In discussing legislative performance during 1943-45, the presentation of the budgets and debates around them deserve special attention. The deliberations that centred around the budgets touched on some of the major administrative and developmental issues of the day. The Budget of the Government of Bengal for the year 1943-44 had to face unprecedented situation. It was placed in the House three times in a year. The first Budget was placed by the Chief Minister, A.K. Fazlul Huq, who assumed the portfolio of 'Finance' following the resignation of S.P. Mookerjee. The Budget was placed on February 16, 1943.

While the Budget discussions were going on in the Assembly, unprecedented political situations dominated the political scene of Bengal. On March 28, 1943, the Chief Minister, A.K. Fazlul Huq, was asked by the Governor to form a new Ministry on his dictated terms. Fazlul Huq could not oblige and consequently he had to resign forthwith. When the matter was raised in the Assembly, Nalinakshya Sanyal of the Congress said that in view of the Chief Minister's resignation, the House should not proceed with the Budget discussions and amidst the cries of 'Hear Hear' from the Coalition benches he said that the House could not transact any business unless the Chief Minister moved a vote of confidence. The Speaker, Nausher Ali, in his ruling said that in view of the Premier's statement that his resignation had been accepted, the responsibility of the Ministry had ceased to exist. 'Consequently, no business of the House whatsoever can be transacted unless a new
Ministry is formed'.

In this connection, it may be worth while to mention that Fazlul Huq contradicted the Gazette Notification published in this connection through a Press statement. His Press statement was this: 'I am surprised by the Gazette Notification published regarding our resignations, that my resignation has been accepted with effect from 29th March. This is contrary to facts.

My resignation was accepted on the night of the 28th and this was communicated to me at 10.15 P.M. that very night. On the morning of the 29th, I made a statement in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in answer to a question put to me that I had resigned on the previous night and that I was no longer a Minister. Upon this the Speaker ruled that the whole Ministry was functus officio and therefore, the Budget motions could not be moved.

I am making this statement in order to make it clear that when resignations were accepted there was one day remaining, namely, the 29th, when Ministry could have moved the Budget demands and the whole Budget would have been normally passed without any recourse to Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935'.

The Budget of Fazlul Huq disclosed a deficit on revenue account of one crore and 53 lakhs of rupees. According to him, the Government had decided to raise additional revenue during the coming year by enhancing the rates of some of the existing duties. The estimated yield of enhanced taxation would be around 33 lakhs.

2 Amrita Bazar Patrika, April 3, 1943.
3 BIA P. vol. LXIV, No. 1, p. 123.
The enhanced items were Entertainment Tax, Totalisator Tax, Betting Tax and Electricity Duty. From his speech, it had been revealed that there was a decline of 'Court fees' and consequent reduction of Civil litigation and the decline of revenue under 'Non-Judicial Stamps' was due to the 'unsettled condition of trade'. The drop in the 'Electricity Duty was due to 'rigid enforcement of lighting restrictions'. There were several grants for 'Extraordinary Changes' that include 'Civil Supplies, Home Guard Police and consequent decrease of 44 lakhs in Civil Works, 10 lakhs under Education and 10 lakhs under Public Health'.

I.D. Jalan initiating the debate, criticised the Budget for it 'reflects want of a co-ordinated policy'. To him, that might be due to the fact that the 'Finance Minister is overburdened with too many portfolios'. Maulvi Jalaluddin Ahmed and many others regretted that 'Nation Building' departments had been starving. To him, 'with regard to "Irrigation", the less said the better'. Tamizuddin Khan criticised the Budget for the neglect of welfare departments. To him, 'The Secondary Education Scheme has been effectively shelved'. N. Sanyal in his speech said: 'Those who belong to Official Congress expect little either from this or from any other Government'. A powerful support to the Government came from Syed Badruddoza. In a scathing criticism of the Government, H.S. Suhrwardy wanted that this Ministry should be replaced by a 'National Ministry'. He wanted to know the

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid, p. 265.
7 Ibid, p. 271.
8 Ibid, p. 303.
9 Ibid, p. 381.
10 Ibid, p. 403.
attitude of the Government as regards the 'Congress Campaign' against 'His Majesty's Government'. Fazlul Huq in his candid reply to the general discussion of the Budget sought to explain that since the middle of 1941, the government 'had to divert lakhs of rupees from Nation Building to Civil Defence'.

The Hindusthan Standard, a Pro-Bose Group daily in its editorial congratulated Fazlul Huq 'on the clear and business-like language in which the Budget has been presented ... It is a good thing that for this kind of Budget, Mr. Huq who is a People's man has refused to subject Bengal to heavy taxation'.

Till 29 March, 1943, when the Budget discussions were going on, 18 of the 34 grants were voted by the House. The new Ministry with Khwaja Nazimuddin as Chief Minister and T.C. Goswami as Finance Minister presumably sought to pass remaining grants when the Assembly met on July 5. On July 6, S.P. Mookerjee of the Opposition raised a point of order and claimed that according to the Government of India Act, 1935, a revised financial statement in respect of all grants for the entire year must be placed. The Speaker, Nausher Ali, admitted that the situation was unprecedented. But he upheld the point of order raised by S.P. Mookerjee. In course of his ruling he said, 'The motions as they stand without the slightest indication as to the amount of expenditure incurred during the period between April 1 and April 24, 1943 are, I am afraid, inadmissible and not in order.

13 Hindusthan Standard, February 17, 1943.
'I think, therefore, that I have got no other alternative but to uphold the Point of Order raised and I rule that motion for demands for grants are out of order'.

For the third time, in the same year, the Budget estimates had been placed in the Assembly on September 14, 1943. The estimates provided for a revenue of Rs. 18,55,00,000 (as against the actual receipts of Rs. 16,50,00,000 in 1942-43) and expenditure on revenue account of Rs. 25,80,00,000 as against the actual expenditure of Rs. 15,73,00,000 leaving a deficit of Rs. 7,36,00,000 on the revenue account. The Budget provided for Rs. 50,00,000 for subsidised food, Rs. 3,52,00,000 for Famine Relief, Rs. 66,00,000 for 'Grow More Food' campaign.

In course of his speech, the Finance Minister, T.C. Goswami, said, 'Bengal once so richly dowered with nature's bounties, is today bent double with woe and agony and is a suppliant for neighbourly charity. In the situation in which we find ourselves, there is no choice left to the Government but to undertake in the very largest measure, the task of relieving distress, regardless of cost'. He also mentioned that Inflation was 'set in motion by war conditions' and the evil of 'black market' was inevitable.

While initiating the general discussion on the Budget, P. Banerjee said, 'the Hon'ble Minister has put so many items in the Budget that it appears that he as well as everybody else is living in an atmosphere of unreality'.

17 Ibid, p. 212.
Sasanka Sanyal said, 'the body Politic of this province is totally afflicted today by two clear cut maladies. One is a food situation. I won't call it a problem because it is no longer a problem. It is a situation deepening and darkening hour after hour. And the other question is of Political Prisoners, particularly the Security Prisoners'.

The discussion on the Budget was concluded on September 25, 1943 and the demands were passed without any cut. Abu Hossain Sarkar's motion on the failure of the Government in fixing the price of the Jute and Rai Harendra Nath Chaudhury's motion on 'No Relief to Teachers of Secondary Schools' were put to vote and lost. Most of the other demands were guillotined and passed. The Press in general gave wide publicity to the discussions on the Demands under the Heads 'Agriculture' and 'Education'.

Although the Budget session for the year 1944-45 began on February 1, the Budget estimate was placed much later. It was placed on March 18. It showed a deficit of Rs. 846 lakhs. The estimated Revenue was Rs. 2,197 lakhs as against Rs. 2,134 lakhs of the previous year. The estimated expenditure would be Rs. 3,043 lakhs against previous year's Rs. 3,254 lakhs. Reporting on the Budget, the Indian Annual Register stated, 'the year 1944-45 will close with a negative balance of Rs. 1,065 lakhs. Explaining why the closing was shown "unashamedly as a minus one" and he (Finance Minister) had adopted the unprecedented course of presenting a budget in which no steps had been taken to make good the expected depletion of their balance, the Finance Minister, Mr. T.C. Goswami, said that in November last, the Government of Bengal addressed the

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18 BLAP, vol. LXVI, No. 1, p. 216.
Government of India and asked for a subvention. So far no reply had been received ....' The Finance Minister's speech was critical of Government of India's attitude towards the financial needs of Bengal though he was optimistic about Central help as he said, 'The financial settlement that governs the allocation of revenue between the Centre and the Provinces was designed for normal times and in the circumstances of today it would be as inequitable as it would be impracticable to suggest that Bengal must work out its own salvation within the limits of Niemeyer Award'. But he also hinted that the Government of Bengal might go for further taxation at the end of the year. It was revealed from his speech that estimated expenditure under the three heads, 'Extraordinary Charges in India', 'Famine' and 'Agriculture' covered the total amount of the expenditure of 1940-41 and half of the total expenditure of the ensuing year's Budget.

But the provision of Famine Relief expenditure was much low. As he said, against Rs. 5 crores 65 lakhs in 1943-44, estimate of Famine Relief expenditure in 1944-45 stood at Rs. 2 crores 61 lakhs. In the item under 'Jail', while it was Rs. 53 lakhs (actual expenditure) in the year 1942-43, it rose to Rs. 1 crore 36 lakhs in 1943-44. But this Budget estimate for 1944-45 was Rs. 1 crore 11 lakhs 'on the assumption that the prices of food stuff will be lower'.

Initiating the general discussion on the Budget, P.N. Banerjee asked 'Is it a nation-strangulating Budget or is it a nation-killing Budget ?' He pointed out that there was 'net uncovered indebtedness, that is to say, one minus two, is Rs. 19,70,75,000'.

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19 Indian Annual Register, 1944, vol. 1, pp. 176-177.
22 Ibid, p. 28.
23 Ibid, p. 56.
Giasuddin Ahmed of the Proja Party urged for an all party Government to solve the vast problems of the Province which the Government had not the courage to meet. Ashutosh Mullik in his Bengali speech said, 'on one side of the Bengal Government there is the ferocious tiger, Central Government and on the other there is the hungry British lion and the Budget is like a terrified and perplexed lamb between the two'.

The Anglo-Indian Member, Griffiths, was not happy with the running of the administration and wanted that there should be a Government led by a 'non-communal leader' who should be 'first selected by the House and then supported by the Governor'.

Nalinakshya Sanyal said, 'The two legs that the Government claim to be standing upon, the legs on which Government's plan rests with a view to prevent recurrence of famine, are stated to be their food grains procurement and distribution policy and their 'Grow More Food' campaign. The one leg is lame and the other is paralytic'.

Syed Badruddoza and Shamsuddin Ahmed made very forceful speeches while opposing the Budget. On the other hand, very powerful support came from the European members, Gladding and Hendry. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee criticised the Europeans for their support to 'corrupt', 'inefficient' and 'dishonest' Government 'at this crisis'.

The Leader of the Opposition, A.K. Fazlul Huq, maintained that the bankruptcy of the Government was unparalleled. As he said, 'The Finance Minister has hinted that the deficit by April 15th may be in the proximity of 20 crores of rupees, But I feel convinced that the real deficit will be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 50 crores. The situation is so terribly alarming that

27 Ibid, p. 201.
there would have been a revolution in the country had it not been for the fact that Bengal is absolutely dead, politically, economically and morally'. 26 At the end of the speech Fazlul Huq said, 'awake, arise or be ever fallen'. Led by him, the Opposition then walked out of the House. The Minister in a brief reply justified his budget proposals.

During the debate, there was very often thin attendance and on February 26, 1944 the Star of India gave a lead news that 'Opposition Lacks Enthusiasm : Attendance Extremely Poor'. On February 29, the paper in its editorial 'Wanted Introspection' criticised the speech of Fazlul Huq and the Opposition walk out. It said about Huq 'people usually talk nonsense when they talk without introspection'.

Even after one year's gap, the Bengal Budget could not get through the House. While the House was considering the Demand for Agriculture the Government was defeated by a snap voting and the Governor, R.G. Casey, by issuing a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 assumed the administration of the Province. It was on March 31, 1945 that the Governor authorised the annual estimate of expenditure for 1945-46.

Presenting the 'First Rehabilitation' and 'Seventh Wartime Budget' the Finance Minister, T.C. Goswami, admitted the gloomy economic condition of the Province due to the War and Famine. The Budget showed an estimated revenue deficit of Rs. 8,59,72,000 for the year 1945-46 and a deficit of Rs. 11,34,82,000 for the prevailing year's revised estimate. He said, 'The organisation of famine

relief and the control of epidemics also presented problems of exceptional difficulty and taxed to the utmost the resources of Government. The question was not merely one of money although, as honourable members are well aware, money is one of our serious problems'.

He narrated in detail the steps that the Government had taken regarding improvement of Agriculture and Fisheries and stated that a provision of Rs. 2 crores 25 lakhs in 1944-45 and 2 crores 10 lakhs in 1945-46 had been allotted. To bring the maximum possible area under plough, the Minister announced that the Indian Statistical Institute 'under the guidance of the renowned statistician, Professor P.C. Mahalanobis, is to carry out a survey of jute, aus paddy and aman paddy by a method of random sampling at a cost of 7 lakhs per annum'.

The cost of Civil Supplies Department was estimated at Rs. 3 crores in 1944-45 and it was Rs. 2 crores 75 lakhs in 1945-46. The opening of centralised homes for destitutes was a part of Government Plan, as it was stated in the Budget speech. The Famine Relief Operations estimated for 1945-46 was Rs. one and half crores as against Rs. 3 crores 85 lakhs in the prevailing year's cost. The provision for Public Health was Rs. 95 lakhs. He had also announced that the Government of India had decided to raise its financial assistance to Rs. 10 crores. While thanking the Government of India for this Ex-Gratia Grant he urged for a correct basis of federal finance and asserted once more that the 'Niemeyer Award' had been unfair to Bengal. Earlier he also stated that the Provincial Government had been trying its best to raise its income and

30 Ibid, p. 27.
it had imposed an Agricultural Income Tax and doubled the rates of the Sales Tax.

While initiating the discussion on February 20, Nalinakshya Sanyal characterised the situation in Bengal with the words 'As in his personal life so also in his career as Finance Minister of the Province, he gives evidence of unabashed recklessness and pro­digality, unparalleled self deception and self complacence and unpardonable miscalculations and humbug. In less than two years of the regime of the Present Ministry, Bengal has been laid prostrate under unprecedented burdens of man-made famine and natural calamity and the measures so far taken by Government have in most cases added to the miseries of the people'.

He was particularly critical of corruption and maladministration in the Civil Defence and Civil Works Department. Then he said, 'To cover up all the sins of corruption and patronage and to boost the activities of the Ministerial coterie the Publicity Department of the Government has been reorganised last year involving the setting up of an elaborate publicity machinery, almost a parallel Government at enormous cost'.

Dhirendra Nath Sen referred to the Government's inefficiency in securing cloth quota at par with Bombay and the Punjab. Atul Chandra Sen said that the Irrigation in Bengal was worst in India and the Government was indifferent.

The Anglo Indian member Griffiths lamented that while Bengal through her jute, steel, iron, coal, tea, sugar and other industries contributed a lot to the war, she had not received anything tangible. He depicted the miserable condition of Bengal with the

31 BLAP, vol. LXIX, No. 1, p. 68.
following words: 'in growing 'pat' and not 'bhat' a people once blessed with full and plenty in a most fertile land, a country so to say flowing with milk and honey has been reduced to want and disease in a wilderness of jute which reminds us of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" instead of, "Water, water, everywhere, not a drop to drink" we have "'pat pat' everywhere not a particle to eat"'.

Giasuddin Ahmed said that the Civil Supplies Department had opened a flood gate of corruption in the province.

Maulvi Abdul Razzak criticised the Government for miseries of the people, particularly of the Muslims due to the cloth famine. It had been difficult for the Muslims to have a piece of cloth for 'Kafan' (piece of cloth for dead body). But the leaders of the League did not care to observe Muslim rites. If there were exceptions, they were Nawabs and Zamindars who had hardly any time to think about the ordinary Muslims.

Maulvi Abdul Reuf said that there was no message of hope, no assurance about gradual lowering of the general price index and no guarantee about rigid practice of economy by all Government departments and non-imposition of any fresh taxes.

Rai Harendra Nath Chowdhury accused the Finance Minister for mishandling the exchequer of the Province. He ridiculed the Finance Minister for talking 'glibly of ensuring "ampler scope to emergent life"' which 'is a cruel mockery when we see on every side the harrowing march of resurgent death'. In reply to the criticism, the Finance Minister, T.C. Goswami said, 'Our Budget may seem somewhat gloomy, but it is not an impossible budget'.

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34 Ibid, p. 119.
36 Ibid, p. 250.
37 Ibid, p. 263.
On March 6, when Nasimuddin demanded a sum of Rs. 9,80,98,000 for the expenditure under the head '63 - Extraordinary Charges in India', the Opposition demanded longer debate on the subject to which the Chief Whip of the Government, Fazlur Rahman could not agree. After a lengthy exchange of words, the Opposition walked out of the House. On March 14, when Jail Convict Settlement Budget was under discussion, several cut motions were moved. Nisith Nath Kundu in moving his cut motion read several letters of convicts of different Jails and narrated their miseries. In his reply, Nasimuddin stated that many of the problems of the Security Prisoners had been considerably solved and others were of individual nature.

Dramatic Changes : Fall of Ministry

On March 28 Saiyed Maazzamuddin Hossain, the Minister for Agriculture placed his demand for the sum of Rs. 2,04,000. Dhirendra Nath Datta, who was supposed to move a cut motion, did not do so. The Minister did not make any statement nor did Dhirendra Nath Datta. Several points of orders were raised by some members which had been diverted to procedural questions including closure motion. A.F. Stark suggested that a general debate should continue. The Leader of the Opposition, A.K. Fazlul Huq said, 'the House is not in a position to take the situation as if it is a debating society, because no debate is needed. As regards the Government Policy, we know very well what the Government Policy has been for the last two years'. He thus urged upon the Speaker not to allow any 'delaying tactics' but to 'put the whole motion to the House'. Since there was no speech on the Budget the Minister's speech supposed to be the reply, came first. For their want of strength

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the Government was really in an awkward position for the moment. So the Opposition was determined to take the advantage of the situation.

Ahmed Ali Mirdha and H.S. Suhrawardy charged the Opposition that since the Government had taken action against the profiteers and black marketeers, they had mustered their strength for the Opposition and with their money, the Opposition was majority in the House. Suhrawardy exclaimed 'If this cloth drive had not taken place, this thing would not have occurred'. The demand of the Minister was put to vote and it was lost, 'Ayes' being 97 and 'Noes' 106. Pro-Government Star of India in its editorial urged upon Khwaja Nazimuddin 'not to oblige the enemies of society by surrendering office without conclusive proof that he had lost the majority'. Supporting the ruling of the Speaker, the Amrita Bazar Patrika wrote, 'An entire demand for grant has been thrown out. The rules of the Assembly prevented reintroduction of the rejected demand on the same session. The year was about to come to an end and certain other demands are outstanding. There are besides Speaker's previous ruling that budget was unitary and whole and if any major demand were thrown out, the entire budget, passed, rejected or undisposed of, was to be treated null and void .... Therefore Sir Nazimuddin's "confidence trick" to which the Governor had referred a token cut and then the Ministry's decision to be or not to be - was to put it mildly ill-conceived.'

On the earlier occasion, that is, when the Budget was placed before the House, the Star of India characterised it as a 'Brave

40 Star of India, March 29, 1945.
41 Amrita Bazar Patrika - Editorial '93' March 31, 1945.
Budget'. It said that Bengal had suffered most due to the War and therefore 'Bengal's budgetary position should be of as much interest and concern to the Government of India as to Bengal itself'. On the other hand, the Amrita Bazar Patrika's comment on the occasion was, 'We confess, we cannot share Mr. Goswami's robust optimism of his self-deluding infantile romanticism' and it characterised the Finance Minister as 'the custodian of a bankrupt estate'.

During the period under consideration, the War had deeply set in very near to India, more particularly to Bengal. There had been obvious repercussions of it in the framing of the Budgets. Bearing, the first Budget, that had been presented by A.K. Fazlul Huq, there had been heavy taxations. Of course, with the fall of Huq ministry, the Budget presented by him remained ineffective. All the subsequent Budgets had been presented by Tulsi Goswami. He tried to present the case of Bengal so far Central allocations were concerned, and clamoured for more money from the Centre. The Opposition's main charge against him was 'recklessness' in framing the Budget. In the Budget discussions of 1943 (twice) and in 1945, the Speaker, Nausher Ali, played a very crucial role. In fact, his rulings had moulded the politics of Bengal centring the Legislature to considerable extents, both in 1943 and in 1945.

The Bengal Famine of 1943

Writing on the famine situation in the country, Jawaharlal Nehru grimly wrote that India was very sick, both in mind and body. While some people had prospered during the War, the burden on the

42 Star of India - Editorial, February 19, 1945.
others had reached the breaking point, and as an awful reminder of these came famine, a famine of vast dimensions affecting Bengal and east and south India. The Famine Enquiry Commission presided over by Sir John Woodhead said that it had been for them a sad task to enquire into the course and causes of the famine. The Commission stated that a million and a half of the poor of Bengal fell victim to circumstances and 'there was a moral and social breakdown as well as an administrative breakdown'. About the estimation of death toll at 'about 1.5 million W.R. Aykroyd was primarily responsible. But in retrospection he said, 'I now think it was an under-estimate, especially in that it took little account of roadside deaths, but not as gross an under-estimate as some critics of the Commission's report, who preferred three to four million, declared it to be'.

The Commission, however, tried to find out the basic causes of the Famine and pointed out that before the famine the economic

44 The Discovery of India (London 1956), p. 505.
45 The Commission was set up under an ordinance (No. XXVII of 1944) to investigate and report to the Central Government upon the causes of the food shortage and subsequent epidemics in India and in particular in Bengal, in the year 1943, and to make recommendations as to the prevention of their recurrence, with special reference to (a) the possibility of improving the diet of the people and the quality and yield of food crops, and (b) the possibility of improving the system of administration in respect of the supply and distribution of food, the provision of emergent medical relief and the emergent arrangement for the control of epidemics in famine conditions in those areas and in those aspects in which the present system might be found to have been unsatisfactory.

The other members of the Commission were S.V. Ramamurthi, Manilal S. Nanaboti, M. Afzal Hossain and Dr. W.R. Aykroyd. R.A. Gopalaswami was the Secretary. The Commission presented its report on the 8th of May, 1945.

level of the people was low and agricultural production was not keeping pace with the growth of population. Increasing pressure on land was not relieved by any attempt to the growth of industries. There was shortage in supply of rice in 1943. The cycle of events that culminated in the famine might be traced back to 1941. B.M. Bhatia analysing the report of Famine Enquiry Commission said that the aman crop was short by about two million tons and the deficiency was not made good either by imports which made that year a net addition of only 2,33,000 tons to the food supply of the province or by the aus and boro crops during the year. In the summer of 1942 there was failure of aman crop. The Province had suffered some loss of food stocks in the surplus districts of 24-Parganas and Midnapore due to a cyclone that hit the coastal areas on October 16, 1942. Shortage of rice naturally led to rise in prices which was another basic cause of the famine. But the common approach to the famine in terms of 'food availability decline' (FAD) theory has been challenged by the renowned economist Amartya Sen. After examining the data on foodgrains availability (1928-43), exchange rates, wages of agricultural labourers etc. he has shown that food availability was not worse in 1943 than in 1941 and 'like Sphinex the FAD arose rejuvenated from the ashes'. Famine in the form in which it occurred could have been prevented by equitable distribution of available supplies.

It is well known that the famine was a direct result of war conditions and carelessness and complete lack of foresight of those in authority. It could have been avoided, given proper handling of the food situation in the earlier years of the war. The Government of India started a Food Department three and a

49 Poverty and Famines (Delhi, 1986), pp. 57-83.
quarter years after the war began in Europe and over a year after
the Japanese war started. Japanese occupation of Burma vitally
affected Bengal's food supply. In regard to food the Government
of India had no policy at all till the middle of 1943 when the
famine was already beginning its 'disastrous career'. Moreover,
the 'denial policy' of Government brought ruin to the poorer clusres.
Military demands on food and transport and lack of public
coopération deepened the crisis. This popular non-cooperation
had two aspects - (1) Economic and (2) Political. Economic: The
wholesale merchants of some districts at first boycotted the dis­
trict authorities although they were later prevailed upon to co­
operate. But the traders, producers and middlemen in general
remained sullen and non-coöperative throughout. Political: The
Ministries in Bengal in 1942 and 1943 were on each occasion so
constituted as invariably to forfeit the confidence of a large
section of the Bengalee people. Moreover, a communal outlook was
encouraged from some quarters and the members of Food Committees,
traders, licensed dealers and even officers of the permanent ser­
vices were openly accused because they were upholding of this or
that particular political or social creed. The interest of the
society as a whole was overshadowed by party or sectional interests.
And in the midst of political controversy, wrangles of commercial
passion and factional quarrels, practical measure to combat the
famine were largely overlooked.51

During Nazimuddin's Ministry the sole agency for Government's
procurement was given to Ispahani and Company and that obviously
became a point of criticism. Between the Government in office and
the various political parties and in the early part of the year,

51 Karunamoy Mukherjee, Agriculture, Famine and Rehabilitation
between the Governor and his Ministry, and between the administrative organisation of the Government and the public there was lack of co-operation. In his letter to the Governor John Herbert on January 9, 1943 Fazlul Huq wrote clearly, 'I record my disapproval of the whole policy you and some of your officers have been pursuing since April, 1941, regarding the matter of foodstuffs and supplies'. So Huq was alert about the food situation. Again he stated on July 5, 'During the last three months the food situation has degenerated to such an alarming extent that the famine conditions which are now raging in Bengal are unprecedented in the annals of this Province. There are signs that the famine that seems to be impending on us will be far more disastrous and devastating than the great famine of 1770 A.D. The present Cabinet knows very well that it is entirely to blame for the situation and that it is unable to cope with it effectively. In order to escape public criticism, it has gagged the press and forbidden public meeting where food problems are likely to be discussed'. This stood in the way of a united and vigorous effort to prevent and relieve famine. On May 13, 1943 Azizul Huq, Commerce Member, Government of India and Major General Wood, Secretary to the Department, Government of India lent support to the thesis of H.S. Suhrawardy, Minister of Civil Supplies, Bengal, that 'there was no shortage of food stuffs in Bengal' and that 'psychological factor was among the main causes of shortage of essential food stuffs and the rise of prices'.

There was governmental failure to tackle the food problem.

51 Contd. in South East Asia (Viswa Bharati 1965), p. 50.
In the Central Legislative Assembly K.C. Neogy expressed, 'If we consider the acts of omission and commission of which Government have been guilty in their attempt to prevent the outbreak of this famine or to deal with it adequately, we cannot help thinking that this famine is primarily a State industry, and to my mind in certain aspects it bears the hallmark of a genuine British manufacture'.

While reports of distress in various districts were received from commissioners and collectors from the early months of 1943 and even while the Bengal Assembly was occupied with food debate, the Government did not call for a report on the situation in the districts until June. Detailed instructions relating to relief were not issued till August. Famine was not declared till this month. It was only in mid-September less than a month before Viceroy Linlithgow was to relinquish his post to Lord Wavell that the Indian authorities permitted the use of the term 'famine' in despatches by correspondents. On September 20, the London Times carried an editorial entitled 'Bengal Food Crisis', while the Manchester Guardian featured one under the title 'Famine in Bengal'. Famine was not declared till this month. Even the measures initiated in August were inadequate. A famine Relief Committee was not appointed till late in September. The British Government which was jointly responsible for the good government of India was watching the developments from a distance. The British Parliament, the ultimate authority on every matter of moment in the British Empire, met on September 23, 1943 to discuss over famine. In the meantime, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy

54 Central Legislative Assembly Debates, November 15, 1943.
wrote from New Delhi to the Secretary of State, Amery, on July 6, 1943 that what was bothering him, principally at that moment was the food position, which had again taken a turn for the worse. He further wrote, 'It is about as difficult to judge how to handle food in a country like this as it is to deal with a currency .... Our difficulty here, apart from the circumstances peculiar to India, is the lack not of experience but of enough men of sufficient quality to handle the situation'.

There were further correspondence between Linlithgow and Amery and between Herbert, Governor of Bengal and Linlithgow over the food situation from June to September 20. On the 2nd of July, Herbert wrote to Linlithgow about Bengal's critical food position and import of food to Bengal from other Provinces and added, 'I can assure you that we are doing our best within Bengal and I must pay Suhrawardy's energy and enthusiasm a high tribute'. Regarding relief, the Cabinet decided to appoint a Relief Commissioner, but Martin who had been chosen for the post was very reluctant to serve, if Suhrawardy had anything to do with it. Suhrawardy blamed Revenue Minister (T.C. Goswami) for lack of adequate preparations for relief in districts but the real trouble was provision of supplies to them and transport.

Food shortage was so acute that in August, 1943 the Mayor of Calcutta, Syed Badrudduja addressed an appeal to New York City's first citizen, Fiorello La Guardia to send some help to relieve 'unprecedented distress' in Bengal where people 'are dying by the

58 Ibid.
59 Transfer of Power, vol. IV, Document No. 27.
60 Ibid. Document No. 125 (Telegram MSS EUR F.125/25 Linlithgow to Amery).
thousands'. The York Mayor was not known to have made any con-
crete response to the appeal. On August 22, 1943 the New York
Times reported that the Calcutta Municipal Corporation had decided
to cable President Roosevelt appealing for aid to the victims of
the famine. In pursuance of the resolution the City's Mayor, Syed
Badrudoja, sent the following telegram to Roosevelt: 'Acute dis-
tress prevails in the city of Calcutta and Province of Bengal due
to the shortage of food stuffs. Entire population being devitali-
zed and hundreds dying of starvation. Appeal to you and Mr.
Churchill in the name of starving humanity to arrange immediate
shipment of foodgrains from America, Australia and other coun-
tries'. But response was not satisfactory.

Besides governmental relief measures, relief came to Bengal
from different parts of the country also and from some private
organisations. In November, 1943 Muslim League Famine Relief
Committee was formed with Moazzam Hussain Chowdhury (Lal Mia) of
Faridpur as its Secretary. The Committee collected public contri-
butions both in coin and kind and helped the distressed people as
much as they could with active co-operation of Muslim League lead-
ers and workers. But all helps were not taken graciously by all
classes of people. The Hindu Mahasabha while appreciating the
help sent from different parts of the country observed that famine
and pestilence exhibited different sides of human nature which had
been reflected in the activities of certain organisations including
the Khaksars who held out to the starving people assurances to pro-
vide them with food, clothes and shelter and began to remove men,
women and children to distant places in India without paying any

61 New York Times, 26th August, 1943, p. 4 (Quoted in M.S.
Venkataramani's Bengal Famine of 1943 - The American Response
(Delhi, 1973), p. 18).
regard to their religion or choice. It further stated, 'We always agreed that Hindu orphans should remain in the custody of Hindu organisations and Moslem orphans with Muslim orphanages. While we scrupulously adhered to this principle, the Khaksars and some other organisations did not'. When Shyamaprasad Mookerjee came to know of these activities of the Khaksars, he immediately met the Khaksar leaders working in Calcutta and requested them to make over to the Hindu Mahasabha and other Relief Organisations those Hindu destitutes who were picked up by them and sent to their different campus outside Bengal and also to stop further despatch of destitutes from Bengal. A young Khaksar leader of the time, Azizur Rahman admitted that they had picked up the destitutes from the streets of Calcutta and had sent them to the neighbouring Provinces like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (Aligarh) for better care and to lessen the burden from Bengal. They (the Khaksars) had no bad motive behind it. They did it only from the philanthropist point of view. He added that afterwards they even returned some destitutes to their parents when claimed, and sometimes the children when grown up, refused to go back to their parents.

In short, the War, the policy of the Government and the hoarders and profiteers - all combined, led to the famine in Bengal in 1943 which silently killed thousands of people of the Province. This made Nazimuddin's Government unpopular. But through Suhrawardy's efforts, relief measures succeeded to a certain extent and it added to his prestige. Political parties,

64 Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha (Report of Relief Works), Calcutta, 1944.
65 Ibid.
66 Interview with Azizur Rahman (a philanthropist, at present residing in Chittagong, Bangladesh) on 2.2.87.
however, tried to exploit the famine situation. In fact, there was politics over the famine.

Breakdown of the Progressive Coalition Ministry

The year 1943 saw the breakdown of the Progressive Coalition Ministry. The Assembly session as usual started with the budget on February 12. But the earliest possible occasion was taken to bring forward the non-official special motion moved by S.P. Mookerjee - 'The Assembly is of the opinion that the Government of Bengal should immediately take necessary steps to represent to the Government of India that in view of the fast undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi in the present state of his health, he should be unconditionally released forthwith'. The Assembly was in remarkable silence on this occasion carrying unanimous Indian votes only the European group opposing. It was obvious that all the Muslim members of Bengal including the Muslim League supported the unconditional release of Gandhiji. But on his fast and reaction to it, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, in a telegram to Amery, the Secretary of State, on February 15, 1943 stated 'Muslims continue to stand apart'.

During this time S.P. Mookerjee gave his statement on his resignation from the Cabinet as Finance Minister which was accepted by the Governor on November 20, 1942. All sections of the House except the European Group applauded his speech. Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, a League member also congratulated him. In the meantime,

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67 BLAP, vol. LXIV, No. 1, p. 40. Also G.I.Home Poll. F.No.18/2/43.
68 Ibid, p. 41 (David Hendry).
S.P. Hookerjee issued a statement in Calcutta on the same lines in which he observed inter-alia, 'My experience as a provincial Minister for eleven months justifies me in stating clearly and categorically that Ministers while possessing great responsibilities for which they are answerable to the people and the legislature, have very little powers, especially in matters concerning the rights and liberties of the people. The Governor has chosen to act, in many vital matters in disregard of the wishes of the Ministers and has depended on the advice of a section of permanent officials, who are indifferent to the interests of the Province. If the British Prime Minister or the Secretary of State has the courage to direct an inquiry into the manner in which popular rights have been disregarded against the advice of responsible Ministers, the hollowness of their claims that Dominion Status is already in action in India will stand exposed'.

In his statement to the Legislature, S.P. Hookerjee showed the hollowness of power which the British Government conferred to the Provinces which was nothing but 'mockery of provincial autonomy'. But the Azad raised doubts on the real points presented by S.P. Hookerjee as the causes of his resignation. It was thought that he resigned because of his difference of opinion on the question of the flat rate collection of fines for destructive civil disobedience movement, from which the Bengal Government at the instance of the Government of India wanted to exempt the Leaguers and the anti-Congress Muslims. The President of Hindu Mahasabha could not tolerate it. According to the Azad, it had also been known that S.P. Hookerjee also insisted other Hindu Ministers to resign.

72 Azad, November 20, 1942; November 22 - editorial.
During this time Midnapore incidents also came into prominence. There the situation continued to improve and troops had been withdrawn from Contai Sub-division. But it had not been possible to withdraw the same from Tamluk. Congress activities continued there in less accessible areas. There were also disturbances and assaults on shopkeepers in some other places. Several adjournment motions were moved by Suhrawardy and others and the important one was on the repression carried out in the Contai and Tamluk Sub-divisions of Midnapore district including the arrest of innocent persons, destruction of property, burning of houses and assaults. The Chief Minister announced that the Cabinet had agreed to the investigation of allegations by a person or persons of the same status as a High Court Judge. For this announcement the Governor called him to question.

Besides the Midnapore incidents, debate on food supply was the burning issue in the session. Since last year food occupied an important place in the Legislature to be discussed. The year 1943 witnessed great devastation in Bengal and that resulted in famine. It was perhaps one of the horrible incidents of the twentieth century in Bengal.

On behalf of the Government, the Chief Whip, Yusuf Mirza, initiated the debate on food, kerosene oil and cloth situation in the Province. Nalinakshya Sanyal on behalf of Congress Party criticised the Government for the failure to tackle the problems which was due to the lack of a policy of the Government. He said that the Government had not considered the situation on all-Bengal basis, but were concerned only to ensure for making supplies for

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73 Fortnightly Report - First Half of February, 1943 (G.I.Home Poll. F.No. 18/2/43).
the industrial and other workers engaged in work connected with the war. On behalf of the Muslim League Opposition, Tamizuddin Khan criticised the Government for its miserable failure in handling the civil supplies and food.

The Food Minister did not make any statement in the beginning about the real food situation in the Province and what he was doing to cope with that. The member from the European Group David Hendry attacked the Minister on this point and said that the debate had left a good deal in the air because of this. The responsibility of controlling the essential commodity like rice rested upon the Provincial Government. Hendry stated that in the last year 'Bengal's rice crop was a good one,' and in the present year (1943) it was not so good. But with the carrying over from last year the possible shortage could only be very small.

'Exports and Military consumption' according to Hendry 'can only amount to an extremely small percentage of the total available supplies, and shortage, if any, cannot account for the fantastic prices which have prevailed for rice in Calcutta and the mofussil areas since November last.' Member from Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, D.N. Sen, pointed to the serious food position which was clear from the rise of the cost of living of the working class from 100 to 218. The average price of rice had gone up by nearly 300 percent and 'ata' by more than 200 percent. The control of prices required the control of supply. Sen emphasised that the Government should also combat the psychological tendency of hoarding rice by law and by total purchase of all available supplies accompanied by all round rationing if necessary.  

75 Fortnightly Reports from Bengal (of the whole year, 1942); also stated this almost regularly (G.I.Home Poll. P.Nos. 18/1/42 to 18/12/42).
77 Ibid.
Because of acute food condition the House was occupied with food debate for several days more. After February 18, when the food debate was resumed again on February 25, the speakers participating in the discussion on the Government motion in this regard demanded an announcement of a definite policy from the Government regarding food, fuel and cloth situation in the Province.

On March 10, the last day of food debate, the Muslim League Opposition sought to censure the Government for its alleged failure to tackle satisfactorily the food situation. The House registered the motion by 92 to 78 votes. The voting pattern as seen in the Legislative Assembly Proceedings was on the following line: The European Group voted with the League and the Official Congress Party remained neutral. Two Independent Labour members and six Scheduled Caste members of the Government Party did not participate in the voting.

The debate concluded in a tense atmosphere. Winding up the debate, the Chief Minister declared that the Government had decided that there should be a minister for Civil Supplies assisted by a strong and representative advisory committee. At the same time it was also announced that Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, lately Commerce Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council had agreed to be the Chairman of the Committee. H.S. Suhrawardy strongly attacking the Ministry said that it proved thoroughly incapable of handling the food situation. In this connection the Nawab of Dacca, Minister for Civil Supplies gave a broad outline of how the situation developed since Burma rice ceased coming to Bengal. The scheme of the 'denial policy' of the Government of India due to war further

aggravated the situation. He explained the steps taken by the Government to deal with the situation.79

On March 27, K.A. Hamilton of the European Group moved a motion to censure the Government for alleged failure to deal with black marketing and speculation in hoarding of food stuffs. While speaking on the motion Suhrwardy criticised Fazlul Huq and said that the latter depended on the Hindu support who tried to exert their influence in administration through Huq. Thus the European Group and the Muslim League jointly tried to dislodge the Ministry. The Azad was writing editorials abusing Fazlul Huq almost every day in March and April, 1943. But the motion was lost by 109 to 99 votes. There was a record attendance in the House. So all attempts to bring down the Ministry from power having failed the Governor intervened and Fazlul Huq was forced to sign on the resignation letter on March 28, prepared by Herbert.80

79 BLAP, vol. LXXV, No. 3, p. 16.

'(i) First, that we shall buy paddy and rice from a number of buying areas in this province,

(ii) Secondly, that much buying shall be made through our approved agents and under such terms as to prices etc. as we shall lay down,

(iii) Thirdly, that restrictions on the movement of paddy and rice from our buying as well as non-buying areas except under permits to be issued by our Food-grains Purchasing Officer should be imposed.

(iv) Fourthly, that these buying activities will be supervised by a special officer, called Food-grains Purchasing Officer, who will work under the guidance and control of the Directorate of Civil Supplies.'

80 Text of the letter -

Dear Sir John,

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

Yours sincerely,

Dated, the 28th March, 1943 (Sd/-) A.K. Fazlul Huq
It is reported that realising the gravity of the war situation, earlier in April, 1942 the Governor tried to secure general support for the establishment of an all Parties Government to form a War Front. But there was no progress and the Governor intended to see individual leaders as a next step. Some of the leaders at that time, the Governor said, 'were of the opinion that no Government with the representatives of all parties would be possible in Bengal until the all-India problem had been solved or some agreement had been reached between the major political parties'.

Anyway, the sixteen months' old Second Ministry of Fazlul Huq came to an end and on March 31, the Governor temporarily promulgated the Article 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. The action of the Governor in dismissing the Huq Cabinet was a hasty one and serious difficulty followed regarding the passing of the budget for the year 1943-44. This has been discussed in budget section. In fact, there was a constitutional deadlock in Bengal. A public meeting at this time at Sraddhananda Park, Calcutta, condemned the unconstitutional action of the Governor and it was claimed that Fazlul Huq still commanded the confidence of the majority of the M.L.As.

Again League in Power

It was reported on April 14, that Khwaja Nazimuddin, the leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party was invited to

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80 Contd.
(Fazlul Huq : Bengal Today (Calcutta, 1944), p. 37. Also statement of Fazlul Huq before the Bengal Legislative Assembly on July 5, 1943. This is an important political document of the time.
81 G.I.Home Poll. F.No. 18/4/42 (First half).
82 BLAP, vol. LXXI, No. 4, p. 277.
form a new Ministry in Bengal. Being commissioned by the Governor, John Herbert, Nazimuddin accepting the offer made a press statement with promises to improve the lot of the Province and the people. On April 24, with the concurrence of the Viceroy, the Governor by a proclamation revoked the Provision of Section 93. Members of the Council of Ministers were appointed.

83 Allotment of Portfolios:

1. Sir Nazimuddin - Chief Minister and Home including Civil Defence Co-ordination (Muslim Bengal Coalition).
2. H.S. Suhrawardy - Civil Supplies (Muslim Bengal Coalition).
3. Tulsi Chandra Goswami - Finance (Caste Hindu Bengal Coalition).
4. Tamizuddin Khan - Education (Muslim Bengal Coalition).
5. Barada Prasanna Pain - Communication and Works (Caste Hindu Bengal Coalition).
6. Khan Bahadur Syed Muazzamuddin Hosain - Agriculture (Muslim Bengal Coalition).
7. Tarak Nath Mukherjee - Revenue (Caste Hindu Bengal Coalition).
8. Musharruff Hossain - Judicial and Legislative (Muslim Bengal Coalition).
10. Premhari Burman - Forest and Excise (Scheduled Caste Bengal Coalition).
12. Pulin Behary Mullick - Publicity (Scheduled Caste Bengal Coalition).
13. Jogendra Nath Mandal - Co-operative Credit and Rural Indebtedness (Scheduled Caste Bengal Coalition).
The party positions in the Assembly were as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Government Supporters</th>
<th>Opposition</th>
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<td>1. Muslim League</td>
<td>1. Progressive Party</td>
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<td>4. European Group</td>
<td>4. Congress (Official)</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>5. Labour Party</td>
<td>5. Congress (Rash Group)</td>
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<td>8. Anglo-Indians</td>
<td>8. Scheduled Caste</td>
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140 108

One seat was vacant. The Speaker not included.

In the legislative and administrative fields there were not much activities during the premiership of Nazimuddin. From the point of legislation two main attempts were made by this Ministry — one was the imposition of tax on agricultural income and the other was a renewed effort to pass the Secondary Education Bill.

The Finance Minister, Tulsi Goswami, introduced the Agricultural Income Tax Bill on September 16. The Bill was referred to a Select Committee. The purpose of the Bill was to levy a tax on agricultural income from land. The Bill came to the House again, on February 10, 1944. But it did not carry much importance because the House was preoccupied with food debate.

The only principal Bill discussed in the House during the time was the Secondary Education Bill. The Education Minister,
Tamizuddin Khan, at a Press Conference in Calcutta on April 10, 1944 explained the main provisions of the Bill which the Government proposed to introduce in the Assembly. (This was the third time since 1940 the Bill was introduced in the House). The Bill was much discussed in the Legislature and also outside the Legislature. It became the issue of politics between different interested groups. While moving the Bill, the Education Minister declared that its principles and provisions were of a basic progressive character, which would help much to accelerate the educational regeneration of this province and it was fraught with immense possibilities. There was hot discussion in the House over the Bill. The Opposition moved amendment seeking circulation of the Bill to elicit public opinion. There was also an appeal to the Government to refer the Bill to a Select Committee and it was expected that in the meanwhile an understanding with the Calcutta University could be arrived. S.P. Mookerjee, Rai H.N. Chowdhury and N. Senyal representing the Opposition in the Legislature were invited by the Chief Minister at a Conference on August 8 in the Assembly building to discuss the Bill with a view to coming to a settlement on the controversial provisions of the measure. The Secondary Education Bill so much discussed and criticised by the public and the press and also in the Legislature, and at the same time long overdue, could not be enacted because of the conflicts of interests and party squabbles.

The short July session of seven days of the new Nazimuddin Ministry started on the 5th with the statement of Suhrawardy, Civil Supplies Minister, on food situation and anti-hoarding campaign in the province. The statement was placed before the House by the
Chief Minister. Important events of the session were the long and revealing statements of the former Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq, on his resignation, question of release of political prisoners and the discussions on Midnapore affairs.

The House severely criticised the bad handling of the food position of the Government. Nine special motions were moved by members of the different opposition parties. Some, while condemning the Government plans, put forward suggestions to tackle them. After three days' debate the Governmental Party was defeated by a special motion of Rai H.N. Chowdhury of the non-official Congress party by 134 to 88 votes. The motion aimed at ensuring the Ministry and their handling of food situation. A similar motion by N. Sanyal of Official Congress was defeated by 133 to 82 votes.

On September 16, the House, in the next session rejected by 111 to 66 votes the Official Congress Party's adjournment resolution to discuss (a) the failure of the Government to set at liberty persons purported to have been detained under rule 28 of the Defence of India Rules inspite of the decision of the Calcutta High Court and (b) the recent decision of the Federal Court of India declaring the procedure adopted by the Bengal Government regarding detention as contrary to law and improper.

Most of the time of the Autumn Session of 1943 was spent on food policy of the Government. Members taking part in the debate referred to the mounting death toll in Calcutta and mofussil due to starvation and to the misery caused by food shortage. Majority of the deceased were from East Bengal rural areas. During the general discussion of the budget food situation naturally figured
prominently. All sections agreed that Bengal had a stronger case for a large and more substantial help from the Government of India. The disappearance of rice from market was also critically discussed. When the debate was proceeding the Opposition staged a walk-out on September 22, as a protest against the decision of the Speaker not to allow Fazlul Huq, the Leader of the Opposition, to make a statement on a speech of the Civil Supplies Minister on the food situation.

On the next day again the Opposition's main targets of criticism were the working of the Civil Supplies Department and the transactions of Messrs. Ispahani and Co., as sole food grain purchasing agent for the Bengal Government. The House rejected a special motion by N. Sanyal condemning the Ministry's handling of the food situation by 128 to 88 votes.

The curse of the famine was not so easy to forget. Nazimuddin's Government lost people's confidence because of the large number of death due to famine and naturally this made the Ministry unpopular. The next year's budget session again began with the discussion on the Food Policy of the Government, particularly their appointment of some Calcutta merchants as their chief agents to buy paddy and rice. The Minister-in-Charge on the other hand reiterated the Government's determination to reduce the prices of paddy and rice substantially and at the same time ensured against hoarding. The famine condition had been severe but when there were enquiries about death tolls due to starvation in mofussil districts, Hamiduddin Ahmed admitted that the Government was not

in a position to give the exact number of such deaths but were searching for it.

On March 2, the Assembly rejected by 99 to 79 votes an adjournment motion censuring Government for banning publication of a joint statement by leaders of the different parties in the Opposition, criticising certain observations made by R.A. Hutchings, Food Secretary, Government of India, on the food situation in Bengal. This was a blow to Parliamentary rights, they alleged.

The last phase of Nazimuddin Ministry was a gloomy picture and that was manifested in the Finance Minister's presentation of the Budget for 1945-46. The provincial finances had been severely strained by the impact of the war and famine and its aftermath. It was a deficit budget of 3 crores. The cloth famine was severe in Bengal during this time. An adjournment motion to condemn the Government for their failure to prevent the cloth famine was defeated by 104 to 65 votes. The Civil Supply Minister, Suhrawardy admitted the cloth famine and said that he was trying his best to improve the supply position.

The days of the Government were numbered. There was dissension among the League members. Akram Khan, Nazimuddin, Ispahani were thoroughly committed to Jinnah and All India Muslim League and were following the hard line. They were representing Bengal to the League Working Committee. On the other hand, there were Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim who wanted the League to be a party for the Muslims in Bengal and followed a soft line. About Suhrawardy an interesting remark from a contemporary League office bearer can be quoted: 'He was never mentally prepared to completely sever his
political association with the Khwajas, and at the same time in
the interest of his power politics, could not afford to disoblige
the leftists. Thus he always hovered between the right and the
left'. In fact, there were differences between the two major
factions. Thus, though organisationally stronger due to its deep
penetration into local units, the League could not avoid such in­
ternal conflict which was in process for quite a long time.

Moreover, members were crossing the floor. On June 20, 1944,
11 members of the ruling party joined the Opposition. Ultimately,
the Ministry was defeated by a cut motion on agriculture budget on
March 28, 1945, moved by the Opposition. The scene of the Assembly
during that day has been described by a contemporary journalist in
the following way: Immediately after Saiyed Muazzamuddin Hosain,
the Minister-in-Charge of Agriculture presented his budget,
Dhirendranath Datta from the Opposition read his cut motion. As
usual the Ministry was totally dependent on the European Group,
They were not aware that the cut motion would come so early. They
used to go to the House after finishing their day's work. It may
be mentioned here that for the convenience of these members and
the lawyers of High Court, the House used to sit in the afternoon.
The Opposition, on the other hand, claimed that more than two
dozen members would cross the floor from the treasury benches.
When the Opposition demanded voting on the cut motion, Nazimuddin
and Stork (from the European Group), opposed and said that it could
not be done without discussion. Fazlul Huq ridiculed the proposal.
In the midst of altercations, the Speaker, Nausher Ali announced
that the Minister of Agriculture could speak for ten minutes only.

86 Abul Hashim, In Retrospection (Dacca, No date), p. 79.
87 Amrita Bazar Patrika, June 21, 1944.
The Minister spoke for ten minutes but till then the European members did not turn up. The cut motion was voted and lost by 106 to 97 votes. Immediately after the voting sixteen European members entered the House hurriedly but the game was already over. It was alleged that the money of the Marwari businessmen helped the 'purchasing' of some members.

On the next day the Speaker Syed Nausher Ali gave the following famous ruling:

'The Ministry is the creature of this House, the House can make and unmake the Ministry and the Governor is but the registering authority of the declaration of the House. Besides direct no-confidence, there are other recognised methods. Sir Nazimuddin may claim that the decision of the House does not really reflect the opinion of the majority of the House but I doubt if it is permissible to be dragged into the realm of speculation after the verdict of the House against the Ministry to function as a ministry in this House. In these circumstances, I think that the House can not function any longer unless a new ministry is formed ....'

Thus the Nazimuddin Government fell. The Speaker was criticised for his ruling. It was alleged that he snatched away the rights of the members of the ruling party in this matter. Casey, the Governor was extremely angry with the Speaker, but there was nothing that he could do. However on March 31, he issued a Proclamation under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935 in a Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary assuming the administration of

89 Azad, March 29, 1945.
90 BLAP, March 29, 1945.
91 Ibid.
the province. Many years later Casey recalled the matter and in a fit of typical imperial arrogance commented: 'It was my function to say whether there was a ministry in office, not the Speaker's'.

In short, the time between 1943 and 1945 was complicated for Bengal as well as for India. The War came at the door of India, particularly of Bengal. It had a heavy impact on the Budget of the Bengal Government and the situation was 'reckless' with the problem of rehabilitation added to it. In the midst of such uncertain economic situation the famine as a curse was set in Bengal in 1943. Both men and the sequence of events made the situation worse. It made the Nazimuddin Ministry unpopular. At the same time uneasiness prevailed there due to communal conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims.

The political situation of the time was also complicated. Since August 1942 due to the 'Quit India Movement' most of the important leaders of the Congress had been in jail. The spirit of the movement stirred Bengal also and its citadel was the Midnapore district. There had been less activities in the legislature. Functioning as Opposition for sixteen months the League wanted to uphold its position and tried to show that it had the intention to form an all Party Ministry in Bengal. This act of the drama was closed with the intervention of Governor Casey when he compelled Fazlul Huq to resign in March 1943. Then Nazimuddin with the splinter groups of the Congress and the Scheduled Castes formed a Ministry. The Europeans had support for the Government and acted as a balancing factor.

As stated before, this Ministry was not popular due to the famine and there was no major legislation to alleviate people's misery. But organisationally the League became stronger though there was difference of opinion between the two groups of the League in Bengal. While Nazimuddin commanded more support in Parliamentary Party and had backing of the non-Muslim business magnets, his cabinet colleague Suhrawardy, who was also the General Secretary of the Provincial League was ahead of him organisationally. Suhrawardy's successor Abul Hashim (elected on November 7, 1943) was mainly concerned in developing mass base of the Party independent of Nazimuddin's group, notwithstanding Jinnah's covert and sometimes obvert patronage to Khwaja-Akram group. He had the guts to avoid the purse of powerful Ispahani.

Those internal feuds and crises in the League could be compared to those of the Bengal Congress in 1939-40. In spite of internal feuds the League outwardly acted in an united manner which is clear from the following words of Abul Hashim, the Secretary of the BPML:

'My job was to organise and strengthen the parent body the Muslim League. In my public speeches or statements issued to the Press I never exposed our internal conflict. My opponents also followed the same principle. The result was that our internal conflict in Muslim League party politics never amounted to a public scandal and personal relations remained un-affected. In public I preached soundness and justice of the contents of the Lahore Resolution of 1940 and I urged upon the people to do their best to build up the Muslim League as a democratic and progressive party'.

93 Abul Hashim, op.cit., pp. 41-42.
However, differences within the League and the crossing of floors by some members made the Ministry unstable and it was censored on March 29, 1945 when the Speaker Nausher Ali gave his historic ruling. Eventually the Nazimuddin Ministry fell. The Governor's rule was proclaimed in Bengal and the long life of the Bengal Legislative Assembly had come to an end.

Role of the Governor

Under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, 'the Governor of a Province is appointed by the Majesty by a Commission under the Royal Sign Manual' (Article 48) and 'the executive authority of a Province shall be exercised on behalf of His Majesty by the Governor ....' (Article 49). Regarding the Administration of Provincial Affairs, the Act further provided: 'there shall be a council of ministers to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except in so far he is by or under this Act required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion' (Article 50(1)). The Act gave unlimited discretionary power to the Governor which is more clear from the following provision: 'The functions of the Governor under this section with respect to the choosing and summoning and the dismissal of ministers, and with respect to the determination of their salaries, shall be exercised by him in his discretion' (Article 51(5)). Article 93 of the Act empowered the Governor to issue proclamation 'if at any time' he 'is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of the Province can not be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Act'. In fact, the Governor enjoyed enormous power in the Act of 1935,
there are even cases of crossing constitutional limits and the Governor interfering in provincial politics. The posts of Governors were prize posts which were given to members of the I.C.S. with a long record of distinguished service.

At the time of the introduction of Provincial Autonomy John Anderson was the Governor of Bengal. During the election of 1937 he went out of his way to appeal to the people to support the League leader Khwaja Nazimuddin and issued 'a directive to Government officials to actively support the Khwaja' against the Krishak Proja Party leader A.K. Fazlul Huq.94 While addressing to the first Joint Session of the Bengal Legislature John Anderson had spoken of himself as the representative of the Sovereign as well as a part of the legislature. He expressed his hope that the 'great experiment in democracy' would be successful and said that democracy nourished on envy, hatred, malice or any other form of uncharitableness could never thrive in any part of the world.95 But unfortunately the sweet desire of John Anderson was not fulfilled. Moreover the role of the Governors like John Herbert and Casey particularly that of Herbert 'exposed the mockery of Provincial Autonomy'.96 The Governor had enormous constitutional power no doubt but as first Chief Minister of Bengal Fazlul Huq said that 'while working with the first four Governors (John Anderson, Robert Reid, John Woodhead and Lord Brabourne) he never felt that there were things in the Government of India Act known as Governor's discretion or individual judgement or special responsibilities'.97 But the political developments and war situation

95 Please see Chapter 4, F.N. 2.
97 Ibid, p. 4.
complicated the problems. The Progressive Coalition Ministry of Fazlul Huq having a 'patriotic and nationalist line' became the headache of the vested interests and the communalists. The Governor 'was not only unsympathetic but in many cases positively obstructive .... in matters of day to day administration'. He directly or indirectly encouraged some sections of permanent officials to flout the authority of the Ministers leading them to ignore Ministers altogether and deal directly with the Governor as if the Ministers did not exist. As an instance it may be mentioned that in April 1942 Herbert issued a mandate to the Joint Secretary, Commerce and Labour Department in the matter of the rice removal policy. During paddy and rice crisis, inspite of the opposition of Fazlul Huq, Herbert appointed McInnes as the Food Controller in place of Somerset Butler. The Chief Minister wanted that an Indian should be appointed in that post for better handling of food situation. But then Pinnel was appointed to that post. So Fazlul Huq was disappointed. About the duty of the officials Herbert said that they should be allowed to go on unchecked with their own policy and any interference on the part of the Ministers with their work should be reported to the Governor. In his statement to the Bengal Legislative Assembly on the question of his 'forced resignation' Fazlul Huq presented all the correspondence between him and the Governor. It was evident that during the period enormous misgivings and dissatisfaction led to tacit ill-feeling between the Governor, bureaucracy and the Europeans on the one hand and the Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq and some of his colleagues on the other.

98 See Chapter 6, pp. 243-44.
100 Ibid, p. 10.
hand. As Fazlul Huq said: 'matters came to a head when Shyama Prosad Mookerjee made his statement to the House on the 12th February regarding the circumstances leading to his resignation. The statement made by Dr. Mookerjee added fuel to the fire .... from February onwards there was a sort of an agreement between my political adversaries on the one hand and high officials and the European party on the other to oust me from office'. 103 When the Chief Minister 'agreed' to the demand of all the parties to appoint a Committee of Enquiry on the atrocities of the Government officials in Midnapore, the Governor and his officials became furious. The Governor wrote a letter to the Chief Minister on February 15, 1943 with harsh words: 'I shall expect an explanation from you at your interview tomorrow morning of your conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the Government'. 104 This was very much insulting for Fazlul Huq and he unhesitatingly replied: the 'indecorous language such as has been used in your letter under reply should in future be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and His Chief Minister'. 105

Thus, there was an atmosphere of crisis all around. Communal tensions were there which the British Government tried to exploit in their interest. They also wanted to pursue their war policy by utilising the abnormal situation. Moreover, temperamentally haughty John Herbert started instigating the high officials to flout the orders of the Ministers. The direct interference of the Governor in politics was clear. He sided with the Muslim League of Nazimuddin, as the prospect of a Progressive Coalition Ministry

103 Bengal Today, pp. 24-25.
105 Ibid, p. 27.
would go against the imperialist interest. Again there was a conspiracy to dissuade some ministers from the Cabinet. All the issues combining together led to the forcible resignation of Fazlul Huq from the office of Chief Minister and the fall of his Ministry.

The Governor got unlimited constitutional power. In the case of bringing about the fall of the Progressive Coalition Ministry, it was clear that he acted in an unconstitutional manner and played politics which was beyond his jurisdiction. About the action of John Herbert, V.P. Menon commented: 'It would appear that the Governor had acted under influence of the European Group who were at that time openly aligned with the Muslim League against Fazlul Huq. The action was a hasty one taken without consultation with the Governor-General'.

Even the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow wrote to the Secretary of State Amery:

'I am very disturbed about this business of Herbert and his ministry .... I can not imagine greater folly than to present some one of the type of Huq with a draft letter of resignation, head him off from consulting his colleagues and his party .... other aspects that concern me very much are the suggestions that Huq at this time had a majority and that Nazimuddin certainly had not and has not. I am sure it is most dangerous for Governor to play politics ...'  

(April 2, 1943). Inspite of this remark of the Viceroy, it should be kept in mind that the British imperialists had some ulterior motives. Naturally Linlithgow again wrote to Amery on April 15:

'Herbert has been most unwise .... but .... a ministry under Nazimuddin will, I would hope, lend much more effective support to

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war effort than we were ever able to get from Huq, dominated by the somewhat sinister figure of S.P. Mookerjee in the background.\textsuperscript{108}

So John Herbert, by engineering the fall of the Progressive Coalition Ministry brought the League Ministry under Nazimuddin to power. The latter enjoyed the blessings of the next Governor, Casey also. So when Nazimuddin Ministry lost the confidence of the House and fell through the famous ruling of the Speaker Nausher Ali, Casey was not only annoyed with the Speaker but criticised him ruthlessly and declared his ruling unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{109} The role of the next Governor Francis Burrows was also not without any question. On the Direct Action Day (August 16, 1946) of the Muslim League it was Burrows who interfered in police action and rejected the request of the police to get military help 'as early as 2 p.m. on the first day' which could minimise the massacre in Calcutta (narrated in the next chapter).

So it can be concluded that though the Governor had special constitutional powers, at times some of them, because of their very nature and because of existing situation, tried to exert extra-constitutional authority which amounted to autocracy. The Governor used to involve himself in politics. The political configuration of Bengal at that moment gave him that opportunity. To serve the interests of the European business magnets, the Governor had to take that course, as was done by Casey in 1945.

The disturbed condition of the Province especially the communal differences served a congenial background for the play of imperial interests. To forestall national interests and national unity the Governor along with the top bureaucracy and pliable politicians could often abuse his power and act unconstitutionally.

\textsuperscript{108} Mansergh, Document No. 649, p. 893, pp. 875-76.
\textsuperscript{109} Casey, op.cit., pp. 26-27.