi Kanta Moitra and Somenath Lahiri, on 17th November two unprecedented constitutional questions were raised and appealed to the President of India to take the opinion of Supreme Court. The questions were: i) Whether the Governor had the right to compel the Cabinet to summon the Assembly according to his discretion or the day what he fixed as per his convenience? ii) Without going for trial of strength, only on the basis of his assumption or accusation that the Ministry had lost its majority, Governor would be able to dismiss any Government or not?¹⁰⁸

Governor Dharma Vira sent Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee two days prior to the dismissal of the 1st U.F. Ministry to inform him that the Governor was most reluctant to wait any more and directed him to report to the Governor whether the Assembly would be convened immediately in order to test the strength of the two opposite parties. The Chief Minister however, could give any answer to this. That was actually the final warning on behalf of Governor through the Chief Secretary.

On 21st November 1967, the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee along with Sushil Dhar left Writers' Buildings in the evening to meet Chief Minister of Bihar, M.P. Sinha who on the very day halted at the Grand Hotel, Calcutta. The purpose of this meeting was to settle up a public gathering next day where M.P. Sinha was expected to deliver a public lecture. At the moment of their discussion suddenly at about 8-10 p.m. a hotel boy knocked the door of the room to inform that a messenger had come from the Raj Bhavan with an urgent letter to deliver to Ajoy Mukherjee. The Chief Minister received it and after opening the the letter found that the Governor of West Bengal made an office order under Article 164 (1) of the Indian Constitution

that Shri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee's holding the office of the Chief Minister had ceased with immediate effect and also mentioned that the Council of Ministers headed by him stood dissolved.¹⁰⁹ Immediately Ajoy Mukherjee asked his security to report it to his office and left the Government vehicle at once. After finishing his talk to M.P. Sinha, Ajoy Mukherjee returned his residence in a taxi. That fateful day Ajoy Mukherjee had left his house as the Chief Minister but returned there as ex-Chief Minister.

Prafulla Chandra Ghosh Sworn in as Chief Minister: (21st November 1967- 20th February 1968)

Another magnificent drama performed at Raj Bhavan about that time under huge secrecy i. e. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was sworn in as Chief Minister immediately after the dismissal of Ajoy Mukherjee Ministry. Along with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh another two defectors of Bangla Congress as well as adherents of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh- Harendra Nath Majumdar and Amir Ali Molla also took oath as the Minister of Progressive Democratic Front (henceforth PDF). It was noteworthy that never before in the history of West Bengal nay India no Ministry had taken its oath in such a situation of secrecy and dramatic fashion that the PDF Ministry did in the presence of a very thin gathering. The leader of the Congress Legislature Party, K. N. Dasgupta, Humayun Kabir, Prafulla Chandra Sen, former chief minister and Ashu Ghosh, a former Minister were present there those who played key role behind the dislodging the United Front Ministry replacing the PDF Ministry headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh at Raj Bhavan.¹¹⁰ After the sworn in ceremony Governor Dharma Vira requested the septuagenarian Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh to summon a session of the Assembly on 29th November in order to seek a vote of confidence. On the other hand, the reaction of U.F. was violent. They declared next day i.e. on 22nd November 1967 as the day for general strike. Thus ended the chequered period of 8 months 19 days First United Front regime of West Bengal which was another way known as 'Mili Zuli Sarkar'.

On 22nd November 1967, when Calcutta was observing a general strike against the dismissal of United Front Ministry in a undemocratic manner by Governor Dharma Vira and installation of P.D.F. Ministry headed by Prafulla

Chandra Ghosh, reports of sporadic violences were pouring in the Secretariat through telephone, then the new Chief Minister entered his office room in Writers Buildings' just at 10 a.m. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh became the Chief Minister of West Bengal for the second time under the cover of a conspiracy that led to the development in that political atmosphere and of course it was significantly different from the context of his first term as Chief Minister (3rd July 1947—22nd January 1948). During the brief period (it was 3 months) of his second term as Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had to rely mostly upon those bureaucrats were the Chief Secretary- M. M. Basu, Upananda Mukherjee, Inspector-General of Police- Binay Ranjan Gupta, trusted Food Secretary and Commissioner of Police- P. K. Sen.¹¹¹

Problems faced by PDF Ministry headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh

The first problem before the PDF Government was to maintain law and order in the pretext of the impending civil disobedience movement as well as violence made by the parties belonged to the United Front. The Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh retained all the portfolios in his hand except Agriculture and Community Development, Irrigation and Waterways, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services and Fisheries which were entrusted to Haren Majumdar who was considered as number 2 within the 3-man Cabinet. Another Minister Amir Ali Molla was given the charge of the Health and Forest Departments. The Ministry was thus initiated its activities within a hostile atmosphere as because then the statewide protest strike was observing by the left parties. In that context, once, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh told Upananda Mukherjee (I.G.), "Remember Gandhiji's saying that violence can be crushed only by greater violence".¹¹² That was perhaps the enough indication to the I. G. in the field of maintaining law and order in the wake of leftist violence.

In order to quell the disturbances, immediately after taking oath of the new Ministry on 21st November 1967, section 144 Cr. P.C. was promulgated throughout the city. On 22nd November, the U.F. leaders announced to hold a protest rally defying the Section 144 Cr. P.C. and that would be addressed by some of the erstwhile Ministers of U.F. At the time, summoning top level Home Department officials along with Police Chief of Calcutta at his room Prafulla Chandra Ghosh gave strong directives to them and said that under no circumstances the Brigade Parade

Ground meeting would be allowed to take place in the afternoon. That was actually the first show-down between the Government and the Opposition. There was huge preparations on both sides. A number of Deputy Commissioners of Police were given the charge of the task force. Two former Ministers namely Biswanath Mukherjee (C.P.I.) and Amar Chakrabarty (Judicial Minister, Forward Bloc) along with four other U.F. leaders took part to address the rally. They were severely beaten up and thereupon causing bleeding injuries to them. All the leaders including the convener of the United Front, Sudhin Kumar of the Revolutionary Communist Party were arrested. The directives of the Chief Minister were carried out effectively. The Chief Minister himself with another Minister went to Lalbazar Control Room to supervise police operation personally.

Disturbances were also intensified on the following day i. e. on 23rd November, the second day of the general strike summoned by a body known as “Rashtriya Sangram Samity”. In case of resistance, the Police had to fire 49 rounds and thereby one person was killed and totally 700 agitators were arrested. From the view point of the United Front leaders- the strike became completely success as a result of their organizing ability and whole hearted devotion of the party workers. Curfew was imposed in some areas particularly in north and central Calcutta.¹¹³

Role of Congress Leadership behind the Survival of PDF Ministry under P.C. Ghosh

Apart from suppressing the violent activities in the name of protest against PDF Ministry another issue worried the Chief Minister most was to convince and agree the Congress leaders to join the Ministry as early as possible. As the Cabinet mainly depended on the goodwill of the Congress party, so Prafulla Chandra Ghosh would keep in touch frequently with Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen over telephone apart from holding discussions with them and urging them to persuade with the Central leadership for getting permission so that the Congress party in West Bengal directly would join in the coalition Ministry. P.C. Ghosh also expressed his helplessness to the leaders of the Congress party that how far was it possible for him to fight a battle against so powerful Opposition only with 17 supporters. Under the circumstances, both Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen on behalf of the West

Bengal Pradesh Congress jointly held an hour long discussion with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh at his residence on 26th November 1967. Both the leaders assured Prafulla Chandra Ghosh reiterating the unconditional support of the Congress party to the Progressive Democratic Front Ministry under his stewardship.¹¹⁴

A Historic Assembly Session for Trial of Strength

In the meantime, after the dismissal of the United Front Ministry by the Governor, then a United Front meeting was convened on 23rd November in order to decide their future course of action. After long discussion it was decided that a committee of 5 members consisting of Ajoy Mukherjee, Jyoti Basu, Somenath Lahiri, Kashi Kanta Moitra and Kamal Guha to decide the action within the Assembly House. It was also decided in the meeting that the activities of the United Front would remain as it was. Ajoy Mukherjee would act as leader, Jyoti Basu as Deputy and Kamal Guha would act as Chief Whife within the Assembly. The leaders of the Front openly declared that the Ministry of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was illegal and they would not recognize it.¹¹⁵In that exciting situation, the day of the Assembly Session came on the 29th November 1967. The Speaker Bijoy Kumar Banerjee who earlier seceded from the Congress and elected Speaker by the members of the United Front. In order to know the final outcome every one of the Writers' Buildings was waiting eagerly. It was expected that Prafulla Chandra Ghosh with the support of the Congress MLAs in that trial of strength would win if the supporters of PDF were not prevented to attend the Assembly Session.

The speaker is the supreme authority within the Assembly House. Nobody even President of India can not do anything against the decision as well as Ruling of the Speaker. As the United Front from the beginning claiming the PDF Ministry headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was unconstitutional and illegal, so everything depended upon the mentality of the Speaker. It was expected that the members of the United Front would creat chaos for disruption of the Assembly Session. But they did not do that. With the entrance of the Speaker in the House all the members stood up as a mark of honour to the chair of the Speaker. In the meantime, the car of the Chief Minister already entered into the Assembly Buildings and a group of Congress MLAs and volunteers under the leadership of Bijay Singh Nahar greeted him with shouting

the slogan of “Vande Mataram”. No United Front MLAs or their supporters were present there to raise any counter-slogans. Everything seemed as if normal and orderly. Only a few minutes before commencing the House at 1 p.m. the United Front members rose anti Prafulla Chandra Ghosh slogans. “Dharma Vira quit Bengal, Down, Down with Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, U.F. Zindabad”.¹¹⁶

Speaker’s Historical Ruling

Just at 1 p.m. on 29th November 1967, the Speaker, Bijoy Kumar Banerjee entered into the Assembly House and immediately after standing up he brought a paper from the pocket and started reading out his ruling which was prepared earlier with the consultation of the 5 members committee and Mohan Kumarmangalam, former advocate general of Madraj and son in law of Ajoy Mukherjee and Biswanath Mukherjee. Actually, Kumarmangalam himself prepared the draft of the ruling. He was all along a man of Communist mentalities.¹¹⁷ However, the Speaker’s 5-page ruling was started reading before understanding anything by the opposition bloc. In the historic ruling what Speaker Bijoy Kumar Banerjee stated were as under:

“Honourable Members, this House meets under extraordinary circumstances. I am prima facie satisfied that the dissolution of the Ministry headed by Shri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee followed by the appointment of Dr. P.C. Ghosh as Chief Minister and the summoning of this House on his advice is unconstitutional and invalid since it has been effected behind the back of this House. Pending a full and proper examination of the matter in exercise of powers vested in me under rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure of this Assembly, I adjourn the House sine die.”¹¹⁸

Quoting from the ruling of his predecessor i.e. Nausher Ali on 29th March 1945 of pre-independent undivided Bengal,¹¹⁹ Speaker Bijoy Kumar Banerjee said, “No doubt, the circumstances facing Shri Nausher Ali were different. But the essence of the matter, namely, that this House is the supreme authority in regard to making and unmaking Ministers, is the same. And this statement came from the lips of the presiding officer of this House when India was not free. Today when the sovereign Indian people have given unto themselves a Constitution, surely the authority of this House, has increased and not diminished.” Continuing the Speaker said, “This is why I find it extremely difficult to recognize Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh as a Chief

Minister and his colleagues Shri Harendra Nath Majumdar and Dr. Amir Ali Molla as members of the Council of Ministers. Both the text of the articles of the Constitution and the precedent quoted above recognize no discretion in the Governor in respect of the appointment of the Council of Ministers. He is merely a registering authority to use the expression of my predecessor; an authority whose constitutional duty is to recognize and implement the decisions of the House”.¹²⁰

The Speaker in his ruling also said, “On a prima facie examination of the constitutional question involved, I find it impossible to recognise as legal, valid and constitutional the dissolution of the Council of Ministers, headed by Shri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee. It follows then that the appointment of the Council of Ministers headed by Dr. P.C. Ghosh as Chief Minister is invalid and unconstitutional.” The Speaker again said, “The matters in issue are of the highest constitutional importance. It is my regret that when an attempt was made to refer them for the opinion of the Supreme Court under Article 143 such attempt was frustrated. It is beyond dispute that the issues go to the very root of democracy. It is obvious, therefore, that if I am to find out how exactly I should act so as to preserve and protect the privileges of this House I should need more time and then only give a considered ruling on grave issues at stake. This is why in exercise of my powers under rule 15, I have adjourned the House sine die.”¹²¹

Attack on Chief Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghosh

With the end of the ruling of the Speaker the most unfortunate event took place in the Assembly which never happened since 1937 that a Chief Minister himself being attacked inside the House. Whenever the Pandemonium was going on after the ruling of the Speaker, then some of the Opposition members rushed towards the Chief Minister who was fortunately then guarded by some Congress Members. Amidst of chaos a piece of wood thrown by an Opposition MLA to Chief Minister which hit the Chief Minister and injured him below his eye. Then a red ink-pot was thrown aiming at him. Seeing his unsafe position some more members of his group came forward and made a ring around him and left the House immediately. A doctor was then summoned in order to dress up his injured cheek. His eyes somehow escaped miraculously and blood was trickling from his face. “It would have even caused my

death” Prafulla Chandra Ghosh remarked to his friends. The whole affair was really unexpected, but the most surprising event of that fateful day was that Leader of the Opposition, Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee who was a worshiper of non-violence did not raise his single finger in order to restrain his partymen and spare his ex-teacher from violence.¹²²

The ruling of the Speaker however completely paralysed the constitutional experts of the Central Government, Congress party as well as Governor and first of all they did not understand what should they do? But, on the other hand, Y.B. Chavan, Central Home Minister declared in the Lok Sabha on 30th November 1967, that according to the legal advice what obtained by him with the view that the West Bengal Ministry headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was ‘Lawfully constituted’. Then he brought the matter in Loke Sabha and got it passed by the majority voters (195 – 21). But nobody was able to give the indication how Assembly could convene coming out from the ruling of the Speaker.¹²³

Expansion of PDF Ministry

In the midst of uncertainty of the fate of the PDF Ministry headed by Prafulla Chandra Ghosh (P.C. Ghosh) in West Bengal, the meeting of the National Development Council (NDC) was convened at Delhi on the 1st of December 1967. In that insecure political atmosphere, though Home Minister Y.B. Chavan’s statement in Lok Sabha had to boost up the morale of the Bengal Government, in spite of that the Chief Minister decided not to attend the NDC meeting but to remain in the city in order to meet any developing situation. In that context on 4th December 1967, the Chief Minister P.C. Ghosh advised the Governor to appoint eight persons as members of the PDF Ministry. They were Nalinakshya Sanyal, Gangadhar Pramanick, Amiya Kumar Kisku, (who later for sometime became a Deputy Minister under Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1972) Dasarathi Tah, as full Cabinet Ministers and Khagendra Nath Bandopadhaya, Rajendra Singh Singhi, Chandipada Mitra and Jagadananda Roy as State Ministers.¹²⁴

Joining of the Congress party in PDF Ministry

After inducting eight Ministers from Progressive Democratic Front, the MLAs of Congress party became very much anxious to become Minister. But Congress leaders of West Bengal specially Atulya Ghosh, Pratap Chandra Chunder and Siddhartha Sankar Ray after consultation with Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister declared that with the end of the constitutional dead lock, Congress party would join the PDF Ministry positively. On behalf of P.C. Ghosh who was repeatedly requesting to the West Bengal Congress leaders and Congress High Commands to form a ministerial alliance in order to strengthen his hands. In that context, on 9th January 1968, a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Board was held at Hyderabad. In that meeting Congress Parliamentary Board approved the demand of the Congress leaders of West Bengal for joining in PDF Ministry. After that on 14th January a meeting of the Congress party was convened at Congress Bhavan. As per the decision of the meeting full power was entrusted to the hands of Prafulla Chandra Sen and Atulya Ghosh to finalise the names of the would be Ministers. According to the decision of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress committee the names of Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, Rabindra Lal Singha, Bijay Singh Nahar, Pratap Chandra Chunder, Abdus Sattar and Binode Behari Manji were recommended by P.C. Ghosh to Governor to be included in his Ministry. Accordingly they took oath on 15th January 1968.¹²⁵

Personal and Group Politics among Three Ghoshes

At that critical hour of excitement of selecting the names of the Ministers, the selectors i.e. Prafulla Chandra Sen and Atulya Ghosh did not mention the name of Ashu Ghosh who was considered as the key player of toppling the United Front Ministry. He had personal vendetta against Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra sen. The defeat of the two top leaders of West Bengal in 1967 general elections had considerably eroded their popularity as well as prestige. When Ashu Ghosh found that his role to put an end of the first U.F. Ministry was unrewarded, then he took every possible initiatives to crack down the Congress-PDF Ministry. It was published in the newspaper on 15-1-1968 that 32 MLAs, followers of Ashu Ghosh, were going to withdraw their support from the Congress-PDF coalition Ministry.¹²⁶ Not only that Ashu Ghosh with the help of his two political amissaries namely Rabi Chowdhury and Ranadhir Barman communicated with the United Front leaders and assured them

that if they (U.F. leaders) agreed to support them (Ashu Ghosh and his followers who were subsequently formed a new party named- Indian National democratic Front) then they would form a 'Jatiya Sarkar' jointly by the all the political parties excluding Congress.¹²⁷

In order to avoid crisis Pratap Chandra Chunder, the then President of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee met Ashu Ghosh in his residence but that meeting produced no result. Thereafter Ashu Ghosh sent two of his political emissaries to Delhi to inform the Congress High Command including Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister that unless his demands relating to his induction in the Ministry was not positive, he would obviously bring about the fall of the new Coalition Ministry.

In this juncture, Chief Minister P.C. Ghosh made a public statement against Ashu Ghosh on 3rd February 1968. P.C. Ghosh charged Ashu Ghosh for violation of all kinds of discipline and his effort to topple the Ministry. He said, "Two of his emissaries came to me with a request to take Mr. Ghosh in the Cabinet. I pointed out that it would not be possible as a criminal case and that of another misappropriation of fund pending against him in the court. They requested me to withdraw the case against him, but I did not comply with the same".¹²⁸ Not only that P.C. Ghosh wanted to know from Pratap Chandra Chunder, the then PCC President on that 3rd February 1968 regarding his inaction against Ashu Ghosh who openly maligning the image of the Congress party. In that pretext, Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder after consultation with other leaders of the Congress party, as a PCC President he temporarily suspended Ashu Ghosh from Congress party on 3rd February 1968 and gave a long chargesheet against him.¹²⁹

The Indian National Democratic Front of Ashu Ghosh and his effort to form a INDF-U.F. Coalition Ministry with Barisster Sankar Das Banerjee

In that situation, on 11th February 1968 Ashu Ghosh along with his followers founded a new party, known as 'Indian National Democratic Front' (henceforth INDF). The Press in Calcutta had given wide coverage of Ashu Ghosh's day-to-day activities particularly his efforts in case of formation of an alternative party. Sankar Das Banerjee, a senior Barrister who became an MLC, then an MLA, Speaker,

Advocate General and finally Finance Minister during P.C. Sen's Government (he was dropped under Kamraj Plan along with Ajoy Mukherjee) was projected as the leader of the new party. Ashu Ghosh himself became the Deputy leader of his newly formed INDF party. Sankar Das Banerjee was equally pained with the West Bengal Congress leaders particularly Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen for crushing him out of politics under the pretext of Kamraj Plan. However, Sankar Das Banerjee after meeting the Governor informed him that his party (INDF) was in a position to form a Government with the support of the parties belonged to United Front which commanded over 132 MLAs. Sankar Das Banerjee further claimed that the total number of strength in the Assembly to support INDF would rise to 150 (UF-132 + INDF-18).¹³⁰ The Governor was informed by two other letters of Sankar Das Banerjee, about the withdrawal of support of 18 MLAs from the Congress-PDF Coalition Government, of whom 12 from the Congress party, 4 from the PDF and rest 2 from nominated Anglo-Indian members. Ashu Ghosh further claimed that his Party was in a position to form an alternative Government with Sankar Das Banerjee as Leader and he himself as Deputy Leader.¹³¹

In that moment, Governor Dharma Vira asked P.C. Ghosh, Chief Minister of West Bengal whether he was prepared to face the trial of strength in the Assembly or not? In the meantime, Assembly was summoned by Governor on 14th February 1968 and P.C. Ghosh was also supported the action of Governor. At that juncture, taking advantages of summoning the assembly on 14th February, Ashu Ghosh tried to convince the United Front leaders to allow the summoning of Assembly so that they could win in the trial of strength in order to oust the Congress-PDF coalition Ministry. But the United Front leaders made it clear that as per the ruling of the Speaker on 29th November 1967, the stalemate of the Assembly was still continuing and in order to show the honour to the ruling of the Speaker at least for two hour Presidential Rule must had to be introduced in West Bengal, otherwise they would not allow to summon the Assembly under any circumstances.¹³²

A Historic Joint Session and Attack on Governor Dharma Vira on 14th February, 1968

Political circles of West Bengal as well as Delhi were speculating whether after the ruling of the Speaker on 29th November 1967 the Assembly could at all be convened. But falsifying the speculations of the political circle, the joint Session of the Assembly was summoned by the Governor on 14th February 1968, where Speaker was all in all as per regulation at the time of opening the Session. The Opposition parties repeated their old tactics in order to prevent the Governor to address the session. Blocking the main door of the House, the U.F. MLAs were shouting slogans so that the Governor could not enter into the Chamber for ceremonial procession. But the Governor Dharma Vira showed his remarkable courage and presence of mind through a side door securing his entry into the Assembly House. Thereafter the Governor somehow occupied a seat and started reading from a printed copy. But as and when the Governor tried to read out a few sentences of his printed Address, then in the history of any legislature it was for the first time (at least from 1932-33) that voice of the Governor was drowned by shouting slogans. Moreover, some cushions were also thrown from opposition bloc to hit his head. Naturally, it was certainly impossible for him as well as for any one to continue the speech. So, he was escorted at once and brought out of the House by a side gate and as if flee from the Assembly with the help of a number of pro-Government MLAs and employees by his car.¹³³

After leaving the Assembly of Governor Dharma Vira, then wrestling started among the MLAs of both sides. One of the MLAs of violent United Front had thrown a cushion towards P.C. Ghosh. Another one thrown an ink pot and more one rushed towards P.C. Ghosh and slapped at him. Therefore, instead of resolving the constitutional crisis, the summoning of the Assembly, in other words complicated it further more when the Speaker Bijoy Kumar Banerjee reiterating his previous ruling again and adjourned the Assembly sine die declaring Ghosh Ministry illegal.¹³⁴ Considering the gravity of the situation, the very next day i.e. on 15th February 1968 the Cabinet of the Central Government decided to dissolve the Legislative Assembly as well as Ministry of West Bengal.¹³⁵

Prime Minister's Last Attempt to Reconcile between Two Groups of the Congress party

In spite of happenings the above incidents the West Bengal Congress leaders were still thinking that if they were able to show the support of the majority of the MLAs, then the Congress-PDF coalition Government would exist. In the meantime, on 18th February 1968 at the invitation of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Congress High Command Pratap Chandra Chunder, P.C. Ghosh, Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen left for Delhi while Ashu Ghosh was already there on the same day to have a separate talk with the Prime Minister. Both the contending parties met the Prime Minister, Home Minister and others Congress high-ups, but the possibility of rapprochement was seemed bleak.¹³⁶ After consultation with the Congress High Command in Delhi, the leaders of the Congress in West Bengal felt that the Central Congress leaders already took the decision of the imposition of Presidential Rule in West Bengal, so the West Bengal leaders would not go for any controversy with the Central leaders. In that context, according to the advice of the Governor Dharma Vira, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh tendered his resignation on 20th February 1968.¹³⁷

B. i. IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENTIAL RULE

On 20th February 1968 the Presidential Rule was imposed in West Bengal following the resignation of P. C. Ghosh on the same date, which ultimately led to the end of political uncertainties in the State. Thus West Bengal became the third State throughout the country to have Presidential Rule after the Fourth General Elections in 1967.¹³⁸

Date of poll and Filing of Nomination

After continuing almost one year long Presidential Rule over West Bengal the people were sincerely waiting for the news of the date of polls in West Bengal and the installation of a popular Ministry that would be elected by the electors. In that context, the Chief Secretary of West Bengal M.M. Basu at a Press meeting announced that the upcoming polling would be held on 9th February 1969 and also expressed the hope that next Ministry likely to be installed by February 16. As per the information of Mr.S.K. Mukherjee, Chief Electoral Officer that within the last date for filing the

nomination papers i. e. on 8th January totally 1,000 candidates of at least 25 political parties filed their nomination papers for the 280 constituencies. The United Front comprising 12 (previously it was 14) political parties i.e. CPI(M), CPI, Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc, RSP, SUCI, SSP, Revolutionary PSP, Bolshevic Party, Gorkha League, RCPI and Marxist Forward Bloc had collectively set up 270 candidates apart from supporting 6 independent and 4 PSP candidates. The Congress party filed the nomination for all the 280 seats. The Lok Dal set up 70 while Jana Sangha filed the nomination for 59 seats. The Indian National Democratic Front (INDF) of Ashu Ghosh also claimed that it filed the nomination for all the 280 seats!¹³⁹

The total numbers of contestants for the 280 Assembly seats in that year were 1,019 persons. Two former Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Prafulla Chandra Sen (Congress) and Ajoy Mukherjee (Bangla Congress) were again locked in battle for Arambagh constituency while Jyoti Basu (CPI-M) had to contest against Amar Banerjee, a student leader of Congress party in Baranagore constituency.¹⁴⁰

The Mid-term Poll and Result

At last the long awaited 9th February 1969 came and election for the formation of Fifth Legislative Assembly was held throughout West Bengal. The election was started from early in the morning and ended in the evening within more or less peaceful environment. Mr. S.P. Sen Verma, the Chief Election Commissioner of India expressed his satisfaction for prevailing general peaceful atmosphere on the polling day in West Bengal.

After the end of the election and thereafter counting of votes the party wise comparative results of that mid-term Assembly election (in 1967 and 1969) were as under: Congress- 55 (in 1967 it was 127), CPI (M)- 80 (in 1967 it was 43), Bangla Congress- 33 (in 1967 it was 34), CPI-30 (in 1967 it was 16), Forward Bloc- 21(in 1967 it was 13), RSP- 12 (previously it was 6), SSP-9 (previously it was 7), SUCI-7 (previously it was 4), PSP-5 (previously it was 7), Gorkha League- 4(Previously it was 3), LSS-4 (in 1967 it was 5), MFB -1 (in 1967 it was 1), WPI-2 (in 1967 it was 2), RCPI-2 (previously it was 0), Swatantra-0 (previously it was 1), Janasangha-O

(previously it was 1), INDF-1, Progressive Muslim League-3, Independent and others supported by United Front-9.¹⁴¹

Landslide Defeat of the Congress Party

The result of fifth midterm general election of 1969 simply showed that it was the landslide defeat of the Congress party in West Bengal. The strength of the Congress party in the assembly reduced from 127 to only 55. After showing the result of that election it was found that the calculations of the Congress bosses were so mistake that even the All India Congress President N.Nijalingappa also became astonished. Congress party in West Bengal never had to face suchlike situation in view of electoral results since Independence. Actually the Congress leaders were as if living their own universe. Their assessment about the changing attitude of the politically matured people of West Bengal was tragically wrong. Taking the responsibility of the unthinkable defeat of the Congress party in West Bengal, Atulya Ghosh tendered his resignation as a member from the Congress Working Committee, although later on he had withdrawn the resignation letter at the request of the Congress President. In that very alarming situation of Congress party in the State Siddhartha Shankar Ray was elected as Leader of the Congress Legislature Party (55). In first meeting of the CLP the name of Siddhartha Shankar Ray was proposed by Prafulla Chandra Sen and seconded by Bijoy Singh Nahar. On behalf of the Congress party Siddhartha Shankar Ray was authorized to elect the other office-bearers.¹⁴²

Congress's Defeat and Atulya Ghosh's Reaction

Though there were many causes behind the defeat of Congress party in West Bengal, but as per the explanation of Atulya Ghosh- the involvement of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself and West Bengal Congress leaders including Prafulla Chandra Sen for the toppling the First United Front Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee could not support the politically conscious people of West Bengal. As the Congress party was in power since Independence throughout the country and as a result of that the Congressmen virtually lost the values of democratic spirit. In democracy the role of the opposition parties are always respectable. But forgetting the spirit of democracy, the Congress leaders under any circumstances i.e. using the play

of money and adopting various misdoing on behalf of Congress party and taking the support of Prime Minister determined for overthrowing the United Front Ministry. But the people of West Bengal did not comply that move of Congress party which reflected in the ballot box in the mid term poll of 1969.¹⁴³ It is mentionworthy that Atulya Ghosh was all along against the move of knocking down the United Front Ministry and was in favour of continuing the front Ministry headed by Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee. It is also noteworthy that after the defeat of Atulya Ghosh in the Fourth General election in 1967, Central as well as State leadership of the Congress party started ignoring him in many ways in order to diminish the image of Atulya Ghosh who was a very dynamic leader and had the record of his huge sacrifice in pre-independence era. Moreover, Congress party in West Bengal became an indomitable power and tested the victory in the last three general elections under his leadership.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, on behalf of the United Front Jyoti Basu and Ajoy Mukherjee in a brief press statement thanked the people of West Bengal for their political consciousness and giving massive verdict in favour of Front.

Tussle over Ministry Formation

In spite of landslide defeat of the Congress party as well as massive victory of the United Front in the mid term poll in 1969, it was not easy to form the second United Front Ministry due to claiming and counter claiming for the post of Chief Minister and Home Minister between CPI(M) and Bangla Congress. Logic behind the CPI (M)'s claim was that as the single largest party (it had gained 80 seats) not only within the Front but also among the all parties those who were participated in the mid term poll in 1969, it demanded both Chief Minister and Home Ministry portfolios. But the other United Front partners specially the Bangla Congress, CPI, Forward Bloc and PSP came into an understanding and jointly claimed that Bangla Congress leader as well as Chief Minister of first United Front Ministry Shri Ajoy kumar Mukherjee would be the Chief Minister along with Home portpholio in his hand in the second United Front Ministry.¹⁴⁵ But on behalf of CPI (M), Promode Das Gupta, State Secretary of CPI (M) declared "At least without getting the Home Portfolio CPI (M) would not participate in the second United front Government. It was the final decision of the CPI (M) party that under any circumstances Home portfolio must have to be retained in their hand".¹⁴⁶ Understanding the importance of the Home portfolio,

Harekrishna Konar, CPI (M) leader and Minister categorically remarked, “As the aim of the CPI (M) is to strengthen the democratic movement and it would not be fulfilled without Home portfolio in their hand, so any understanding without Home portfolio would not be materialised.”¹⁴⁷

In that situation of deadlock, the CPI (M) party agreed to leave the demand of Chief Ministership but in no way the leaders of that party were ready to give up the Home portfolio. Lastly, in a United Front meeting held on 20th February it was decided that Ajoy Mukherjee would be Chief Minister along with Home (political) and Finance portfolio and Jyoti Basu would be Deputy Chief Minister along with Home portfolio. The name of Ajoy Mukherjee as leader of the united Front was proposed by Jyoti Basu and seconded by Jatin Chakrabarty.¹⁴⁸ On 21st February 1969, Ajoy Mukherjee, leader of the United Front met the Governor Dharma Vira and apprised him regarding the decision of the meeting of Front Committee held on 20th February and requested him to arrange a Swearing-in-ceremony. After being convinced by the claim of Ajoy Mukherjee, the leader of the United Front, Governor fixed 25th February 1969 as the date for Oath-taking ceremony accordingly. It was decided in the meeting of the United Front Committee on 20th and 21st February 1969, that a Cabinet with 30 Ministers would be constituted and among the total number, as per the partywise MLAs strength,- 9 from CPI (M), 4 from Bangla Congress, 3 from CPI, 3 from Forward Bloc, 2 from the RSP and one each from the S.S.P, Gorkha League, L.S.S., R.C.P.I., Workers Party and the P.S.P. The decision of the appointment of four Ministers of State was also taken in order to fulfill the demands of the smaller parties.¹⁴⁹

A 30—Member Cabinet

As scheduled, with taking the Oath of Office by Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee along with his team of 29 on 25th February 1969 in the Throne Room at Raj Bhavan—the long one year and six (371 days)—days Presidential Rule in the State was terminated. Though, due to the disagreement among the partners of the United Front regarding Ministry making, the image of the Front slightly dimmed, but overall confidence of the common people were not fatigued. At the time of Oath taking ceremony as well as entrance of the Ministers into the Writers Buildings’, the

thousands of people came to wish the United Front Ministers with great hope for the betterment of the people of West Bengal. The crowd was so bigger and enthusiastic that the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee and Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu had to come out from their room several times to address the crowd from the balcony. All the Ministers of the Front entered into the room of the Chief Minister one by one for holding a formal discussion. In his first press meet, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee said, "Though we are called the United Front, we are like a single political party and we will serve the people in a united manner."¹⁵⁰ Chief Minister also said, "We are cautious about the gravity of the responsibility conferred upon us. Our efforts would be succeeded if we can fulfill the rising aspiration of the people partially through our work." In that connection Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu remarked, "Work is being start from today. We shall try to be worthy and reflect the aspiration of the people."¹⁵¹

The First Cabinet Meeting and Release of All Naxalites and Withdraw All Cases Against Central Government Employees During Strike

In its first Cabinet meeting of the United Front Government held on 26th February 1969, it was decided to release all Naxalites immediately, who were imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act, in connection with the Naxalbari Movement, subject to reconsideration by the Home Minister Jyoti Basu. It was also decided to withdraw all pending cases against Central Government Employees owing to their total strike in the month of September, 1968. The Cabinet also decided to reduce the tram fare which was raised from 2nd January 1969.¹⁵²

The Second Cabinet Meeting and Urging President–Prime Minister to withdraw Dharma Vira Before Budget Session

In a Cabinet meeting of the Second United Front Government held on 2nd March 1969, decided unanimously for sending a telegram to the President of India to urge him to withdraw Dharma Vira, Governor of West Bengal prior to the Assembly Session which was expected to be held on 6th March. In response to the demand of the West Bengal Government the Union Home Minister, Y. B. Chavan rejected the demand with a firm 'no' that Governor Dharma Vira should be repealed before 6th March. Union Home Minister also disclosed that as per the Governor's request for his

release on 'personal grounds' was under consideration. Following the precedence the Ministers of the United Front Government prepared the address of the Governor which he had to deliver at the time of opening the Session. In that address the role of the Governor behind the toppling of the first United Front Government and his partisan activities were severely criticized. Actually the front leadership wanted to condemn the Governor's role by his own mouth. After reading the draft address when Governor expressed his unwillingness to read out the controversial portions, then Promode Dasgupta, State Secretary of CPI (M) declared, "If the Governor would not agree to read out full address and skip any parts of the same, then he would be gheraod within the Assembly House until and unless he would not agree to read the whole address." ¹⁵³ In that context, as per the guidance of the Central Government, Governor Dharma Vira read out the Address formally but skipping some portions which contained very critical references regarding his role behind the removal of the first United Front Ministry in 1967. Then, United Front MLAs started slogan against Dharma Vira. However, Governor Dharma Vira ended his speech describing the Centre-State relation as 'frankly intolerable'. ¹⁵⁴

The United Front leaders would not get much time to pick up anti Dharma Vira campaign. On behalf of Central Government, Home Minister Y.B.Chavan declared the release of Dharma Vira and he would be replaced by Shanti Swarup Dhawan (henceforth S.S. Dhawan), Indian High Commissioner in England on 19th March 1969. At the initial stage the Front leaders were not agree to accept the name of S.S. Dhawan as the Governor of West Bengal but later on they had to accord with the Central Government decision. Dharma Vira, left Calcutta on 28th March in 1969 and S. S. Dhawan took the charge of the office of the Governor on 19th September in the same year. During that interim period as per regulation Mr. Justice Deep Narayan Sinha, the then Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court was acting as the Governor of West Bengal. ¹⁵⁵

Unfortunate Developments—Durgapur Steel Factory, Rabindra Sarobar Stadium and Cossipur Gun & Shell Factory:

Durgapur Steel Factory: With the end of the tussle between Centre and West Bengal State over the issue of Governor Dharma Vira, some unfortunate

development took place in Durgapur Steel Factory, Cossipur Gun and Shell Factory and Rabindra Sarobar Stadium. The event of Durgapur took place on 24th March 1969. The tragic event of Durgapur started centering the removal of its own security guards for the installation of central force according to the earlier decision of the Central Government. But Communists influential union of the security guards demanded no Central force would be deployed under any circumstances. The Union of the Durgapur Steel Factory marched to the Head Office and when they were resisted by the C.R.P. and ultimately conflict broke out and C.R.P. was forced to fire in order to disperse the agitated workers. Then the workers raise the demand of arrest of Mr. Pal, chief security officer and Mr. Oadhera, head of the factory. Jyoti Basu, Home Minister of Second United Front Government supported the move of the union and ultimately chief security officer Mr. Pal was arrested. Jyoti Basu demanded for removal of C.R.P.¹⁵⁶

Rabindra Sarobar Stadium: One such unfortunate event took place on April 6 at Rabindra Sarobar Stadium where a musical soiree was arranged. Due to the disturbances of the microphone led to exhaust the patience of the audience and ultimately pandemonium broke out. In that context, in order to bring the situation under control the Police had to intervene and fire. Out of police firing one person died at once and huge numbers of people were injured. It was come out after two of three days from various sources that fleeing women were molested on a mass scale by anti-social elements. This incident resounded throughout the state and complains one after another started reaching to Prime Minister and Home Minister of India and demand for impartial judicial enquiry was raised. But Jyoti Basu claimed it as a conspiracy of the Central Government against United Front Government. It was alleged against Jyoti Basu that he was reluctant to go for any impartial enquiry due to the involvement of his two close associates namely Snehangsha Kanta Acharya and Minister Ram Chatterjee, among the organizers. However due to the pressure from inside and outside the Cabinet Jyoti Basu was compelled to appoint a one man enquiry committee headed by Justice Shambhu Ghosh on 16th April 1969. After long days when enquiry was over then Justice Ghosh submitted his report where it was found that there was no any incident of molestation on women.¹⁵⁷

Cossipur Gun & Shell Factory: In Cossipur also there was going on a trouble between authority of the factory and the workers union influenced by the

communists. On 8th April 1969 conflict started over the question of entering into the factory between the guards and the workers. In the midst of the conflict the guards of the factory had to fire to quell the disturbances and there upon four workers died at on the spot and one more dead body was rescued later on. In that context Jyoti Basu rushed to the spot and supported the claim of the workers demanded the punishment of the guards who had shot fired. But the authority argued that as the guards were the part of the Army so they would be judged only by the military court. Then on 10th April State wide general strike was called for highlighting the Cossipur incidents and State Government was also supported the strike. Another fresh conflict started at Kancharapara between the two workers group and as a result of that one more died. Police also fired to sub side the situation and lastly curfew was imposed. However in the Court army authority was lastly won.¹⁵⁸

Inter-Party Clash

At the beginning of the formation of the Second United Front Government, most of the Parties of the Front Governments opposing the demand of CPI (M) having Home portfolio out of fear that after getting Home Department in their hand they would use the power of that department in order to spread sphere of influence. Hare Krishna Konar, Minister in Charge of Land and Land Revenue Department declared on 27th March 1969 that in the field of the struggle for land among the United Front partners, police would not interfere. A circular in that regard was sent to Home Department.¹⁵⁹ After that CPI (M) started occupying land, embankment and school forcefully. After seeing the activities of the CPI (M) the other parties also engaged themselves in the same work and thereby inter-party bloody struggle started among the United Front parties. In Calcutta the main leaders of each party engaged themselves to impose allegation against one another but in rural areas that took the shape as a bloody struggle when the supporters of each party got involved in conflict with their traditional weapon like stick, arrows along with gun and bombs. As a result of that, murders, injuries, looting and in some cases molestation of women also became the very common phenomena in West Bengal during the second United Front Government.¹⁶⁰

It might be noteworthy that in most of the cases in the inter-party conflict the main accused was CPI (M). In the May Day of 1969 Calcutta witnessed violent clashes between the supporters of two contending parties i.e. on behalf of U.F. dominated by mainly CPI (M) and the newly formed CPI (ML), extrist group of the CPI (M), otherwise known as Naxalites. There was an open fight between the two groups and in due course the Police had to make lathi charges and use tear gas to bring the situation under control.¹⁶¹

The Inter-Party Conflict Came to the Open Platform

At Alipurduar of Jalpaiguri district in North Bengal two party i. e. CPI (M) and RSP were involved in the inter-party conflict on 16th May 1969 that led to the death of five person altogether. The situation was so explosive that at last Curfew was imposed in order to bring the situation normal. After that incident it was alleged on behalf of the RSP that police acted as a partisan and with the help of the police the cadre of the CPI (M) made that bloody campaign.¹⁶² The Alipurduar incident was followed by many inter-party cum bloody clashes took place in defferent parts of West Bengal. It was at Taherpur in Nadia District conflict started between CPI (M) and RSP, in Haringhata CPI verses CPI (M). Within two or three days CPI and CPI (M) took the course of brutality in order to sub due each other. For example the places like Canning and Ranaghat were turned into common spot of clashes. On 30th May at Jadavpur CPI (M) and SUCI were involved in inter-party struggle for establishing their hold and as a result of that a number of persons were severely injured. Apartfrom Alipurduar and those which are mentioned above more such unwanted incidents took place in various parts of both North and South Bengal. All these events had sufficient reasons to agitate the common masses of West Bengal and all other leaders including Chief Minister were not exception.¹⁶³

Before the out break of the inter-party conflict for expansion of their support base, in the meantime, the United Front Cabinet took two very major decisions on 24th and 25th March 1969. Out of anti Congress feeling and taking the attitude for throwing the Congress party entirely from all spheres of activities, the United Front passed an Ordinance on 24th March by which the school boards in all district were declared null and void. By another Ordinance on 25th March, all Zilla Parishad (District Council)

and Anchalic Parishad (local council) were declared nullified. After abolishing School Managing Committees, administrators were installed in the Schools and Colleges according to testing the loyalties to the parties. Those teachers were not agreed with the activities of the party nominated administrators they became subject to oppress. In some cases teachers' were forced to resign in the face of severe resistance. That practice was so exaggerated that even after a certain time Satyapriya Roy, the then Education Minister, who was very radical in his attitude, forced to raise his voice against the forceful resignation of the teachers.¹⁶⁴

As the 'gherao culture' was initiated during the First United Front Government and extended in a large scale during Second United Front Government regime. The gherao tactics entered from industry to the premises of the educational institutions. The practice of gherao was so frequent that some of the Ministers of the Front started giving statement about the excessiveness of the system. In that context, When Sushil Kumar Dhara, Minister in Charge of Commerce and Industries and Agro-Industries Corporation was himself gheraod at Jaldhaka in Darjeeling District when he went there on 24th May 1969 to visit the 'Jaldhaka Projects', an electricity producing centre.¹⁶⁵ As protest against that Gherao, once well known Gandhian leader Sushil Dhara started fasting until the gherao was lifted. Though Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee and Home Minister Jyoti Basu repeatedly requested him to use police force as much as possible to suppress the agitators and come back to Calcutta. But Sushil Dhara did not do so, rather in the fourth day of his fasting he sent a Radiogram to Chief Minister expressing his firmness i.e., "You know me best! Bless me to over come all weaknesses and to get strength to continue my fast till the mission is successful."¹⁶⁶ At last the agitators were forced to withdraw their gherao programme seeing the firmness of Minister Sushil Dhara's stance against lawlessness in the industrial field in the name of gherao at night of the fourth day of his fasting. Then in the fifth day of his fasting at 7 a.m. Sushil Dhara ended his fasting after drinking fruit juice in the hands of Shiu Mangal Singh, President of Darjeeling District Bangla Congress Committee.¹⁶⁷

Attack of the Ananda Bazar Patrika Office

Another unfortunate event took place during this time. A group of students who were representing five left parties forcefully entered into 'Ananda Bazar Patrika' office and damaged glass panes and telephone wires. They also broke and damaged some furniture of the office. These young students representatives were very much dissatisfied due to critical coverage of news along with the editorial comments relating to the activities of the U.F. Government. Jyoti Basu, as a Home Minister admitted this raid in the Assembly. This was actually the first time that a newspaper office was attacked as well as ransacked by supporters of the Government. On behalf of the Opposition, the Congress party described it in the Assembly as nothing short to an attempt to suppress the freedom of Press and force them to 'kowtow' their line.¹⁶⁸

United Front in Disarray

In Calcutta for the first time the Chief Minister gave public statement expressing his unhappiness and anxiety over the violent incidents that happened inside the State. He said to the Press that he was disturbed by some recent incidents that affecting the law and order situation in the State (he was referring to the killing of five small landowners under the Police Station of Basanti in 24-Parganas in the presence of a Police party) and admitted that discussions between the Front leaders in case of taking measures to prevent such clashes produced little result. Most of the clashes were due to land disputes. The violence was committed by supporters of SUCI. They had strong pockets in certain areas of South 24-Parganas. In the next day's meeting the SUCI representatives were reprimanded by other party leaders for excesses committed by them.¹⁶⁹

Stormy Raid of Assembly by Policemen

After becoming Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister, Jyoti Basu at the very beginning dismissed Upananda Mukherjee, I.G. of Police, and he was replaced by Sachin Ghosh who was very much loyal to Jyoti Basu as well as CPI (M). Similarly some peoples were posted in the D.I.Gs testing loyalties. As a result of that whole police department came absolutely under the control of Jyoti Basu or CPI (M) party. Most of the police officers came to the conclusion that it would be their duty to satisfy Jyoti Basu and his party. So, in that context wherever any clashes took place

police started acting as a partisan manner. Moreover, when it was circulated that in case of land dispute and trade union related matters police would not interfere, then in that way after making the police force inactive, the CPI (M) party started occupying land, dams, various unions for spreading their support base. Incidentally, the Communists had the long cherished grievances against the police forces, now getting the opportunities they were go for gheraoing the polich stations. The police were insulted in public places which produced graudge among the police personnel against the CPI (M) leaders as well as Communists. In that context, after the murder of a police constable named Shankar Das Sharma, the angry police personnel carrying the dead body marched Assembly House in around 4.30 p.m. on 31st July 1969.¹⁷⁰

After entering into the Assembly House, the infuriated policemen started breaking the microphone stands, tables and tore up Order Papers. Minister Biswanath Mukherjee and other several MLAs were beaten up. After showing vandalism inside the House then the agitators ran towards the Speaker's room and tried to open it by force. The angry police men then went towards the Deputy Chief Minister's room. He was the main target of the aggrieved police personnel. After entering Jyoti Basu's room more than half a dozen men who were turned brute with anger started breaking glass panels of the almirah and the flower vase on the table. At that moment, Jyoti Basu in a mild tone but firmly told, "Take your seat and tell me what you have to say". He was at first visibly shaken due to the unexpected turn of events. After that in an angry voice he roared, "It is a sinful act to raid the House while in session. I have my sympathy for the murdered policeman, Shankar Das Sharma. As a matter of fact, I have a garland ready here for him. But after your disgraceful conduct I do not feel like doing it." After that the agitators lost their nerves. Again Basu said in a violent tone, "You will have to pay a heavy price for this".¹⁷¹

Action Taken Against the Invading Policemen

However the next day of that incident i. e. on 1st August 1969 the United Front demanded to punish four big bosses of the police department. They were- Sachin Ghosh, I.G., P.K. Sen, Police Commissioner, Ranjit Gupta, D.I.G. I.B. and Debabrata Dhar, D.I.G, Presidency Division. But instead of giving punishment, Jyoti Basu appointed an enquiry Committee headed by Ranu Gupta. Then after taking the

approval of the Cabinet, Jyoti Basu dismissed Subodh Dutta, President of Police Association along with others active workers of the police association under the 311 Section of the Constitution so that the punished police personnel could not go to any appeal Court. In that way creating a fearful atmosphere and in the name of punishment to the offender extreme favouritism was shown to the partymen and thereby Jyoti Basu created the ground for controlling the police association in his hands.¹⁷²

United Front Vis-à-vis Violence

In the midst of the atrocities committed by the CPI (M) only because of strengthening their organization, the United Front leaders met number of times at the aim of stopping the inter-party clashes and sometimes very good proposals were also adopted, but there was no result at all. Under the circumstances, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee in a reaction to the pressmen on 7th September 1969, said, “I am really unhappy due to the inter-party conflict and if that practices were not stopped then it would creat such a situation that Government would not be able to continue its activities easily.”¹⁷³ But there was no sign of stopping the politics of murder, blood sheeding which was going on in full swing in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri, Mathurapur and Baruipur of South 24 Parganas. In that excited environment of inter-party clashes and blood sheeding, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee went to Delhi and met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 26th September 1969 and discussed for long time.¹⁷⁴ After coming back of Ajoy Mukherjee from Delhi a meeting of the Secretariate of Bangla Congress was held on 7th October 1969. The meeting was presided over by Ajoy Mukherjee. The resolution of that meeting came to the public notice though the contemporary newspapers. It was brought to the news headlines that the entire West Bengal was in a violent move and the law and order was questioned. It appears from the statement that if the on going violence and humiliation of women wer not stopped, the Bangla Congress would have no alternatives but to initiate resistance movement on Gandhian lines.¹⁷⁵ After distribution the resolution copies to the pressmen and openly expressed on the interrogation of the journalists that “I do not think about the dissolution of the U.F. Government and the imposition of Presidential Rule as well”¹⁷⁶ The main allegations which however, focused in the

newspaper that - several hundred people lost their lives due to the excessiveness committed by a particular political party i. e. CPI (M).¹⁷⁷

Sharp Reaction of Jyoti Basu and United Front Meeting on 16th October 1969

As Sukumar Roy, member of the Bangla Congress Secretariate, in the meantime became very close to the CPI (M) and divulged to the CPI (M) leaders that it was due to Sushil Dhara's influence Bangla Congress adopted that resolution and party President Ajoy Mukherjee had no approval on it. After getting such information Home Minister Jyoty Basu reacted sharply against that resolution saying, "Let them say so at the U.F. meeting. It is absurd" (referring to the killing of several hundred men).¹⁷⁸ Jyoti Basu sent a strong letter to the United Front partners on 11th October and mentioned that "untill and unless the proposal of Bangla Congress will not be placed for discussion in the Front meeting, all the joint programmes should be stopped."¹⁷⁹ Naturally, United Front meeting was held on 16th October 1969. Jyoti Basu in a rude voice is said to have accused the proposals of Bangla Congress as it was completely absurd and false and with this he also raised the question and said, "Why these false allegations were given to the press and Bangla Congress must have to be answerable".¹⁸⁰ Hearing the statement of Jyoty Basu, Ajoy Mukherjee, ever a clam and cool minded man was shocked and his face was flared up and remarked, "Am I Chief Minister or Foolish Minister? Am I blind, deaf and dumb? Am I not watch what is happening in the state."¹⁸¹ Thereafter, Chief Minister asked Sushil Dhara-"Sushil, place all the facts," Then Sushil Dhara narrated the horriable evidences of lootings, murders, injuries, blood shedings, persecution of women etc. With the end of Sushil Dhara's statement Nirmal Basu of Forward Bloc shouted at once and said, "Police was being used as per the direction of the CPI (M). CPI (M) was not abiding the instruction of the Front in the educational field. Oppression was going on everywhere. At that point of time we should instruct our followers to take actions against all vandalism."¹⁸² Then Somenath Lahiri of CPI remarked, "Your leader Sundariya said, there is some anti-people parties like-CPI, Bangla Congress, SUCI and Froward Bloc in the Front, so first of all you have to decide whether you would be associated with them who were supposed to be anti-people. Thereafter might be further discussion on the presence situation."¹⁸³ The CPI (M) could not give any answer, so the meeting was ended in a confution.

Deterioration of the Law and Order to the Worst Level

Meanwhile in West Bengal deadly quarrels among the U.F. partners had taken a serious turn to the worse. Three CPI workers were brutally killed by CPI (M) supporters. After two days their dead-bodies were taken to Writers' Buildings by a procession. Biswanath Mukherjee and Somenath Lahiri two CPI Ministers came near to the dead bodies and delivered speeches narrating the incidence of violence. Garland were offered by some other Ministers of the United Front on the dead bodies except the CPI (M). The incident was followed by many more funeral processions of other United Front partners and Writers' Buildings virtually converted into a morgue. Due to large-scale murder and violent activities the faith of common people in a multi-party system of Government was rudely shaken. The Administration was virtually become in a stalemate position.¹⁸⁴

The Satyagraha Movement of Ajoy Mukherjee

As was predicted, Ajoy Mukherjee launched his Satyagraha movement on Gandhian line in order to put end the politics of violence on 1st December 1969. At least 3 to 7 days in 1450 camps and almost two lakhs satyagrahis participated in a long monthly wide Satyagraha Movement. All classes of people irrespective of male and female became the part of that gigantic effort. In the big camp of Curzen Park at least one hundred satyagrahees would continue their fast for at least three days. Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee himself opened the fasting camp for Satyagraha movement by doing his fast for three days in Curzon Park. Unending waves of visitors came spontaneously into the camp to show their respect and solidarity to the fasting Chief Minister. Lakhs of people supported the Satyagraha movement against the mischievous activities of the CPI (M). On the first day of his fasting Ajoy Mukherjee faced a painful experience of violence in his fasting tent. A group of violent demonstrators rushed to the camp and smashed chairs and tables, cut telephone lines and threw shoes. Ajoy Mukherjee himself was sustained injuries on his forehead and chest. There was however a continuous demonstrations in the form of slogan-shouting. At 3 p.m. police was called to avoid any mischief. Many leaders and Ministers of others democratic parties came to Curzon Park fasting camp to show

their support and sympathy. Bidyut Basu, President of PSP, Bhupal Basu, President of SSP along with 20-22 party workers directly participated in the fasting camp of Curzon Park. They showed their active support in order to boost up the organizers by fasting for 3 days. The 33 MLAs of Bangla Congress and 3 Ministers did their fasting. Ajoy Mukherjee along with Sushil Dhara and Kumudini Dakua, G.O.C. of “Shanti Fauoj” (women wings) toured all the fasting camp throughout the West Bengal and delivered their speeches for awakening the people against the violent activities in the State.¹⁸⁵

On the second day of the fast, Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister, addressed a big gathering outside the fasting camp and charged CPI (M) of having made the Police completely ineffective. On the last day of his three day fasting, Chief Minister made a very significant remark at the time of his speech outside the camp while addressing a mammoth gathering. Ajoy Mukherjee said, “If the people of West Bengal feel that the present state of lawlessness should continue, we shall silently bid them farewell. (This means that Bangla Congress would quit the U.F.) “Don’t be silent”, he warned the people, “against lawlessness, otherwise a catastrophe would overtake the country”.¹⁸⁶ The Chief Minister, however, broke his fast at 8 a.m. in the morning of 4th December, 1969.

Transfer Order of the O.C. of Gazole and its Postponement

In the last week of the month of December 1969, Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister went on a tour to North Bengal. While Chief Minister passing through Malda District the O.C. of Gazole Police Station, Mihresh Burman who was under orders of transfer, met the Chief Minister and requested him to withdraw his transfer order. It was known that as that O.C. was continuing some criminal cases against some of the supporters of CPI (M), so, he faced the transfer order. On his return to Calcutta the Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee sent a telex using his special power to the S.P. of Malda to keep in abeyance of the transfer order of Mihresh Barman for a period of six months. This telex was sent on 29th December. After this, Ajoy Mukherjee communicated this to his Deputy as well as Home Minister accordingly.¹⁸⁷

Scenario of All India Congress Politics Following the Death of Zakir Hussain

Whenever the internal conflict among the United Front partners was going on in full swing specially due to the misuse of police force by the CPI (M) for their narrow party interests and as a result of that inter-party clashes became as if a day to day affairs which severely shaking the unity of United Front, then disagreement within the Congress party by centering the election of the President of India provoked the waring United Front leaders for a while to truce their infighting. The sudden death of Dr. Zakir Hossain, a 'Bharat Ratna' awardee and the third President of Indian Republic on 7th May 1969 following a massive heart attack- the question of the election of the new President of India emerged that led to the difference of opinion among the top Congress leadership in all India level which ultimately widened the path of the split of Indian National Congress. However, after the death of Zakir Hossain, automatically Vice-President of India, Varahagiri Venkat Giri (V.V.Giri), became the acting President as per the Constitution until the formalities of the Presidential election was over. Actually, on the issue of the election of new President the top most Congress leaders divided into two parallel groups which later led to the formation of the Congress (R) and Congress (O), introducing a vast change in the entire political scenario of India.¹⁸⁸

The Seeds of Strife: Division in Congress Camp

It was fact that All India Congress Committee (AICC) was then dominating by the so called Syndicate groups which was consisted by Shri K. Kamraj, Shri Nijalingappa, Shri S. K. Patil, Shri Sanjeeva Reddy, Shri Morarji Desai and Shri Atulya Ghosh. It was also fact that after the death of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Smt. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister according to the will of the leades of so called syndicate group. The leaders expected to her to be democratic and responsive to the public opinion. At the time of her first part of Prime Ministership in 1966-1967, Indira Gandhi generally with the consultation of the leaders would follow democratic approach in case of national problems which was something collective leadership would prevail. After the election of 1967, the same people did their best to re-elect her as Prime Minister and after that her attitude was changed and she started behaving as like as autocratic ruler.¹⁸⁹ The mental difference between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the So-called syndicate group leaders came into the forefront during the time of the nomination of the Congress candidate for Presidential election.

It was found that prior to the Parliamentary Board meeting on 13th July 1969 in Bangalore, some important members of the Congress Working Committee tried to discuss about the nomination of Presidential candidate with the Prime Minister but failed to know her mind clearly. On behalf of some senior leaders of so-called syndicate first of all proposed the name of Sri Jagjivan Ram, but hearing that proposal Sri Ram at once issued a negative statement from Nainital on the ground of his comparatively young age. After getting negative reply from Sri Ram then the leaders went for a threadbare discussion about that matter and lastly majority of the leaders considered the name of Shri Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy as most suitable candidate for the post of the President of India. Naturally, according to the earlier decision, on the last day of the Bangalore session of the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Board held on 13th July 1969, the name of Sri Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy was declared as the Congress candidate. But the strange was that, the Prime Minister all on a sudden proposed the name of Sri Jagjivan Ram for the nomination. The members of the Board meeting were become very much aback as because even some days ago in spite of repeated efforts of the senior leaders she never mentioned any name. However, at last the Parliamentary Board had to settle the issue following the precedence of any disagreement by a majority vote. It was shown that there were three votes went to Sri Ram i.e. Prime Minister's candidate while five votes in favour of Sri N. Sanjeeva Reddy. Therefore, as the majority members of the Parliamentary Board Meeting voted in favour of the then Lok Sabha Speaker, Shri Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, so despite the opposition of the Prime Minister he was declared as the official Congress nominee for the post of President of India. At the time of voting, the then Congress President S. Nijalingappa and Prime Minister's candidate Jagjivan Ram did not participate in the voting.¹⁹⁰

V.V. Giri Stands as a Candidate For Presidency

Another significant development took place that the Prime Minister herself signed the nomination paper of Shri Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy as proposer. But she had worked in the election against N. Sanjeeva Reddy.¹⁹¹ On the following day another dramatic development happened following the announcement of V.V. Giri, the Vice-President of India who was acting as President from Delhi regarding his decision to contest as an Independent candidate for the post of the President of India.

Shri Varahagiri Venkat Giri in a lengthy statement, said, “The Congress Parliamentary Board has failed to give a correct lead to the country especially at a time when they should have risen above partisan approach”.¹⁹² The date for the polling of Presidential election was fixed on 16th August 1969. In the meantime, on 13th July 1969 the Prime Minister declared that she would obey the decision of the Board and gave a clear indication that she would not be hesitated to fight those who attacked her policies and beliefs. On 6th August 1969, the Prime Minister again announced that she stood by the decision of the Parliamentary Board on the nomination of N. Sanjeeva Reddy. But in practice she did not do that. On 15th August, prior to one day of the Presidential election the Prime Minister all on a sudden took a new stand. The Prime Minister suddenly advocated the principle of conscience voting at the time of the Presidential election which caused the defeat of the Congress’s official candidate and the defection in the Party as well as bringing the spilit in the Indian National Congress.¹⁹³

Reaction in West Bengal after Giri’s Candidature

In West Bengal there was a mixed reaction following the announcement of V.V. Giri as his candidature for Presidential election after the announcement of the official candidate of the Congress Party. As the United Front came into the power in West Bengal after deposing the Congress, so within the division as well as disagreement among the top Congress leaders they found the ray of hope as because inspite of difference of opinion among the United Front partners they collectively would consider Congress party as their main enemy. The enmity between the Congress party and the United Front partners increased after the dismissal of the First United Front Government on 21st November 1967, by Governor Dharma Vira. So, in that context the United Front’s reaction in West Bengal as like as jubilation over Giri’s decision to contest the election. The Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee commenting on that issue remarked that the development showed cracks in the Congress. Pratap Chandra Chunder, the then President of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee remarked that Mr. Giri betrayed the Congress.¹⁹⁴

V.V. Giri Visits Calcutta

Vharahagiri Venkat Giri in the meantime informed Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal about his intention to address the U.F. Legislators for the purpose of his Presidential candidature. After consultation with his colleagues, the Chief Minister on his behalf extended an invitation to V.V. Giri to arrive in Calcutta for this purpose. The meeting in between Mr. Giri and the U.F. Legislators was arranged in the Assembly House towards the last week of July 1969. In that U.F. meeting Mr. Giri emphatically declared that he had not been a Congressman for years but was a trade unionist and believing in Gandhian principles.¹⁹⁵

Division in Congress Camp

Reaction in Bengal

When Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi instead of issuing a statement in support of the official Congress candidate whose nomination paper signed by the Prime Minister herself, sought 'conscience voting' then in Calcutta Jatin Chakrabarty, Chief Whip of the United Front Government along with Jyoti Basu issued a joint whips to their members against cross voting. They urged to all their 217 United Front members to cast their votes in favour of V. V. Giri. On the other hand, the Legislators of the Congress party met in Congress Bhavan at Chowragee Road under the leadership of Siddartha Sankar Ray to discuss the issue related to Presidential election. After long discussion a resolution was passed in the form that "the members of CLP desire to vote in accordance with their conscience and exercise their right of free vote in the Presidential election". This resolution also authorized S.S. Ray, the leader of the Congress Legislative party to communicate the decision to the Congress President. Among the 27 members, present 24 supported the resolution while rest of the three voted against it.¹⁹⁶

Dismissal of Morarji Desai From Finance Minister and Nationalisation of 14 Major Indian Banks

The month of July in 1969 would be remembered for the astonishing quick development that was coming one after the other. The headlines of the Press media in the country on 16th July were like that the Prime Minister relieved Morarji Desai from

the Finance Portfolio and that the latter resigned. Just after two days of the Parliamentary Board meeting in Bangalore on 13th July Sri Morarji Desai was relieved from the Finance portfolio on 15th July 1969 in a very unceremoniously without giving him any intimation and there was no sign of common courtesy which is generally shown as a matter of respect to Class IV employees of the Government, but that was not followed to a veteran Congress leader Morarjibhai who was associated with the administration since 1937.¹⁹⁷ However, the letter from the Prime Minister was sent to Morarji Desai at 12-45 p.m. and the letter of resignation from Desai was received at 3-30 p.m. The Prime Minister herself assumed the responsibility of the Finance Portfolio but did not accept the resignation letter. The crisis within the Congress party was fastly moving towards the climax and the political circle elucidated it as an act of reprisal for going against her desires in regard to Presidential nomination. The Prime Minister of India in a broadcast to the nation over the radio media announced the nationalization of 14 major Indian banks by an Ordinance on 19th July 1969.¹⁹⁸

The Day of Presidential Election, 16th August, 1969

At last the long awaited polling day for Presidential election came. It was 16th August 1969. The Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee came to Writers' Buildings first and instead of entering his office room he went straightly into the Hall and became the second man to cast his vote for the election of the country's President. Khuda Bux, an independent member of the Legislative Assembly who later joined Congress party and became an MP, was first cast his vote. Altogether out of 279 of the Legislators 274 members had cast their votes. The numbers of absentees were 5 among whom 2 from Congress and 3 from U.F. Prior to the election due to factional feud Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the one hand propounded the unique theory of freedom of conscience, on the other hand S. Nigalingappa, the then President of the AICC sent telegram to the Congress members addressing to them to cast their votes in favour of Reddy, the official Congress nominee and also mentioned in the telegram 'The question of voting according to conscience does not arise.'

Results

On 20th August 1969 the result of the Presidential election came out and Mr. V.V. Giri was declared winner in the epic battle which opened up a new era in the political history of the country. Apart from West Bengal the surprising results in favour of Giri came from the various States like- Utter Pradesh, Bihar, Hariyana and Orissa. The result of the election unambiguously proved that the majority of the Congress members exercised conscience vote.¹⁹⁹ The result of the election also helped Indira Gandhi to establish her authority over the Government as well as party mechinaries. It was as if the battle in between Indira Gandhi and the senior Congress leaders who were popularly known as 'Syndicate group'. Therefore it was victory of Indira Gandhi in Central politics and side by side the victory of the leaders of the United Front in the State of West Bengal, because they were tasting the victory due to the defeat of the so-called 'sundicate group' leaders.²⁰⁰

Congress Splits

On 1st November 1969 it was indicated from Press reports that the pro-Indira requisitionists were moving for summoning the AICC at a tremendous swiftness to oust S.Nijalingappa from the office of the President of AICC and install a new one belonging to Prime Minister's camp. The number of requisitionists of the pro-Indira group just crossed the border line and ultimately gained a marginal majority. The signed requisition was sent to Sadiq Ali, the then General Secretary of AICC immediately i.e. midnight at 2 a.m. The notable Congress leaders who belonged to the Prime Minister's camp were- Jagjivan Ram, Ram Subhag Singh, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Y.B. Chavan, C. Subramaniam, V.P. Naik, C.M. of Maharashtra- Mohanlal Sukhadia, C.M.of Rajasthan, S.S. Ray, K. Brahmananda Reddy, Shankar Dayal Sharma and Uma Shankar Dikshit. Incidentally Shankar Dayal Sharma was the General Secretary of the AICC. At the midnight meeting of the 1st November, 1969 the pro-Indira group took the decision in favour of boycotting the meeting of the Congress Working Committee which was scheduled to meet a day break and also decided for holding a separate meeting at Prime Minister's House on 2nd November 1969 at 9.30 a.m. This decision indicates that there was holding of two separate and parallel CWC meetings—the venue of the meeting of the Congress President at the AICC office while the camp of Mrs. Ghandhi's at her own residence. The timing of both the meeting was the same. After the completion of two parallel CWC meeting in

the capital in same day, a prominent English daily of Calcutta gave the news in the following manner:

“Congress splits down the middle,
Parallel AICCs parallel CWCs”.²⁰¹

The Division in Congress

It might be noted here that just after the Presidential election of India, when it was found that the split in the Congress party was inevitable, then utmost efforts were made to restrain the split. Not only that, it was also tried to bring about mutual understanding as well as rapprochement among the senior Congress leaders. But in that context, Shri Shripad Amrit Dange commenting over the development said, “Any understanding and rapprochement between the two sections of the Congressmen would be disastrous for the country.”²⁰² However, the Congress party was formally divided with the decision taken by the official CWC in Delhi on 12th November, 1969 to expel Mrs. Gandhi from the Congress. After a long debate which was lasting over three hours by the last minute peace movers and lastly 11 out of 21 members of the CWC unanimously approved the decision. After expelling Smt. Indira Gandhi, the CWC also directed the Congress Legislature party in Parliament to take necessary steps within the shortest possible time to elect a new Leader.

Next day i.e. on 13th November 1969, the strength of the party position as was revealed in a press note that pro-Indira supporters were 350 in number while on the other hand the numbers of Congress MPs were merely 70. On 13th November 1969, the Congress MPs those who were supporting Smt. Indira Gandhi met her in the usual venue in the Central Hall of the Parliament under her Presidency defying the cancellation notice issued as per the direction of Congress President, while the pro-Syndicate MPs met at the house of Morarji Desai. In the meeting of the Central Hall of the Parliament the Prime Minister received a big standing ovation and a resolution was passed undertaking the faith in the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. On 22nd November 1969, a special session of the requisitioned AICC was convened and began its deliberations under the Presidency of C. Subramaniam.²⁰³ Thus, after the split of

the Congress party was over CPI leader Mr. Dangey from Vijayawada “welcomed the spilit in the Congress”, and said, “It was a good sign towards a better future”.²⁰⁴

Impact in West Bengal

Within 3 days after convening the special session of AICC on 22nd November 1969, the new Congress leaders directed the WBPCCL leaders to replace the leadership of PCC. As the WBPCCL was still controlling by Atulya Ghosh and his group who was widely known to all as one of the most influential member of the so-called ‘syndicate group’ and considered as the anti-Indira group. Naturally in order to establish their authority it was said that PCC would be replaced by appointment of an Adhoc Committee. C. Subramaniam, the first President of Congress (R) in a letter suspended the members of the Executive Committee of the WBPCCL and handed over their functions to an Adhoc Committee. A three-man Adhoc committee was appointed consisting of K.K. Shukla, Pijush Kanti Mukherjee and Abdus Sattar.²⁰⁵

Congress and Bangla Congress’s intention to Form a New Non-Marxist Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee

On 14th January 1970, both Shankar Dayal Sharma and Sushil Dhara, General Secretary of the AICC, and Bangla Congress respectively hinted from Delhi about the possibility of the formation of the West Bengal Government excluding the Marxists. Shankar Dayal Sharma on behalf of the Congress party extended all possible support in the event of unstable political situation of West Bengal and the formation of a fresh non-Marxist Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee.²⁰⁶

Jyoti Basu-Indira Gandhi Meeting and Hope of the Survival of the U.F. Ministry

At that moment of the decline of the Communist Government in Kerala on 24th October 1969 and in the midst of the political turmoil in West Bengal Jyoti Basu and P. Sundarayya went to Delhi for saving the West Bengal Ministry. The Marxists gave their support to Indira Gandhi in Parliament during that crucial period for

survival of her Government. Both the leader convinced Indira Gandhi so that the Congress party would not intend to bring a change in the present form of the U.F. Government in West Bengal.²⁰⁷

Indication of Sharp Division in United Front

An incident which occurred in the Assembly of West Bengal on 21st January 1970, that ultimately led to the situation very worst. On that day Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee himself was manhandled in the corridor of the Assembly House by a group of outsiders, both male and female. As on 20th January the members of the managing committee of a school was gheraod and thereafter the frightened gheraod person directly sought help from Chief Minister and thereby as per the direction of the Chief Minister police rushed over there to rescue the victims. So, why Chief Minister sent police to the educational institution at the aim of dishonouring the teachers' that was the allegation of the angry agitators before manhandling the Chief Minister. Most significance was that even when Chief Minister was humiliating within the Assembly premises, the police remained almost silent.²⁰⁸ In that situation, the United Front meeting was held on 30th January 1970 in the CPI office at Bowbazar Street, Calcutta to restore unity among the front leaders. But at the conclusion of its midnight meeting there was a clear division among the partners of the front regarding the formation of Thana level committees. Bangla Congress, Forward Bloc, CPI, SSP, Bolshevik, Gorkha League parties were on the one side on the other hand the CPI (M), RSP, RCPI, Forward Bloc (M), Workers Party and LSS were on the other side.

On 5th February, 1970 in the House of the Legislative Assembly during the debate on Governor's speech, the MLAs of Bangla Congress and other Front partners criticized severely the U.F. Government for the dilapidation of law and order in the State. Home Minister Jyoti Basu and Land and Land Revenue Minister Hare Krishna Konar refuted all the allegation of the Front partners. But Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee said, "It is a fact that no Government can meet up all the problems of the whole people. But it is the prime duty of every civilized Government to provide security to the common people and maintain law and order, unfortunately the present Government is not able to meet that minimum necessities. I am the Chief Minister of

this 'barbarous and uncivilized' Government- but helpless audience only. This miserable situation can not continue."²⁰⁹

Reaction of the Congress Party

During the time of debate on Governor's speech, accusation and counter accusation among the United Front parties about the break-down of the law and order of the State going on in the assembly house, then in a comparatively milder tone Siddhartha Sankar Ray (Henceforth S.S. Ray), Opposition Leader of the House from Congress (R) in course of his speech straightly attacked the United Front Government over a wide range of subjects. S. S. Ray's main target of attack in the House was the CPI (M) and he addressed them as '80 gentlemen' (CPI-M had 80 MLAs during second U.F. Government) and narrated Governor's speech as factually and politically baseless. Both the leaders of the two factions of the Congress party i.e. Congress (R) and Congress (O) sat on the front row in the opposition benches. Congress party worked unitedly under the leadership of Siddhartha Sankar Ray. As a lawyer of eminence, S.S.Ray then played very significant role for strengthening the Congress party in West Bengal.²¹⁰

Resignation of Three Bangla Congress's Ministers

Whenever the inter-party clashes and blood-shedding continued in the State, then in order to stop that crime during the United Front Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee, the executive committee of the Bangla Congress in its meeting held on 12th February 1970 decided that coming 20th February three Ministers of Bangla Congress namely- Sushil Dhara, Charu Mihir Sarkar and Bhabotosh Soren would resign from the Cabinet. The other parties of the Front considered that move of the Bangla Congress as like as a kind of pressure so that the Front partners would refrain from the inter-party clashes and blood-shedding. But, Promode Das Gupta, State Secretary of CPI (M) lambasted the Bangla Congress and its leader Ajoy Mukherjee for resorting to the 'politics of blackmail'.²¹¹ However on 20th February, three Bangla Congress Ministers in a joint letter submitted their resignation accordingly on account of "distressing political situation owing to the intransigent attitude of the CPI (M)".

The Chief Minister deferred his decision for some days about the acceptance of resignations of his party ministers.²¹²

Bitterness deepened between the Bangla Congress and the CPI (M)

When the Bangla Congress and its leader as well as Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee was mentally prepared to stop the lawlessness of the State under any circumstances even if necessary he was grounding the work of ceasing Home Portfolio from CPI (M) or otherwise he would resign from the post of Chief Ministership instead of taking the responsibility of that ongoing mischievous activities. In that context, Ajoy Mukherjee's public gathering at Chatla, Calcutta on 14th February was attacked with the slogan – 'Ajoy Mukherjee Murdabad, Jyoti Basu Zindabad'. On 26th February inter-party clash broke out between CPI (M) and CPI in the colliary region. On 27th February another clash broke out between CPI (M) and RSP and thereby one person died. Not only that, the news of inter-party clash and blood-shedding continuously poured in the Writers' Building. In that situation, the very anguished Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee remarked that condition should not be continued for long time.²¹³ In the meantime, due to the death of Humayun Kabir, Bangla Congress M.P. from Basirhat, a by-election was held there on 3rd March 1970. In that election Bangla Congress candidate Sarder Amjad Ali had to compete against the candidate of Congress (R) and Progressive Muslim League. Though Sardar Amjad Ali was the front candidate, inspite of that CPI (M) leaders tried their best to defeat Bangla Congress candidate and directly or indirectly supported Progressive Muslim League. But inspite of the opposition of the CPI (M) Sardar Amjad Ali came out victorious.²¹⁴

In that unbearable situation the executive committee of Bangla Congress in an extended meeting held on 8th March 1970 took a very drastic decision which was as under: "This meeting requests our leader C.M. Sri Ajoy Kr. Mukherjee to accept the resignation of our three party ministers immediately and directs him to quit this Govt. on a date not later than the 16th of March."²¹⁵ Therefore, according to the decision of the executive committee of the Bangla Congress Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee accepted the resignation of the three Bangla Congress Ministers on 15th March, 1970 and sent it to the Governor for approval. The very next day i.e. on 16th

March Ajoy Mukherjee submitted his resignation letter from the office of the Chief Minister to the Governor S.S. Dhawan and thereafter Governor requests him to continue his work as Chief Minister until alternative arrangement was made. In that pretext, the CPI (M) moved to explore the possibilities of an alternative Government headed by Jyoti Basu without Bangla Congress. But in response to a query of Governor the CPI, Forward Bloc, SUCI, Revolutionary PSP, SSP, Balshevic Party, Gorkha League and RCPI pro-Anadi Das- these eight parties informed the Governor in writing that they would not support the CPI (M)'s attempt to form an alternative Government headed by Jyoti Basu.²¹⁶

B.ii. IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENTIAL RULE

Ajoy Mukherjee was discharging his duties as care taker Chief Minister after 16th March 1970 following the instruction of the Governor S.S. Dhawan. As the law and order situation of the State broke down and that was manifested through the inactiveness of the police personnel and bloody inter-party clashes. In that context, after the resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee on 16th March 1970 from the post of the Chief Ministership, the CPI (M) party called a State wide general strike on 17th March as a protest against the decision of the out going Chief Minister. The strike completely took the shape of violent move and thereby at least 24 persons were brutally killed on that day of strike. The notorious Saibari massacre broke out on that fateful 17th March 1970 in presence of police and higher Government officials like S.D.O, District Magistrate etc. In that event, resignation of Ajoy Mukherjee was accepted on 18th March and after receiving the report from the Governor, the Centre imposed Presidential Rule in West Bengal on 19th March 1970 on the ground of break down of Constitutional machineries.²¹⁷

Dissolution of the Assembly on 30th July, 1970

It is worthy of mention that after the imposition of Presidential Rule in West Bengal for second time (on 19th March 1970 – 2nd April 1971), the Legislative Assembly was not dissolve at once by the Governor S.S. Dhawan following the precedence of the imposition of Presidential Rule in West Bengal for first time (on

20th February 1968 – 25th February 1969). Governor Dhawan's argument behind the cherishing of the Assembly was that due to the break down of the constitutional machineries there were no any other best alternatives. Though, it was a speculation in the political circle that with the hope of the formation of an alternative Government headed by Ajoy Mukherjee with the support of Congress (R) which was popularly known as neo Congress or Indira Congress the Assembly was not dissolved.²¹⁸ But when all the possibilities of an alternative government were faded away then on 30th July, 1970 West Bengal Legislative Assembly was declared null and void.²¹⁹

Ajoy Mukherjee's Tour All Over West Bengal

During the time of Presidential Rule (19th March 1970 – 2nd April 1971) in West Bengal, as per the decision of the Bangla Congress on and from 4th April 1970 to 4th July 1970 Ajoy Mukherjee toured each and every districts town, sud-divisional town and important places throughout the West Bengal for explainings the reasons behind his resignation from the Chief Ministership of second United Front Government. Within that three months in total 66 public gathering were organized on behalf of Bangla Congress under the efficient leadership of Sushil Dhara, where Ajoy Mukherjee delivered his speech under the caption 'why this resignation' in a very lucid manner. There was a famous statement what Ajoy Mukherjee generally used i.e. 'Peoples are my Supreme Court'. So at the time of his speech to his Supreme Court, Ajoy Baby received huge response from the masses and his popularity in West Bengal politics as a symbol of true Gandhian and honesty reached its zenith. Haridas Mitra, former Deputy Speaker and Sarbadhinayaka of 'Shanti Fouj' of Bangla Congress, was sent to all the 66 public gathering. Others leaders of the various democratic parties like- Kashi Kanta Moitra, Sudhir Das, Bidyut Basu, Swarajbandhu Bhattacharya, Bhupal Basu, Arun Mitra etc.also delivered their speeches in that public gatherings, organized by Bangla Congress.²²⁰

Naxalite Violence in Calcutta

It is well known to all that the naxalite violence reached its extreme level in the year of 1970. On 24th February 1970 the prestigious Calcutta University campus

was attacked by 30 Naxalities and rampant bombs and stones were thrown towards the student union offices. The offices were ransacked and the furnitures of the offices were destroyed. On 3rd March 1970 as many as seven cinema halls were attacked by naxalites with bombs and fire were also set on one.²²¹ In the midst of the excessiveness of the naxalite violence, when most of the leaders of the neo-Congress were leaving Calcutta out of fear and panicky then under the Chairmanship of Sushil Dhara a non-political 'Citizen Protection Committee' was formed in order to remove the fear and anxiety from the mind of the common people. During that volatile atmosphere as many as 38 public meetings were organized by the 'Citizen Protection Committee' in the most naxalite influential areas. The meetings were held mainly in the regions of-Vijaygarh, Anwar Shah Road (Taliganj), Bagmari, Narkeldanga, Maniktala Crossing, Kalabagan, Satyanarayan Park, Ultadanga, Amharst Street, Deshpriya Park, Garpar, Bagbazar etc. The notable persons who delivered their speech in that meetings, were- Ajoy Mukherjee, Hemanta Kr. Basu, Pratap Chandra Chunder, Prafulla Chandra Sen, Bidyut Basu, Asoke Dasgupta, Swaraj Bhattacharya, Barada Mukut Moni, Bhupal Basu, Sukumar Das etc.²²²

Stand of the CPI (M) Party

At that point of time the CPI (M) party was the first political organization to come out political propaganda in favour of an election much earlier than any other parties. At the beginning of the imposition of the Presidential Rule (19th March, 1970) in West Bengal, the CPI (M) party was taking their preparation for mid-term poll.²²³

Stand of the Congress Party in West Bengal

It is obvious that centering the election of the President of India in 1969, the glorious institution like Indian National Congress broke into two wings. One part of the Congress led by the senior Congress leader i.e. so-called 'syndicate groups' came to be known as Organisation Congress as well as Congress (O) and another part of the Congress led by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came to be known as neo-Congress or Indira Congress as well as Congress (R). As a consequence of the division of All India Congress party, Atulya Ghosh, most dominating figure as well as top most

leader in the West Bengal Congress since independence and one of the most influential members of the so-called 'syndicate groups' went to self-exile from active politics. In that circumstances, Prafulla Chandra Sen, former Chief Minister of West Bengal took the leadership of the Congress (O). Those who joined with the Indira Congress, there was none among them suitable and acceptable to all in West Bengal politics. But an excellent understanding between Ajoy Mukherjee and Indira Gandhi already developed. Indira Gandhi wanted to bring back Ajoy Mukherjee in the leadership of West Bengal Congress politics in 1967 but failed due to the opposition of the Atulya- Kamraj groups. In that context, taking into account the popularity of Bangla Congress and image of Ajoy Mukherjee, Indira Gandhi wanted to come into an electoral alliance with Bangla Congress in the election of 1971. But on the question of seat adjustment and negative attitude of the Congress (R) leaders and their unilateral decision which led to the collapse of any hope of electoral understanding between Congress (R) and Bangla Congress in West Bengal.²²⁴

Date of Poll and Results

However, as per the earlier announcement of S.P. Sen Verma, Election Commissioner of India, the fifth general election along with Lok Sabha in West Bengal was held on 10th march 1971.²²⁵ In that election the Congress (R) announced the names of 202 candidates for Assembly and 29 for Lok Sabha constituencies. The Congress (O) also released the names of 199 candidates towards the end of January. The CPI (M) declared the names of 235 candidates out of 280 Assembly seats. Bangla Congress also filed the nomination in the 131 Assembly seats in that election. Apart from Tamlik constituency, Ajoy Mukherjee also contested against Jyoti Basy, symbol of violent politics, from Baranagar Assembly seats.²²⁶

On 14th March the result of the fifth general election in West Bengal came out and it changed many equations of the political parties. In the ultimate result, it was found that CPI (M) emerged as the single largest party securing 111 seats and the Congress (R) became the close second with 105 seats. The Bangla congress bagged only 5 seats while Congress (O) was able to capture only 2 seats and one of whom was Prafulla Chandra sen.²²⁷

Reaction in the Camp of the Congress (O)

After winning only two Assembly seats, the dispirited leaders of the Congress (O) met at the residence of Atulya Ghosh informally. The impact of the results of that election was so serious that once the key figure of the Congress politics in West Bengal Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen said in separate public statements, “The verdict of the people brought to an end all controversies and Congressmen should accept gracefully the decisions of the people—the organization led by Congress (R) is the Indian National Congress”.²²⁸ P.C. Sen’s statement was also echoed the same.

Stand of the Bangla Congress

In fact, the result of the fifth general election was a great blow to the existence of Bangla Congress. In spite of huge public sympathy and propaganda throughout the year and its stand against politics of violence as well as clear image of its two leaders Ajoy Mukherjee and Sushil Dhara to the minds of the people, the result was really astonishing. As per the analysis of the General Secretary of Bangla Congress i.e. Sushil Dhara that Pronob Mukherjee, Rajya Sabha M.P. of Bangla Congress²²⁹ and one of the secretaries of the party wanted to contest in a Parliamentary constituency from Birbhum District, but he was restrained for two reasons, such as i). his term as a Rajya Sabha M.P. still remained 4 years and ii). there was a suit of misappropriation of funds of Bidyanagar College against him.²³⁰ The main conspirator behind the disastrous results of Bangla Congress was Pronob Mukherjee and Haridas Mitra. As a son of Kamada Kinkar Mukherjee (i.e. Pranab Mukherjee) and husband of Smt. Bela, (i.e. wife of Haridas Mitra) niece of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose both Pronob Mukherjee and Haridas Mitra received all sympathy and cooperation from the top leaders of Bangla Congress particularly from Sushil Dhara. However, in the name of extended cooperation at the time of election to Sushil Dhara, Pranab Mukherjee started residing at Central Government Hostel (Nijam Palace). During that time Kalyan Roy, CPI (M) M.P., and Debi Prasad Chottopadhyay, Congress M.P. both of them were also staying there. In that triangular assemblage Pranab Mukherjee played his role along with Haridas Mitra very

efficiently on the condition that he would break the Bangla Congress from inside and would receive its reward in time.²³¹

Regarding Ministry formation Bangla Congress Karma Parishad in its meetings held on 19th March 1971 decided, “The Karma Parishad resolves unanimously to give its unconditional support to the Ministry to be formed at the instance of Congress (R) in West Bengal and not to take part in the Ministry as the people of West Bengal has not given due responsibility upon Bangla Congress this time inspite of its long standing service and sacrifice to save West Bengal from political ruination and the cult of violence and vandalism.”²³²

Formation of the ‘Democratic Coalition’ Front Government (2nd April, 1971-28th June,1971)

On 20th March 1971 Ajoy Mukherjee left for Delh to meet Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in a special plane sent by Jagjivan Ram, the then Defense Minister of India and President of Indian National Congress (R). In the meantime, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had a long discussion with Jagjivan Ram, and leaders from West Bengal like Siddhartha Sankar Ray, Bijoy Singh Nahar, the then President of Congress (R) in WBPC and Tarun Kanti Ghosh were also present the meeting. After threadbare discussion it was decided that a ‘Democratic Coalition’ Government would be formed in West Bengal headed by Shri Ajoy kumar Mukherjee. Ajoy Mukherjee also agreed provided Home portfolio had to be in his hand. Thereafter as per the proposal of the WBPC of Congress (R), dated 23rd March 1971, it was officially communicated to Ajoy Mukherjee to form a ‘Democratic Coalition’ Government excluding Marxist Communists on 24th March 1971.²³³ In that Changing circumstances, Bangla Congress Karma Parishad again met on 25th March 1971 and resolved-“The Karma parishad though decided not to join the Ministry in its last meeting dated 19.3.71, yet in view of such changed circumstances in the political atmosphere of the state resolves unanimously that Sri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee may like lead in forming a non-marxist democratic Govt. in West Bengal and this meeting also—1 (a) requests all the constituent parties, big or small, to participate in the proposed ministry from the very beginning; and (b) demands besides the Chief-

Ministership one more Cabinet Minister with important portfolios in the proposed Ministry.”²³⁴

However, in a meeting held on 26th March 1971 at the residence of Ajoy Mukherjee ‘Democratic Coalition’ was formed officially consisting of seven parties namely- Congress (R), Bangla Congress, Muslim League, Gorkha League, PSP (Official), PSP (Democratic) and SSP (revolutionary). On 29th March 1971 more two parties i.e. Congress (O) and Forward Bloc also joined with the coalition. CPI also promised its support to the coalition without participating in the Government. Ajoy Mukherjee was elected leader of the newly formed ‘Democratic Coalition’ and Abdus Sattar of Congress (R) became its convener. On 31st March 1971, the parties belonged to the ‘Democratic Coalition’ separately sent their consent letters to Governor informing their support in favour of Ajoy Mukherjee. Bijay Singh Nahar, President of WBPC of Congress (R) met the Governor along with the names of the list of 143 MLAs those who given in writing support to Ajoy Mukherjee led ‘Democratic Coalition’.²³⁵

The Swearing-in-Ceremony

It is important to note that when Jyoti Basu, leader of the single largest party (111) as well as United Left Front (ULF) leader could not present reasonable proof of his majority to Governor, then as per the communication of S.S. Dhawan, the then Governor of West Bengal, Ajoy Mukherjee, leader of the ‘Democratic Coalition’ placed before him ‘convincing proof’ of the majority’s support behind his Democratic Coalition Front. In that context, Governor S.S. Dhawan invited Ajoy Mukherjee to form his Ministry and thereby on 2nd April, 1971²³⁶ the ‘Democratic Coalition Front’ Ministry headed by Ajoy Mukherjee took its Oaths of Office at the traditional Throne Room of Raj Bhavan. There were 20 Cabinet and 5 State Ministers took their oath. Ajoy Mukherjee became Chief Minister along with Home portfolio and Bijoy Singh Nahar became the Deputy Chief Minister along with Finance portfolio. Thus with the oath taking of the ‘Democratic Front’ Ministry the one year 14 days long Presidential Rule over West Bengal was revoked. After taking oath, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee told to the reporters, “The first action of his Government will be to stop the fire of violence.” Reiterating the remarks of the Chief Minister, Bijay Singh

Nahar, Deputy Chief Minister said, “We are determined to stop the politics of murder.”

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Formation of Central Cabinet

Prior to the fifth general election a pro-Indira wind was blowing all over the country which was reflected in the election results of Lok Sabha. Capturing 350 seats Mrs. Gandhi's Congress (R) gained a two-third's majority in the Lok Sabha. On 18th March 1971, four days after the announcement of results, Mrs. Indira Gandhi formed her new Ministry comprising 36 Ministers among whom 13 Cabinet Ministers, 15 Ministers of State and 8 Deputy Ministers. Mohan Kumarmangalam (he formerly belonged to the CPI group), Siddhartha Shankar Ray, H.R. Gokhale, Raj Bahadur and Moinul Huq were the new comers among the Ministers. Mrs. Gandhi's Cabinet was however described by political commentators as “a balance between continuity and change”.²³⁸

Assembly Session

As per the decision of the Cabinet a session of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly was convened on 3rd May 1971 to elect the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly House. It was in fact the first trial of strength between Democratic Coalition Front and the Marxist-led Opposition. The Government however won in the first trial of strength when their nominee, Apurbalal Majumdar, a member of the Forward Bloc was elected Speaker and Pijush Kanti Mukherjee of Congress (R) was elected Deputy Speaker defeating the Opposition nominees. Apurbalal Majumdar was elected by 142 to 132 votes while Pijush Kanti Mukherjee was elected by 142 to 130 votes. After two days, when Governor S.S. Dhavan delivered his address then Opposition members staged walkout and accused the role of Governor as partisan manner both during Presidential Rule and after the elections.²³⁹

Overall Law and Order Situation in West Bengal

In the midst of politics of murder and violence during the second United Front Government, Hemanta Kumar Basu, universally respected and very popular Forward Bloc leader was brutally killed on 20th February in 1971. The ghastly murder of Hemanta Kumar Basu was followed by a series of murders - Jyotish Bose, Nepal Roy, MLA and Gopal Sen, vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University. In a reaction of these murders the people took law in their own hands and thereby began bloody clashes in different parts of the State that led to the loss of many lives. In that popular upsurge many innocent lives were also lost.²⁴⁰ But most astonishing events was that inspite of keeping Home Department in the hands of Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister of the Democratic Coalition Front Government, the politics of murders and violences were not stopped. On 18th May 1971 in the by-election of Shyumpukur Assembly seat of late Hemanta Kumar Basu, the Forward Bloc candidate Ajit Kumar Biswas was shot death.²⁴¹

Resolution Regarding the Bangladesh War

Inspite of taking all necessary steps to quell the disturbances, the Government of West Bengal was not able to bring the situation under control and thereupon politics of violence continued in its own way. In that grave circumstances when 'Liberation War Bangladesh' i.e. Muktiyuddha started and as a result of that lakhs of refugees migrating into West Bengal then as a border State West Bengal's importance as well as dealing huge numbers of influx and maintaining law and order situation strictly became prime concern to the Central Government. However, in the wake of Bangladesh war, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee himself mooted a proposal on 7th May 1971, regarding immediate recognition of Bangladesh Government by the Government of India.²⁴² It was needless to say that all the parties unanimously supported the proposal of Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee and promised to extend all possible help to Bangladesh and its liberators. In that critical juncture, to handle the huge refugee influx, Ajoy Mukherjee convened a meeting of the Chief Ministers of Bihar, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya in Assembly House on 8th May 1971 thereafter all the five Chief Ministers left for Delhi for a meeting with the Prime Minister and Central leaders to deal with the situation that emerged out of the Liberation War of Bngladesh.²⁴³

Background behind the Fall of the Democratic Front Government

It may be noted that 'Democratic Coalition Front' Government was tottering in terms of internal squabble both within the Bangla Congress and also Congress (R). The internal fray of Bangla Congress was so fatal that at last on 6th June 1971, Bangla Congress was divided into two parts. Ajoy Mukherjee and Pranab Mukherjee became the President and Secretary respectively of the one faction of the Bangla Congress whose office was 180 Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta. The other's faction of Bangla Congress office remained as it was i.e. no. 2 Basanta Bose Road, Kolkata. Purnendu Narayan Khan and Sushil Kumar Dhara became the President and General Secretary respectively of the other faction of Bangla Congress.²⁴⁴ Meanwhile results of three Assembly bye-elections showed that the Democratic Front won only one seat while the other two went to the Opposition parties which were a kind of alariness to the Government relating to majority in the Assembly. Moreover, factional squabble among the leadership of Congress (R) led to the uncertainties to the existence of the Government. A section of MLAs and executive members of Congress (R) openly challenged the leadership of Bijoy Singh Nahar and insisted for the implementation of the principle of 'one man one post' rule. Bijoy Singh Nahar was both Deputy Chief Minister and PCC (R) President. Not only that, raising the question of gradual deterioration of law and order in the State, the Youth Congress and Chhatra Parishad, two organs of the Congress (R) in a demonstration demanded the resignation of the Ministry within 72 hours following the murder of a Youth Congress leader, namely Narayan Kar at Beliaghata in the hands of the extremists.²⁴⁵

Under the circumstances, Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister himself was also not satisfied at all for the continuous deterioration of the law and order in the State. Therefore, he intended to tender his resignation from the post of Chief Ministership and his mood was communicated to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also. Apart from the internal political equation in West Bengal, due to the Muktiyuddha of Bangladesh, West Bengal became the prime concern to the Government of India. Beside this, in view of the possibility of a war between India and Pakistan, a strong and stable Government was felt necessary in West Bengal. So, there were no any other alternatives to Central Government excepting the imposition of Presidential Rule in West Bengal.²⁴⁶ On that pretext, taking the approval of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Chief Minister, Ajoy Mukherjee together with Bijoy Singh Nahar went

to Raj Bhavan on 25th June 1971 with a 3-page letter and advised the Governor to dissolve the Legislative Assembly under Article 174(2) (b) of the Constitution and subsequently on 28th June 1971 tendered resignation of his Council of Ministers.²⁴⁷ The Governor suggested him to carry on the activities of Chief Minister for a while on a caretaker basis. Later the Governor in a broadcast said, “The Government had not lost its majority and therefore had the right to seek a fresh mandate from the people.”²⁴⁸ Thus the third Cabinet headed by Ajoy Mukherjee ended only within 87 days.²⁴⁹

B.iii. IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENTIAL RULE AND APPOINTMENT OF S.S. RAY AS WEST BENGAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

As per the recommendation of the Governor of West Bengal, on 29th June 1971, President V.V. Giri issued a proclamation under Article 356 of the Constitution of India imposing Presidential Rule in the State.²⁵⁰ After its issue, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced in the Lok Sabha on 29th June 1971, regarding the creation of a new Cabinet post of a Minister without portfolio. The post was, however, assigned to Siddhartha Sankar Ray being designated as ‘West Bengal Affairs Minister’. The main responsibilities of S.S. Ray were to deal with the problems of West Bengal exclusively, specially the massive influx of refugees in view of Liberation War of Bangladesh. This was in addition to his running portfolio as an Education Minister of the Central Government.²⁵¹

Role of S.S. Ray as West Bengal Affairs Minister

After taking the responsibility of the new assignment i.e. the West Bengal Affairs Minister, S.S. Ray’s first action was to direct the military to deploy army in every Police Station in Birbhum district to bring back normal situation immediately there. In a press meet, explaining his role S.S. Ray expressed his view that he has been empowered as the sole representative of the Union Cabinet to exercise the Presidential power of ‘superintendence, control and direction. S.S. Ray devoted himself whole-heartedly in the field of eradication of ‘politics of murder’ from the State of West Bengal. In response to the invitation of S.S. Ray, representatives of all the political parties attended on 7th July 1971 in a conference of Assembly House for a

‘meaningful discussion on the present utter lawlessness and how to eradicate this senseless politics of murder’.

After a 3-hour long discussion under the chairmanship of S.S. Ray all those who had assembled there expressed their ‘grave concern at the present situation existing in West Bengal’. The matter of discussion of the meeting exclusively was about the present lawlessness and how to put an end ‘this senseless politics of murder’. Thereafter a long investigation and quires in an all party meeting held on 30th July 1971, in Calcutta and adopted a resolution unanimously condemning ‘murder and terror from whatever quarters’ to oppose and resist all murder and terror jointly. All the political parties including Jyoti Basu of CPI (M) put their signature to that resolution which might be considered as the biggest achievement of Siddhartha Sankar Ray, as West Bengal Affairs Minister.²⁵²

Notes and References

1. Pranab Mukherjee, *op.cit.*p. 54.
2. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 176-177.
3. Pranab Mukherjee, *op.cit.*p. 54.
4. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 200.
5. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp. 160-161.
6. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler Pala*, in *Barun Sengupt Rachana Sangraha* (in Bengali henceforth *Pala Badaler...*), Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 2008, p. 9.
7. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p. 162.
8. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 6.
9. Interview between Ashok Ghosh and Barun Sengupta on 18.05.1970, cited in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 6.
10. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 8-9.

11. Interview between Ashok Ghosh and Barun Sengupta on 18.05.1970, cited in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p 10.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 11.
14. *Ibid.*, p.12; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 158.
15. Atulya Ghosh, *Kasta...*, p.172; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 158.
16. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* p.154.
17. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 154.
18. Atulya Ghosh, *Kasta...*, p.172.
19. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 159-160; also see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp. 168-169.
20. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 15.
21. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 201-202.
22. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* p. 921.
23. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 205-206.
24. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* pp. 921-922.
25. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.12.
26. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p. 168.
27. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* pp.946, 950.
28. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 15.
29. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 205-206.
30. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 160-161; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 17.
31. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 205-206.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.
33. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 17.
34. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p. 200.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
36. Personal interview with Sukharanjan Sengupta, a veteran journalist of West Bengal, on 5th February, 2017.
37. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 212-214.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.18.
39. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 214-215).

40. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.18.
41. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.216.
42. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.163.
43. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 26th March 1967.
44. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.163.
45. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.20.
46. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.217-218.
47. Personal interview with Kumud Bhattachara, former President of West Bengal Chhatra Parishad from 1973-1977, on 4th February 2017.
48. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.21.
49. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 29th May, 1967.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.224.
53. *Ibid.*, pp.227-228.
54. *Naxalbari-50, Fire Dekha O Ajker Katha- Jangal Santal, Kanu sanyal, Ashim Chattopadhyay*(in Bengali), Unique Printers, 5 Abul Hamid Lane, Kolkata, 2016,p.4; also see Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.228, Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.164.
55. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.24.
56. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 28th May, 1967.
57. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.24.
58. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.230-231.
59. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.164.
60. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.234-235.
61. *Ibid.*, pp.234-237.
62. *Ibid.*, pp.238-239.
63. *Ibid.*, pp.239-241.
64. *Ibid.*, p.246.
65. *Ibid.*, p.224.
66. *Ibid.*, p.230.
67. *Ibid.*, pp.246-.247.
68. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.165.

69. Personal interview with Kumud Bhattachara, former President of West Bengal Chhatra Parishad from 1973-1977, on 4th February 2017.
70. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp.28-31; also see. & also Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp.165-166.
71. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, on 26th July 1967.
72. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp.30-31.
73. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.247.
74. Though, Barun Sengupta mentioned the date of interview was on 2nd August 1967, see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.33.
75. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.248-249.
76. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.33.
77. *Ibid.*, p.34.
78. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.250.
79. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 166.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 167; also see interview between Barun Sengupta and Ashok Sen on 8-6-70, cited in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.40.
81. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.257.
82. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.41
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
84. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.258.
85. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 25th September 1967. G.L. Nanda primarily decided that new Government would form on 1st October and meeting of the Congress Parliamentary party was also convened accordingly
86. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 45.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.
88. Interview between Sukumar Roy and Barun Sengupta, on 23-5-1970, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 46.

89. Interview between Ashok Ghosh and Barun Sengupta, on 18-5-1970, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 47.
90. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 169; also see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.*p.177.
91. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 170; also see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp. 178-179.
92. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 171; also see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p. 180; Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 52. Though, Saroj Chakrabarty in his ‘My Years With Chief Ministers’ mentioned that due to the Hemanta Basu’s influence over Ajoy Mukherjee ultimately led to the postponement of his resignation. Mr. Chakrabarty also mentioned that the credit for it, if any, must go to Hemanta Basu. See Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.261.
93. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.262.
94. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp. 180-181.
95. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 172; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 56.
96. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p. 172.
97. The first non-Congress Chief Minister of Bihar, Mahamaya Prasad Sinha had written to another non-Congress Chief Minister of West Bengal Ajoy Mukherjee towards the end of the month of March in 1967 about the necessities for developing an alternative leadership to Congress in the country. Simultaneously, almost all the non-Congress Chief Ministers throughout the country and dissident all India leaders were also approached to meet at Patna on 14th May 1967. The objective of that meeting was to tackle basic problems of India and formulating a common platform of the nationalist parties for posing a democratic challenge to the Congress Party. As the Communist parties were excluded from that meeting, so, the Communist leaders did not favour the move. Even some of the Communist Ministers of the State of West Bengal tried to persue Ajoy Mukherjee not to attend the Patna convention. But disregarding their advice Ajoy Mukherjee along with Dr. P.C. Ghosh, Humayun Kabir, Niharendu Dutta Majumdar and Kali Mukherjee had left for Patna to attend the convention. The new Chief Minister of Bihar

Mahamaya Prasad Sinha came forward with brisk steps to welcome his counterpart and other dignitaries. The Patna convention was a hundred per cent success so far as attendance of all India non-Congress leaders was concerned. From 12 States 90 delegates attended the convention and all the leaders were run-away men from the Congress. Besides Bengal leaders, Singh Deo of Orissa, Charan Singh of U.P. and Chief Ministers of Punjab, Hariyana and Madras were also presented the convention. Another notable invitee was Krishna Menon. Acharya Kripalini had come to the meeting as an observer. On the second day of that conference a new political party known as “Bharatiya Kranti Dal” (B.K.D.) was formed. The immediate objective of the B.K.D. was to ensure social justice by elimination of corruption and violence. It was also decided to provide honest and efficient administration side by side supply necessities of life and extend employment opportunities for all citizens. Mahamaya Prasad Sinha was unanimously elected Chairman of the party. After Independence it was the first major effort to form an all India party which was free from Communist and Congress influence. See Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.226-227.

98. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler* ..., p. 53.
99. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.255-256.
100. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler* ..., p. 54.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
102. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.172.
103. *Ibid.*, p.173.
104. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler* ..., pp. 60-61.
105. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.262-263.
106. *Ibid.*, pp.263-264.
107. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 12th November, 1967.
108. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler* ..., pp. 64-65.
109. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p. 416.

110. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 67.
111. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.265-267.
112. *Ibid.*, pp.267-268.
113. *Ibid.*, pp.269-270.
114. *Ibid.*, pp.270-271.
115. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 68.
116. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.272-273.
117. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 69. Mohan Kumarmangalam, a lawyer by profession and later on he joined as one of the cabine ministers under Smt. Indira Gandhi. He married Kalyani, daughter of Phanindra Kumar Mukherjee, second elder brother of Ajoy Mukherjee and Biswanath Mukherjee, and in that connection he was son-in-law of Ajoy and Biswanath Mukherjee.
118. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.1011.
119. *Ibid.*, pp. 1006-1010. On 28th March, 1945, Mr. Najimuddin's Government was defeated in the Legislative Assembly, when the agricultural budget was rejected by 106 – 97 votes. On 29th March 1945, the then Speaker Mr. Nausher Ali ruled inter alia that refusal by the House of 'Demand for Grand' made by the Ministry for a major department was a censure on the Government and that he could not allow the existing Ministry to function as such in the Legislature and adjourned the House sine die.
120. *Ibid.*, p.1011.
121. *Ibid.*, p.1012.
122. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.274-275.
123. *Ibid.*, pp.276; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*,p.70.
124. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.277.
125. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 72-73; also see Shree Radhakrishna Pari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.179.

126. *The Hindusthan Times*, 15th January, 1968.
127. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 73-74.
128. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.296-298.
129. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 75.
130. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 12th February, 1968.
131. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.299.
132. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 76.
133. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.300.
134. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 78.
135. *Ananda bazaar Patrika*, 16th February, 1968.
136. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.301.
137. It was a rumour that firstly- the West Bengal leaders were not willing in favour of resigning, but when they found that Delhi's leaders already decided regarding the resignation but, if they were not agree to resign then the Ministry would be dismissed, so they became agree. see Interview between Barun Sengupta and Atulya Ghosh and Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, on 6-6-1970; cited in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 79.
138. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.301.
139. *Ibid.*, pp.304-305.
140. *Ibid.*, pp.305-306.
141. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* p. 444.
142. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.308.
143. Atulya Ghosh, *Kasta...*, pp. 174-175.
144. Personal interview with Mihir Ganguly, a veteran journalist of West Bengal on 23rd February, 2017 at Konnagarh, Hooghly, West Bengal.

145. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.186.
146. Barun Sengupta's interview with Promode Das Gupta on 16.7. 1970, cited in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 97.
147. Barun Sengupta's interview with Harekrishna Konar on 25.7.1970, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 97.
148. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.
149. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.308-309.
150. *Ibid.*, p.309.
151. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 26th February, 1969.
152. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.310.
153. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 4th March, 1969. In that context, Promode Dasgupta further remarked, "If I were the Home Minister of West Bengal, then I would arrest Y.B.Chavan, chief patron of Dharma Vira as and when he would land in Calcutta under the P.D. Act as an anti-social person. See Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp.104-105.
154. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 105; also see Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.312.
155. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.189.
156. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 109-110.
157. Though, till date many people believed, that committee could not able to discover the fact. See *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.
158. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
159. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 28th March, 1969.
160. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.190.
161. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.319.

162. Accusation of the State Committee of RSP. See *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 19th May, 1969.
163. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 118.
164. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.191.
165. The date of the visit has been mentioned as 1st May, 1969. See Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.191. But, it is mentioned as 24th May in Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 118, but Sushil Dhara did not mention the exact date instead he mentioned the month of May, see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p.191.
166. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p.193.
167. *Ibid.*, p.193.
168. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.326.
169. *Ibid.*, p.328.
170. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p. 121.
171. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp.329-331.
172. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.121; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.193.
173. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 8th September, 1969.
174. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.194; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.126.
175. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 8th October, 1969.
176. *Ibid.*
177. *Ibid.*
178. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp. 128-129.
179. *Ibid.*
180. *Ibid.*

181. *Ibid.*
182. *Ibid.*
183. *Ibid.*
184. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .342.
185. For details see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp.198-200.
186. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .344.
187. *Ibid.*, p .345.
188. *Ibid.*, p .320.
189. Atulya Ghosh, *The Spilit – Indian National Congress* (henceforth ... *Spilit*), Ananda Publishers Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980, p.iv).
190. *Ibid.*, pp.18-19; also see Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp .326-327.
191. Atulya Ghosh, ... *Spilit*, p. 45; also see Atulya Ghosh, *Kasta...*, pp. 132-133.
192. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .327.
193. Atulya Ghosh, ... *Spilit*, p. 54.
194. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .327.
195. *Ibid.*, p .333.
196. *Ibid.*, p .334.
197. Atulya Ghosh, ... *Spilit*, p.20.
198. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .328.
199. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp .334-335.
200. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler*, p.120.
201. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp .341-342.
202. Atulya Ghosh, ... *Spilit*, p.14.
203. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, pp. 342-343.

204. *Mail of Madras*, 2nd February, 1970. Also see Atulya Ghosh, ... *Spilit*, p.14.
205. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.343. Congress (R) stands for requisitioned group i.e. Indira Group.
206. *Ibid.*, p .347.
207. *Ibid.*, pp .347-348.
208. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.204.
209. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .349; also see *Ibid.*, p. 205.
210. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .349.
211. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 14th February, 1970.
212. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .350.
213. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 29th February, 1970.
214. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p. 197; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.207; Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.159.
215. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* p. 202.
216. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .351; also see Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, pp.164-165.
217. Barun Sengupta, *Pala Badaler ...*, p.165; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.214.
218. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 12th April, 1970; also see Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.216.
219. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.887.
220. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.*p.205.
221. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .350.
222. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.* pp. 207-208.

223. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .359.
224. Shree Radhakrishna Pari, (ed.), *op.cit.* p.220.
225. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.884.
226. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op.cit.*p. 212.
227. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.882.
228. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .360.
229. Pranab Mukherjee became the Rajya Sabha Member for the first time from Bangla Congress on and from 10.07.1969 -09-07-1975; then from Indian National Congress on 10.07.1975 to 09.07.1981; 14.08.1981 to 13.08.1987; then 19.08.1993 to 08.08.1999; and again 19.08.1999 to 13.05.2004. See Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.* p. 303.
230. “This case was lodged by Sri S. C. Roy, Chief Inspector, Secondary Education Govt. of West Bengal & the case no is 4466 Det. 1969 u/s 406 & 120 (b)” . See Shantimaya Mukherjee, *Why Bangla Congress Spilit*, p, i. cited in Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op. cit.*p. 213.
231. Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op. cit.* p. 218.
232. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
233. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 25th March 1971.
234. See, Shantimaya Mukherjee, *Why Bangla Congress Spilit*, p-13.Cited in Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op. cit.* p. 221.
235. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*pp.229-230.
236. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.925.
237. Shree Radhakrishna Pari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.230.
238. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.361.
239. *Ibid.*, p.379-380.
240. *Ibid.*, pp.370-371.

241. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.*p.243.
242. *ibid.*, p.238. In the name of Mujib-Iahia meeting, in order to stop the voice of Bangladeshi intellectuals modern arms and armies were sent to East Pakistan by the Pakistani Government and before leaving Dhaka according to the direction of the Iahia Khan, Military Administrator of Pakistan, the Pakistani soldiers started mass killing on Bangladeshi citizens on and from at night of 25th March, 1971. Thereafter, at the aim of gaining independence there was emerged an 'Independent, Sovereign and Republican Bangladesh' on 17th April 1971. Sekh Mujibur Rahaman, Awami League leader, popularly known as 'Bangabandhu' was declared as President and Tajuddin Ahmmed as Prime Minister.
243. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.380.
244. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 252-253.
245. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .387; also see Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op. cit.* p.224.
246. Shree Radhakrishna Bari, (ed.), *op.cit.* pp. 245-246.
247. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.887.
248. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p .388.
249. There was a speculation in the political circle that after becoming uncertain about the support of the 3 MLAs of Bangla Congress namely- Sushil Dhara, Bankim Maity and Baneswar Patra to the Democratic Front Government led by Ajoy Mukherjee, the Ministry was likely to be dissolved. But, the fact was that Ajoy Mukherjee had to resign following the demands of the Youth Congress and the typed letter on which Ajoy Babu had to sign which was brought from Delhi. See Sushil Kumar Dhara, *op. cit.*p.224.
250. Dilip Banerjee, *op.cit.*p.887.
251. Saroj Chakrabarty, ... *Chief Ministers*, p.388.
252. *Ibid.*, pp.388-390.