On the 3rd of December 1903, was circulated the partition proposal of the Government of India under the signature of Sir Herbert Risley, the acting Secretary to the Home Department. This important resolution contained provisions, affecting administrative changes, of very deep and far-reaching significance. The original proposal schemed to sever the Chittagong Division and the two districts of Dacca and Mymensingh (not the entire division of Dacca) from Bengal and amalgamate them with Assam into a re-constituted administrative unit under a Chief Commissioner.

What the leaders of the Congress thought about the measure was that instead of creating a separate Lieutenant Governorship in Eastern Bengal, the administrative efficiency could be better secured by establishing a Presidency Government in Bengal with an executive council.

The demand for a governorship for Bengal instead of existing Lt. Governorship was not merely a Congress political cry brought into existence by Bengalee agitators, but originated since the time of the charter Act of 1833.

1. Town Hall protest meeting - August 7th, 1905. (case against break-up of Bengal by Prithis Roy)
2. The Indian Review 1908.
The intention of the provision of the charter Act of 1833 was, wrote Sir Courtney Ilbert, on his work on the Government of India, that each of the four Presidencies, Fort William, Fort St. George, Bombay and Agra should have for executive purposes, a Governor and Council of its own.  

But as the Governor-General of India and his Council, at that time, exercised the functions of the Governor and Council of Fort William, no immediate necessity was felt to give immediate effect to the provision of the charter Act of 1833, above alluded to. This provision, however, came to be suspended by a contradictory provision of the Act of 1835 (5 & 6 Will IV c. 52) and thereby the project of establishing an executive Council for the Bengal and North-Western Provinces was abandoned. When the last of the Charter Acts was passed in 1853, during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Dalhousie, the whole question of readjustment of Bengal administration was again taken up, but did not yield any practical response.

In the intervening period, in flagrant disregard to the above promises, there arose a general opinion in official quarters, that Bengal was too large a charge for a

1. The History of the Indian National Congress
By P.B. Sitaramayya.
singular ruler, and that the partition of the province was necessary in the interests of administrative efficiency. It was in pursuance of this policy that the province of Assam was separated from Bengal in 1874 under a Chief Commissioner. In this province, thus separated, were three Bengalee speaking districts viz., Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara. The act of separation was prejudicial to the interests of Bengalees, but public opinion was not then much of a power and the solidarity of the Bengalee-speaking people and their growing sense of unity had not become so pronounced a factor in the public life of the province, so the act did not excite much criticism at that time.

The idea of a further expansion of the scheme of partition was nurtured in the bureaucratic circle. The proposal was made that the Chittagong Division, comprising the districts of Chittagong, Noakhali and Tipperah should be withdrawn from Bengal and added to the province of Assam.

The proposal met with a strong protest from the people of the Chittagong division, fully supported and sympathised with the growing public opinion of Bengal, finding expression through the reformed Legislative Council. For the

time being, the proposal was set aside. But with Lord Curzon, as Governor General, the same partition question was reinforced upon and to make it worse, its orbit was further expanded.

The proposal now assumed the form of the separation from Bengal of the whole of the Chittagong division, to which the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh were to be added, and this area to be incorporated into Assam. 1

Mr. J. Herbert Roberts publicly presented a petition to the Parliament in England on behalf of Bengal, for the withdrawal of the India Government's orders for the partition of the province, as carried against public opinion.

J. Herbert Roberts moved the House to arrive at a definite conclusion of the matter of so urgent public importance, and placed before the members of the House the following memorandum:

"The Resolution of the Government of India with reference to the partition of Bengal, and this decision published in the Parliamentary papers and delivered to members this morning, had created a serious situation in Bengal." 2

2. A debate in Parliament on the partition of Bengal. (Published by the anti-partition agitation Committee Bengal).
The discussion in the House of Parliament on this vital question, affecting the interests of a population of 75,000,000 was mainly to estimate the extent of Government's responsibility in the matter and the people's reaction to it.

To deal the matter from the Government's side, a conference was held in 1891, to officially consider the question of re-adjustment of provincial boundaries, but the scheme was not carried, any further at that time, and was eventually dropped. In 1896 Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, prepared a scheme of provincial readjustment contrary to the demands of the Indian people, which in the following year was submitted to Sir Henry Cotton, the friend of India, for his approval. But Cotton set it aside with the comment that the partition scheme was inadvisable and impracticable. Sir Henry Cotton presided at a huge anti-partition demonstration held at the Calcutta Town Hall and then went to Assam for further enquiries on the matter.

After a lull period of few years the letter of Mr. Risley of December 1903 containing the order of the Government of India, bearing Lord Curzon's final scheme of partition resolution, signalled a storm.

The House of Parliament, upon news of the public unrest,

1. Case against the break-up of Bengal, By Prithip Ch. Roy
2. Indian National Evolution, By A. C. Majumder, p.91
strONGLY resented the half-hearted dealing of the partition affair by the Home Government. On June 5, the Secretary of State, admitted that in the debate of the Indian affairs no reference, whatsoever, was made to this very important question of partition. 1

Mr. J.H. Roberts, in the parliamentary debate on the subject of partition, made enquiries about the exact steps taken by the India Government regarding the partition project. Failing to trace any connecting events, he demanded the House to ask for parliamentary papers containing the despatch of the Secretary of State to the Government of India. 2 The papers revealed to the House of not having received all the informations which the gravity of the subject rendered indispensable. Even papers like 'The Statesman' commented critically upon this measure taken up by the Government and emphasised the inadequacy and inconsistency of the proceedings. It asked in a form of a question in the Editorial Column: "Why both the Government of India, and the Home Government after agreeing that postponement was out of the question, should have kept back the papers on the partition until the eve of the administrative change?" 3

1. Case against break-up of Bengal, by Prithia Ch. Roy.
2. Ibid.
3. The Statesman, October 21, 1905.
Mr. Brodrick's despatch from England revealed clearly the helpless position of the Home Government regarding the matter. It made public the shocking truth that the Government of India had kept the Home Government absolutely ignorant about people's demands, and in spite of Home Government's repeated demands for the parliamentary discussion of the partition scheme, the matter was not mentioned in the Government of India's despatch to the secretary of state.

"Had the papers been allowed to be published immediately after Mr. Brodrick's pledge," wrote The Statesman, "the partition proclamation on September 1st, would not have been issued, and the demand for the postponement until after the reassembling of Parliament, would have been acceded to."

The publication of Kiseley's letter caused widespread consternation which was still further aggravated by the final order of break-up of Bengal on July 1905.

The new administrative scheme involved the formation of a new province consisting of East and North Bengal and Assam, with an area of 106,000 sq. miles and a population of 31,000,000. It was to be ruled by a Lieutenant Governor, with a Legislative Council and the Board of Revenue.

1. The Statesman, October 21, 1905
2. A Nation in making By S.N. Banerjee
Leaving apart the question of administrative merits or demerits of the scheme, the proposal as deeply resented by the whole of the population. The people were convinced that a grave error was being committed, and that the scheme had been carried through its various stages without consultation with the popular bodies representing their views. There was strong resentment among all sections of the Community.

The order of the partition, enforced by Lord Curzon was conceived in secret, discussed in secret and settled in secret.

"The final order", said Lord Morley, in the parliament, "was never submitted to the judgment of any body in Bengal".

"Indeed", writes Surendranath Banerjee, "so complete was the lull after Lord Curzon's visit to East Bengal and before the storm actually burst, that the idea gained ground that the project of a partition had been abandoned. Had we the faintest idea of what had been secretly decided, a deputation would have gone to England along with the despatch, with a view to procuring the annulment of its recommendations".  

1. A Nation in making, By S.N. Banerjee.
At the session of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in December 1904, a resolution was unanimously adopted on the anti-partition proposal.

A deputation waited upon Lord Curzon, under Sir Henry Cotton, the twentieth President of Indian National Congress. The resolution adopted by this Congress recorded its emphatic protest against the partition proposals of the Government of India. It would be disastrous for solidarity of Bengal as the division of the Bengalee nation into separate units, would seriously interfere with its social, intellectual and other rights and privileges which the province had so long enjoyed and would burden the country with heavy expenditure which the Indian tax payers could not at all afford.

The same resolution held the opinion: "If the present constitution of the Bengal Government is considered inadequate for the efficient administration of the province, the remedy lies not in any re-distribution of its territories, but in organic changes in the form of the Government, such as the conversion of the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal into a Governorship with an Executive Council like that of Bombay and Madras."

The rejection by Lord Curzon of the deputation and the announcement on July 20, 1905 of Bengal partition instigated a nationwide conflagration.

From December 1903 to October 1905, over 2,000 public meetings of protest were held in the two parts of Bengal, attended by about 500,000 people.

Memorials and letters of protest flooded the Secretary of State's office. Memorials, signed by no less than 60,000 inhabitants of Bengal, appealed to the Government to suspend the operation of the order, so very detrimental to the people's interest. Telegrams were sent to the Indian Parliamentary Committee to introduce Sir Henry Cotton's new scheme of partition.

Sir Henry Cotton's new scheme suggested an alternative plan of making Behar and Chotanagpur into a separate Lieutenant Governorship and leaving Bengal as it now was.

But all pleadings went in vain. Curzon's drastic measure was set in force which led to popular uproar.

2. A Nation in making, By S.N.Banerjee.
An open letter to Lord Curzon from the citizens of Calcutta stated elaborately the reasons for public tumult.

The Bengalees resented the idea that a part of Bengal with its rich historical associations, was to be handed over to the backward and inefficient administration of Assam, where officials will prevailed at law. Moreover, they surmised that the rich districts of Eastern Bengal would have to pay for the impoverished administration of Assam. 1

The main grounds of objections raised against the partition scheme were the following : 2

Firstly the effect of partition was apprehended to help the destruction of the collective power of the Bengalees people and the influence they were exercising in the growing national feelings.

Secondly, the people very much disliked the change which was to bring about an over throw of the political ascendancy of the metropolis Calcutta, which was the life centre of commerce, trade, education and growing nationalism.

2. Indian National Evolution, By A.J. Majumder.
Thirdly, the people suspected, that the partition was going to fasten in Eastern Bengal the growth of Mohomedan power to keep in check the rapidly growing strength and solidarity of the educated/community.

After close observation of the whole situation, Surendranath Banerjee, forewarn the countrymen "if the scheme is allowed to be passed it would be fatal to our political progress and to that close union between Hindus and Mohomedans upon which the prospects of Indian advancement so largely depended". 1

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1: A Nation in making, By S.N.Banerjee.