CHAPTER - 8

THE ELECTION OF 1946 AND ITS AFTERMATH

The year 1945 witnessed a remarkable change in Bengal as well as in Indian political scene. By the classic ruling of the Speaker Nausher Ali, the functioning of the so-called Provincial Autonomy in Bengal came to a halt, and the Governor Casey took direct charge of the Province. In terms of Section 65 of the Act of 1935, the Governor took over the administration in his own hands. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly were no more entitled to draw their salaries from March 31, 1945. Casey was in office upto February, 1946. The new Governor George Burrows was sworn in on February 20. After the Second World War when normalcy was restored there was talk of elections which would be discussed after the discussion on the political situation of the time.

By the end of the Second World War India's struggle for freedom was almost coming to an end. The August Movement of 1942 was already ruthlessly crushed. The efforts of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fouz, which reached the eastern frontier of India had virtually come to a dead end. The last important struggle, the revolt of a section of the Indians in the Royal Indian Navy of Bombay in February 1946, was also suppressed. During the same month as soon as the trial of Captain Rashid Ali of the I.N.A. started, unrest exploded in the country. Explosion already started in Calcutta in November 1945 with the demand for the release of the three I.N.A. officers on trial - Shah Nawaj, Dhilon and Sehgal. On November 21, the students gave a strike
call and 'several thousand students belonging to the Students' Congress and Students Federation marched towards Dalhousie Square via Dhurrumtolla street. The police opened fire, killing more than a score, including a student, Rameswar Banerjee and a young worker, Abdus Salam'. Besides students' Congress and students' Federation, the Khaksar students had also taken part. It may be mentioned that the Khaksars first reached the place of demonstration and later buried Abdus Salam. On February 13, the Press (Patrika) reported that the situation was very explosive and at a mammoth meeting in Wellington Square Suhrawardy, the Muslim League leader said, 'To-day and last evening we saw an uprising of the people and the matter passed out of the hands of the students'. The meeting was presided over by him and the Congress was represented by the well-known leader Satish Chandra Dasgupta. Akram Khan spoke on the occasion and Abul Hashim hoped that the unity in thought and action achieved between the two communities on this occasion would lead to the ultimate solution of their problems paving the way for the freedom of the country. Among other Speakers were Dilip Kumar Biswas, Nani Bhattacharjee, Gunada Majumdar, Moazzam Hossain and Somnath Lahiry who spoke on the need of unity in the struggle for freedom. Referring to the unity that had been achieved in the movement Suhrawardy said that no power on earth would be able to stop them. He therefore urged the Congress and the League to settle their differences and fight the battle of freedom unitedly. Side by side the Hindus and the Muslims marched together inspired by a common purpose, carrying Congress, League, Khaksar and communist flags.

2 Interview with Azizur Rahman (the then Khaksar student leader, now in Bangladesh) on 2.2.87.
3 The Amrita Bazar Patrika - February 13, 1946.
The British intelligence reports mentioned about the grievances of the people and incidents like damages to Railway lines at Naihati and burning down of Kakinara station and Tollygunj Tram Depot. The British rulers suppressed the Calcutta uprisings brutally. But the Bengalis protested vehemently. The Amrita Bazar Patrika reported: 'Protest meetings against military firing in Calcutta are being held all over Bengal. Complete Hartal, huge Hindu-Muslim united rallies were held on February 13 and 14 in scores of towns .... Transport was completely paralysed and trains were held up everywhere.' About the I.N.A. trial Muhammad Ali Jinnah said that it was 'legally wrong, logically untenable and morally indefensible'.

At this time the British realised that their power in India would not last long. The GOC of the Eastern Command Francis Tucker noted that disaffection against the British Raj was growing rapidly not only among the Civil Servants and Police but also in the Defence Services of India. Prof. Harold Laski, Chairman of the Labour Party declared in January 12, 1946 that British must arrive at an agreement with India soon and after the summer it might be too late. Again Prof. Frank Richards, Labour M.P. and leader of the All Party Delegation to India told the British Prime Minister, Attlee: 'we must quit India quickly, if we don't we shall be kicked out'. So the position of the British Government in India was precarious but the Indian leaders belonging to the Congress and the League failed to utilize it because of their

4 Home/Poll/FN/5/22/46.
5 February 17, 1946.
6 The Statesman, February 18, 1946.
7 Sir Francis Tucker - While Memory Serves (London, 1949), p. 89.
8 The Statesman, January 15, 1946.
9 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 23, 1946.
sectarian outlook.

In the meantime the leaders were busy preparing for the election battles. Already on August 21, 1945 the Government of India announced that the elections to the various Indian Legislatures would be held in the cold weather and it was decided that the Viceroy Lord Wavell would proceed to London for consultation with the Home Government. Accordingly, Wavell went to London and on return to India in the next month announced on behalf of 'His Majesty's Government' that the government was ready to convene a 'Constitution-making body' in India 'as soon as possible'.

The Labour Government had sent a Parliamentary delegation to India in the winter of 1945-46 with a view to collecting first-hand impressions about the political situation in this country. After the return of the delegation to London the British Government officially announced in both Houses of Parliament that a Cabinet Mission would be sent to India 'to act in association with the Viceroy'. The Prime Minister Attlee stated that the object of the Cabinet Mission would be 'to set up a machinery in agreement with the Indians whereby the Indian people themselves will decide their destinies'. The decision of the Mission was announced on May 16. The Congress accepted the Constituent Assembly idea. The League was not happy with the whole procedure.

Talk of an early end to British rule became a topic of the day. In Bengal tension mounted steadily and communal disturbances became an almost day-to-day affair. Communalism had deep roots in Bengal due to the long struggle for power between the Hindus and

12 Ibid, Introduction XIX.
the Muslims in which Calcutta was the focal point. Religious question or religious feeling was not the main cause of bitterness between the two communities. The main issues revolved round political, economic and social interests. The presence of a Muslim Ministry in a predominantly Hindu city like Calcutta was also the bone of contention between them. Normal situation of the Province was totally disturbed because of communal conflicts. Reactionaries and extremists among both the Hindus and the Muslims threatened retaliation. There was a growing polarisation between the Congress and the Muslim League. During the war period the Muslim League made rapid progress in gathering support. The Krishak Proja Party of Fazlul Huq lost its glamour of 1937. Besides, by 1945 most of the leaders of the Party like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Abdulla-el-Baqi, Shamsuddin Ahmed (Secretary of the Krishak Proja Party), Hasan Ali, Nurul Islam Chowdhury and Giasuddin Ahmed had joined the Muslim League. The Pakistan demand of the League received tremendous support from the Muslim mass. In the election of 1946 the League's call of 'Islam in danger' stirred the minds of the Muslims. The League exploited the sentiment of the Muslims at that time. But the internal condition of the Muslim League was far from happy. As has been stated in the last chapter there was a tussle between the two groups of the Muslim League in Bengal.

Abul Hashim, the Secretary of the B.P.M.I. who was said to be a leftist observed in 1944: 'Big guns of the All India Muslim League in their speeches, press statements and discussions breathed fire on the Congress Party and their leaders and reciprocally the big guns of the Congress gave all sorts of bad names to the Muslim League
and Muslim League Leaders. This widened the gulf between the Muslims and the Hindus of India. I discussed this attitude and accordingly I advised Muslim League Leaders and workers in Bengal to shake off negative virtues and to place before the people positively the soundness of their own views in inoffensive language.\footnote{13} He further stated that he felt deeply the necessity to place before the people a manifesto with a view to organising and consolidating the ideas he preached in 1944 from the Muslim League platform. He prepared a draft manifesto of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. In his words: 'A very efficient young communist, Mr. Nikhil Chakravarty, very kindly helped me to prepare the draft. The draft was based on universal values of Islam preached and practised by the prophet of Islam and his faithful followers'.\footnote{14} But 'Khawaja Nazimuddin believed that I preached communism under the cover of Islam'.\footnote{15} He further said: 'Hamidul Huq Chowdhury remarked that the word 'Manifesto' was a communist term. This was the reaction of the reactionaries of the Muslim League'.\footnote{16} The draft manifesto, however, urged upon all political parties to unite in the struggle for liquidating British rule in India.

The Government of India announced that a General Election would be held in India in the first quarter of 1946. Wavell said that both the Muslim League and the Congress professed themselves ready for a trial of strength. But he had doubts if the Congress was really very keen.\footnote{17} The Congress had grave difficulties in fighting the elections. It had been in wilderness for more than three years. Its organisation had broken down as many leaders and

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{13}{In Retrospection (Dacca, n.d.), p. 78.}
\item \footnote{14}{Ibid, p. 79.}
\item \footnote{15}{Ibid.}
\item \footnote{16}{Ibid, p. 80.}
\item \footnote{17}{Mansergh - Transfer of Power, vol. VI, p. 39.}
\end{itemize}
members were still in prison and its party fund had been sequestered by the Government. But the trial of the Indian soldiers of the INA gave a psychological boost to the Congress. There was great resentment at the prevention of the 'patriots' and wild popular demonstrations were held all over the country.\(^{18}\)

The Cabinet Mission with the object of preparing a plan to give independence to India arrived on January 5, 1946.

In the meantime all the parties started their election campaigns. They published their manifestos. The Central Election Board of the Congress issued a bulletin on January 6, 1946. It declared that the Congress stood vindicated and it was the biggest, strongest and most representative organisation in the country. In its manifesto it appealed to the voters all over the country to support its candidates and gave 'independence' pledge to the voters on January 26, 1946.\(^{19}\) Sarat Chandra Bose who had been in jail for a long time delivered a long speech in Calcutta on November 9, 1945 in Bengali while opening the Election Campaign for the Congress. He reiterated that the Congress was the only organisation which had been fighting for independence of India for the last 60 years. The Congress was against Pakistan and the 'communal organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League', far from doing anything for the independence of the country or remaining neutral, 'co-operated with the British Imperialism'.\(^{20}\) The Congress was anxious about the Scheduled Caste and Muslim Constituencies and greatly depended on the Scheduled Castes' support.


\(^{20}\) Sarat Chandra Bose, I Warned My Countrymen (Calcutta, 1968), pp. 54-55.
who numbered not less than 76 lakhs\textsuperscript{21} and in fact, a large section of them supported the Congress in the election. There was brisk preparation for it well ahead. On December 25, 1945 Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Secretary, Congress Central Election Board, wrote to Sarat Bose - 'Have you formed the Scheduled Caste election board as settled by us and has it been done without any difficulty?' He further wrote - 'you have to devote more time in the districts of Bengal and rural areas for creating a proper atmosphere in the Muslim constituencies and also to be more careful in selecting the Muslim candidates, so that the lessons learnt in the Central Assembly elections may not be lost on us'.\textsuperscript{22} Sarat Bose wired him in the affirmative.\textsuperscript{23}

The All India Muslim League decided to set up Provincial and Central Parliamentary Boards for nomination of Muslim League candidates for the General Election. Liaquat Ali Khan, Secretary General of the All India Muslim League came to Calcutta to discuss with members of the Working Committee of the Provincial Muslim League matters concerning the constitution of the Parliamentary Board. The Working Committee of the All India Muslim League decided that the Provincial Parliamentary Board would consist of nine members. The President of the Provincial Muslim League and the leader of the Provincial Parliamentary Party would be ex-officio members of the Parliamentary Board. Naturally Khwaja Nazimuddin and Akram Khan became members of the Board. One member from the lower-house and one from the upper-house would be elected to the Parliamentary Board by the members of the lower-house and upper-house respectively.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} The Census of India, 1941 (Bengal Volume) showed that they numbered 75, 9, 404.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid, Letter No. 473.
\end{itemize}
For the aspiration of membership to the Parliamentary Board, controversy and bitterness started in the Bengal Provincial League between the rightists and the leftists and even physical assault had taken place. The central figure was Suhrawardy. This has been narrated clearly by Abul Hashim, the Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League. In the election, the leftists succeeded, and Suhrawardy joined them at last.

Abul Hashim stated that Khwaja Nazimuddin requested him to take the responsibility of the office of the Secretary of the Parliamentary Board in place of Suhrawardy but he declined on the plea of incompetency. But he expressed his intention in the following words - 'We knew that if Muslim League succeeded in the General Election, the Secretary of the Parliamentary Board would be the leader of the Parliamentary party. We, the members of the Parliamentary Board, elected Mr. Suhrawardy the Secretary of the Board'.

Jinnah declared that the General Election of 1946 would be taken as plebiscite of the Muslims of India on 'Pakistan'. He did not place before the country any economic, social or any other political programme for the General Election. On September 6, 1945 Abul Hashim published a booklet - 'Let us go to war' which became the guideline for the election campaign of the Muslims of Bengal and Assam. The League claimed to be the only organisation of the 10 crores of Muslims of India. The General Election of 1946 had been called 'a pitched battle with the Congress'.

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26 Ibid, p. 97.
The Bengal League Parliamentary Board had 33 sittings for the selection of 119 candidates in the reserved seats for the Muslims. During this period the League felt the necessity of a strong Bengali weekly and the 'Millat' came out on Friday the 16th November 1945. Initially Abul Hashim was the formal editor of 'Millat' but young journalist Kazi Mohammed Idris was appointed working editor.

March 19 to 22 were fixed for the General Election in Bengal. The Muslim League achieved overwhelming victory in the Election. None of their candidates forfeited deposit. In the constituencies where the league had candidates 83.36 percent of the total votes were polled and in the general constituencies where there were Congress candidates, 75.2 per cent of the total votes had been polled. The Muslim League won 114 seats and it claimed the support of two independent Muslim members bringing its total strength to 116. The Congress had 86 members in the new Assembly. The 25 European members were intact.

The Governor, Fredrick Burrows invited Suhrawardy, Leader of the Muslim League on April 3, 1946 to form a cabinet. Suhrawardy accepted the invitation and sought co-operation of all the parties in the task before him, so that he could 'serve the province'; but he took some days to talk to the Congress leaders to form Coalition Government with them, inspite of the allegation of the Congress President Moulana Azad that 'provincial election in Bengal is a sordid story of corruption and official interference of the worst type'. Suhrawardy talked to Moulana Azad and Kiran Shankar

27 Election Results to the Bengal Legislative Assembly, A.I.C.C. Papers E.N.E.D.- 1/1946. K.W. II (Nehru Memorial Library)
28 Details of the Results in Appendix-IX.
29 The Statesman, April 3, 1946.
30 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, April 4, 1946.
30 The Statesman, April 3, 1946.
Ray, the Bengal Parliamentary Party leader for a few days over the question. The following directions were set out by the Congress Working Committee for Kiran Shankar Ray's talks with Suhrawardy:

1. Barring the premier, the number of the ministers from the Congress and the League Parties must be equal.

2. Either of the Home or the Civil Supplies portfolio must be allotted to a Congress Minister.

3. Establishment of an Anti-corruption Board.

4. Release of all categories of political prisoners convicted or otherwise.

5. Comprehensive steps for ameliorating hardships of the masses in respect of acuteness of cloth and food shortage, and


The talk for a League-Congress coalition ministry was welcomed by many. The prominent Congress legislator Nalinakshya Sanyal said in a press statement: 'People welcome the idea of a composite League-Congress Ministry because this only can ensure the proper type of a Cabinet Bengal needs .... Whatever may be outcome of the Delhi negotiations we the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal shall have to live and to die together on the soil of this Province. The lives and institutions of either community must be the sacred trust of the other.'

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32 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, April 15, 1946.
33 Ibid, April 16, 1946.
Congress-League Coalition Ministry in Bengal.  

The talk of a coalition ministry ultimately failed as the League could not agree either to equal number of Ministers or to give Home portfolio to the Congress. The issue of the release of political prisoners was also a point of difference. The entire correspondence was released to the Press on 22 and 23 April. According to some analysis, it seems that while Suhrawardy was serious to form a coalition ministry the Congress was not at all keen to do so. In fact the Congress High Command was not prepared to let the Bengal Congress Committee come to terms with the League, because that would give Bengal an opportunity to assert a greater measure of provincial autonomy which it (Congress High Command) could not afford to countenance. Suhrawardy, again tried to form a coalition ministry with the Congress in September 1946 and that move also failed.

After the failure of the talk of League-Congress coalition, Suhrawardy became the Chief Minister of Bengal on April 23, 1946 forming a Muslim League cabinet with only very minor Hindu support. The ministers and their respective portfolios were as follows:

1. H.S. Suhrawardy: Chief Minister, Home
3. Syed Muazzamuddin Hossain: Education
4. Ahmed Hossain: Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries
5. Abdul Gofran: Civil Supplies

34 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, April 16, 1946.
35 The Statesman, 1946.
36 Gautam Chattopadhyay, op. cit., p. 205.
The political scene of the country was changing rapidly and the Ministry had to work under a tense situation. It continued to function up to partition. The outgoing Governor Casey was already anxious to see that his successor Burrows might soon be facing in Bengal the situation he had always feared and tried assiduously to avoid: an exclusively Muslim ministry facing an exclusively Hindu opposition. Casey's hunch became true and the Muslim League was all powerful and dominating factor in the legislature. The Legislature however started to function. Its first programme was the passing of the budget and some bills were also passed, though many of them were matter of routine. Regarding other activities of the legislature, it can be seen that all the political and communal developments outside legislature did cast their shadows in the House.

Budgets: 1946-47, 1947-48

The spirit of projecting fiscal policy of the government had been gradually evaporating since the advent of the War. The Finance Ministers during the period were thrown in pitiable dilemma.

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The worst sufferer was Mohammad Ali, the new Finance Minister of the Muslim League Ministry, when he had to place the Budget for 1946-47 on July 24 in a precarious situation. The Governor had already prepared the Budget before the assumption of office of the new Ministry. The tone of the Budget was war-oriented par excellence. In the fourth month of the financial year, the Finance Minister had very little option. The income from the Revenue was 32 crores. The estimated expenditure would be 52 crores 20 lakhs. It was expected that ten crores and fifty lakhs would be available from the centre as aid to development programme. But a net deficit of ten crores could not be avoided.

In course of his speech the Finance Minister observed:

'... In regard to substance, the present estimate marks a noticeable departure from the budget of the previous years .... For the first time in her long and troublous history the province has been enabled, through the co-operation and assistance of the centre to embark upon a comprehensive and carefully thought out programme of development in every branch of nation-building activity, untramelled by paucity of resources'.

Besides the burden from the war and the famine, there was a devastating flood. However, in his opinion, the budgetary plans for the year seek to achieve more than the bare repair of ravages caused by flood, famine and war. They lay down the foundations for the great work of national reconstructions calling for united and devoted labour in the fields of Health, Agriculture, Commerce and Industry.'

Haripada Chatterjee of the Congress opened the discussion. In course of his speech in Bengali he strongly criticised the

41 Ibid, p. 35.
Finance Minister for allocating more funds for Civil Defence, Extra Police and Home Guard and allocating much less to developmental works. He was of the opinion that Civil Defence Department was a product of the war and expenses of the department should be borne by the British Government who are responsible for the war. Another Congress member Suresh Dasgupta questioned if the allotment of more police was aimed at the Direct Action Day on 16 August, 1946. He compared the allocations to 'Police' and 'Education'. Nisith Nath Kundu of the Opposition wanted to know that since there was such a wide gap between the procurement price and retail price of the rice, then why the Civil Supplies Department had been incurring such heavy losses. He also urged upon the government to release all political prisoners forthwith.

The most interesting speech on the Budget came not from the Opposition benches, but from a ruling party member. Abdus Sabur Khan of the Muslim League said: 'Perhaps it is just a custom to congratulate my talented friend the Finance Minister who has presented the budget but I hesitate to do it because it happens to be a Section 93 budget, which has taken a weak and uncertain shelter behind a popular Ministry. It has got all the follies, abject incompetency and the most heartless callousness towards public utilitarian aspects which are characteristic of Sec. 93 administration. I know my talented friend has within the short space of time at his disposal to improve. We realise his difficulties who is physically responsible to the popular will and support but morally depending on the benedictions of an alien Governor, so this budget cannot be a budget presented by a Ministry solely and exclusively responsible to the people of this province'.

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The Finance Minister in his reply did not hesitate to admit his constraints. As to the Opposition charges that the administration was top-heavy and there was no planning, he replied that it was because, "we are working within the four corners of the Government of India Act 1935. There are lot of limitations which have been imposed on us. We are not a sovereign body. Therefore much as we would like to do away with certain anomalies that exist and do away with high salaried officials. I must admit that we are unable to do so."\(^{43}\) Referring to Haripada Chatterjee he said that when Congress was in power in certain provinces, they also could not overcome these difficulties. In reply to Nisith Nath Kundu he said that the Government had to arrange storing facilities. The variation between procurement price and retail price could not be avoided particularly in view of the experiences from the famine. Regarding political prisoners his government had released all security prisoners including some of those who are arrested by a government which was manned at that time by friends and representatives of Mr. Kundu's party .... Apart from utter differences in the political situations in two and three provinces Mr. Kundu should realise that in other provinces, some of the Ministers have walked from the prison bars to the Secretariat and they have been able to release their friends and partymen. Whereas we are releasing them who are not our partymen. It is to the eternal credit of this Ministry that they appreciate the civil liberties of the people and they have been able to release all security prisoners*.\(^{44}\) In his reply, the Finance Minister claimed that no previous budget had ever embraced such activities and large scale development projects.

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In the Bengal Legislative Council while participating in
the budget discussion both Muslim League and Congress members
criticised the Civil Supplies Department most. Muslim League
member Sirajul Huq called it a 'civil denial' department. Congress
leader Kamini Kumar Datta opined that mere Zamindari abolition
would not do, productivity of the soil had to be increased. Former
Member of Viceroy's Council Azisul Huq was suggesting for an all
party advisory body to supervise the functioning of the Government
Departments.  

The Budget however, originally prepared by the Governor was
revised slightly by the Finance Minister. He was candid about his
limitations. In the same speech, however, he was boasting of an
unprecedented endeavour in every aspect of nation-building. But
it was revealed from the structure of the Budget as well as from
the speeches of the members including his party colleagues that
his claim was not sound. This Budget was remarkably a deficit
one. A minimum deficit of Rs. 10 crores was really a big gap by
any standard in 1946, particularly because when there was very
limited scope for income from investments. It is also worthwhile
mentioning that the government had to issue an ordinance on July 10,
that is, immediately before the budget, to collect money from cer-
tain taxes. Although the taxes on betting and totalisator's tax
were not new items, the government was not in a mood to wait for
the passing of the Budget.

There was however a unique change in the structure though
it would not have materially affected the budget as such. The
customary Revised Estimates of the preceding year had been re-
placed by Actual, which was compiled by the Accountant General.

45 BLCP, August 2 and 6, 1946.
It seems from the proceedings that the expenditure for the Departments like 'Extra Police' and 'Civil Supplies' were the major targets of the Opposition attacks. However the political situation in the country was in transition. The public opinion was more concerned with the political issues, rather than the metamorphic aspects of the Budget. It seems also that the honourable members had formalised the discussion with more or less stereotypical arguments and the debate was stale. Some other issues like release of political prisoners figured prominently during the general discussions on the Budget.

The discussions on the Budget for 1947-48 was indeed memorable, for it was the last event of this kind in the undivided province of Bengal and it was the last Budget under British subjugation. Five months after the passing of the budget, the province was partitioned and the separated parts became provinces of two sovereign states. Obviously the budgetary provisions lost their significance since then. But the psychosis behind the budget discussion really reflected the prevailing uncertainties as to the fate of the province and also mistrust tinged with communalism between the treasury benches and the Opposition. However, compared to previous year, the budget generated much enthusiasm amongst the members. No less than fifty members participated in the general discussions alone and it took five days in the Assembly (February 17, 25, 26, 27, 28).

The Finance Minister Mohammad Ali presented the Budget on February 17, 1947, that is, unlike the previous year, well ahead of the new financial year. He began his speech by referring to "the grave turmoil",\textsuperscript{46} that the province had been facing.

\textsuperscript{46} BLAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 272.
Notwithstanding the after effects of the war devastations, there were holocausts of riots inside and outside the province. These catastrophes created problems in the supply of foodstuff and other essential commodities and also affected the agriculture and industry. 'The disturbed conditions', the Finance Minister said, 'which prevailed in recent months have left their mark on the budgetary prospects of the year'. The revenue had fallen due to unsettled state of business, so much so that there was Rs. 50 lakhs fall in sale tax. Other notable fall was due to closure of country liquor shops. On the other hand the expenditure had to be increased for providing relief and rehabilitation of the riot-victims and also for the adequate arrangement of law and order.

He also mentioned the difficulties of obtaining suitable personnel and materials for which developmental works were being retarded.

Regarding financial position he said, 'total Revenue Estimate for the coming year is 47 crores 68 lakhs out of which 12 crores 42 lakhs represents grants from the centre on account of Development Projects'.

Mohammad Ali dwelt on why there was huge deficit in the budget. True to the tradition set up by his predecessors, he sought to explain that unless a new policy regarding distribution of revenue between the centre and the provinces was adopted, the chronic financial insolvency of Bengal could not be removed. He criticised the Neimeyer Award of 1936 and made it responsible for the difficulty. He felt that Bengal was deprived of her due share in Income Tax and Jute Duty. That apart, due to existing Permanent Settlement income from Land Revenue was much less compared to the other

47 BIAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 272.
provinces. The problem was all the more difficult for Bengal, due to the fact that it was an important Military base. He concluded by appealing to the House for 'United endeavour to attain our objective with the minimum loss of time' and requested the Opposition to forget for the moment the usual parliamentary obstructions.

Undaunted by the appeal, Bimal Coomar Ghosh of the Congress opened the general discussion with a scathing attack. He began his speech by pointing out that the Finance Minister himself had admitted the 'very disquieting' situation by adding an addendum of the Budget. He said that Bengal's 'sad financial plight' was not due to Neimeyer Award, nor war, nor inflation, but because of 'narrow and short-sighted communal policy pursued by the government'.

Taking the clue from B.C. Ghose, Shyama Prasad Hookerjee charged the Ministry that it 'has not only remained soaked in communalism, but has been corrupt, inefficient extravagant and thoughtless of the welfare of the province as a whole'. During his speech much of communal passions had been generated in both sides of the House when he said, 'It has been repeatedly stated by the Opposition that Bihar incidents had been due to our activities but forget not that Bihar incidents had taken place on account of Noakhali and Calcutta. A warning has come from Bihar and unless members opposite come to their senses, there will be many more Bihar enacted which will be catastrophic to the Muslim League'. He also said that the Government had communalised the

50 Ibid, p. 405.
51 Ibid, p. 408.
52 Ibid, p. 411.
education and as far instance Rs. 10 lakhs grant to the Calcutta University had been taken away. But an English daily commented: 'critics may deplore education treated on communal lines, but when certain communities are educationally backward, the province as a whole suffers if special efforts are not made on their behalf'.

A.J. Mazharul Haque of the ruling party wanted to point out the merit of the Budget by saying that inspite of heavy deficit, there was no new taxation. But although he supported the Budget, he did not hesitate to say that 'very little has been done for the poor and the peasantry of Bengal' and it was urban-oriented with priority to the officers. Suresh Chandra Banerjee regarded the Budget as 'a new chapter of Direct Action'. The Muslim League member Fazlur Karim charged the Government that they were neglecting religious education by ignoring old scheme Madrasas and instead encouraging new scheme Madrases. Fazlur Quadir of the ruling party dwelt with the educational problems of the Muslims. He urged upon the government to pay special attention to the education of the Muslim girls. According to Abdul Momin the grants made to the Muslim institutions was 'an eye-wash of the government for Noakhali and Tippera police 'Zulum', a tactful attempt to pacify and curb the student community'. While extending general support to the Budget, J.H. Methold of the European party echoed with the voice of the Opposition and said that the expenditure on Civil Supplies Department was excessive.

54 BIAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 413.
Participating in the Budget discussions Mukunda Behari Mallick, the scheduled caste member, mentioned to the 'pitiable lot of the poor scheduled castes who have been suffering as a result of various mischievous propensities of different political organisations in the country'. He also blamed the Cabinet Mission on this count. The budgetary provisions, he felt, were not satisfactory to the scheduled castes.

Sharifuddin Chowdhury in a sharp speech accused the Congress leader Bimal Coomar Ghose that as if his speech was a brief of the Government of India. He also regretted that the Hindu Maha-sabha leader S.P. Mookerjee had 'spoiled his great speech' for his communal overtone. He expected 'more and better guidance' from the ex-Finance Minister of the Province. Bimal Chandra Sinha of the Congress charged the Finance Minister that he could not keep any of the promises he made in the last year's budget. Regarding communalism in the administration he reminded the government, with the words: 'this spirit of Aurangzeb will give rise to the spirit of Shivaji in pulling down the dream empire of Aurangzeb as actually happened centuries ago'. Muhammad Habibulla Chowdhury defended the Budget and reminded the House the constraints with which the Finance Minister had to work. According to him the miseries of Bengal were due to the policy of the Central Government, and also for the Meston and Neimeyer Awards. He also made a scathing attack on the zamindars, money-lenders and officers, all of whom, he charged, were related with the Opposition. The scheduled caste members Banka Behari Mondal, Joydeb Chandra Das and Mohini Mohan Barman accused the Government for their neglect of the rural

56 BLAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 460.
57 Ibid, p. 463.
areas in general and the interests of their community in particular.

Jyoti Basu of the communist Party characterised the Budget as bureaucratic. He could not agree with other opposition members that it was a Muslim Budget; for 90% of the Muslims used to live in the villages and they had been utterly neglected. Niharendu Dutta Majumdar criticised the Government for the distraction of handloom textiles and artisans of rural Bengal. He also characterised the Budget as a step to the 'Pakistanisation of Bengal'. Hemanta Kumar Bose pointed out that the agrarian troubles were common features in number of districts and that had taken an aggressive shape in Dinajpur.

While the discussions on the Budget were going on, the Leader of the Opposition Kiran Shankar Roy instead of participating in the budget discussion as such made a statement in the House on February 28 on the food situation in the province and also on the activities of the Muslim National Guards. He said that the price of rice had been going up at an alarming rate in the villages and the villagers had started to shift to the towns. He also said that the presence of private Army as Muslim National Guard had been creating fear psychosis. At this time the Chief Minister H.S. Suhrawardy said that government was quite alert with the food situation and adequate measures had been already taken. He denied that Muslim National Guard was a private Army, it was just a voluntary organisation. He also reminded the House with the words: 'We are undoubtedly on the verge of independence and it is essential that we must prepare ourselves for it'.

59 BIAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 516.
60 Ibid, p. 529.
J.R. Walker of the European Party did not agree with the Opposition that the Budget was a communal one. The government, according to him, had a definite bias for the upliftment of the masses and it had an appropriate rural bias. Dhirendra Nath Dutta referred to the statement of the British Prime Minister Attlee on February 20 and referred to a 'new responsibility'. He urged upon the government to tear the budget up and 'prepare for a new budget for the united Bengal'.

The Finance Minister in his reply rejected the allegations of Congress leader Bimal Coomar Ghose by stating that Niemeyer 'had the question of financial stability of the centre at the back of his mind and he did not consider the question of financial stability of the provinces'. Again he said, 'The Income Tax paid by Bengal in 1945-46 amounted to Rs. 17 crores and Jute duty to Rs. 2.18 lakhs. If we had 'this money, our financial difficulties would have been over'. He also said that if Bengal was free from the control of the centre and had no obligation to the centre, she would have been financially stable. Refuting B.C. Ghosh he emphatically stated that Bengal suffered most due to the war. The Finance Minister admitted to S.P. Mookerjee's charge that the budget reflected the mind of the Muslim League, 'The Muslim League' he said, 'was put to power by the people of this province. They had a definite programme and a definite manifesto. They placed the programme before the country and the Muslim of Bengal .... We have been put into power by the people and we have framed a budget according to the needs of the province .... Each and every item is being honoured by us ....'

61 BLAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 541.
63 Ibid, p. 543.
64 Ibid, p. 544.
that soon the bills for liquidation of Permanent Settlement and Restructuring of Secondary Education would be coming. He mentioned that although the Muslims contributed the 56% of the Bengal's population, they were not even 25% in schools and colleges. So it was necessary for a special encouragement to them. He also stated that Islamia College would be nucleus of future Muslim University. He was happy that Walker had appreciated the rural bias of the budget, though some of his party members like Mazharul Haque could not. He admitted the Opposition charges that Civil Supplies Department was top heavy. But since it was created during the emergency of war there was no way out but a cabinet sub-committee had been set up at that time to affect possible retrenchment. He denied Fazlur Karim's charge that the old scheme Madrassas were being neglected. While appreciating Suresh Dasgupta's suggestion to consult the members before placing budget, he regretted that it was not feasible since they were working within the bounds of parliamentary system. Before he finished, he reminded the members that they 'are in the threshold of a new constitutional era' and expressed his hope, 'with so much co-operation from all sections of the house we can built up a better Bengal so that we can go ahead with all our programme for the development of the province'.

Unlike the budget of the previous year, the budget for 1947-48 was a total budget of the Muslim League Ministry. Though within the orbit of the Government of India Act 1935, the Finance Minister Mohammad Ali did not hesitate to demonstrate their policy and programme through the budget. The budget discussion was a lively one. The partition of the country had become imminent. The fate of

65 BIAP, vol. 72, No. 1, p. 553.
Bengal was hanging! The whole environment was vitiated by communal virus. There had already been the great Calcutta killing, the Noakhali and Bihar riots. During budget discussions there came Attlee's announcement which gave the indication that early transfer of power was going to take place. Every politically conscious being was concerned with the future shape of the country, more particularly that of Bengal. It should be mentioned that the Muslim League practically monopolised the Muslim seats. At the time of the budget session, the Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru was already there. The Congress members, it seems, felt it a solemn duty to defend that government. It might be that they had a fear at their back of mind that Bengal might not be within India. Unlike the thirties and early forties they did not join issue with the treasury benches for more resources for Bengal. So while the ruling party members including the Finance Minister were blaming Nimeyer Award for the economic distress of Bengal, the Opposition voiced their feeling by saying that it was a scapegoat for the inefficiency and corruption of the government.

The Finance Minister was determined to offer some additional privileges to the Muslims in the administration and education. Yet some of his party members thought that it was an eye-wash. But the Opposition Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha bitterly criticised the Government for this partisan attitude. They found it to be a step towards 'Pakistanisation of Bengal'. It appeared from the speeches of the Assembly members, that their identities as Muslims, caste Hindus, Schedule Castes, Europeans were more important than their party affiliations. But there were many members within the Congress, particularly who had
affiliations with Forward Bloc, Congress Socialist, and outside the Congress, the Communists who tried to overcome the communal passions to a large extent. There were many shades of opinion within Muslim League also. Some members sought to project that they represented the peasantry and the workers and the Congress represented the feudal aristocracy. Following the speeches, particularly of the ruling party it appears that whatever pro-Muslim attitude might be reflected in the Budget it was not really meant for the poorer Muslim masses living in the rural areas. The Statesman also observed that many members criticised the Budget for lack of 'constructive approach'. Even Muslim League members, though supporting the Finance Minister on the provisions of money for the advancement of Muslim education criticised him for absence of any plan for the industrial and agricultural development of north and east Bengal. So, whatever might be the nomenclature of the Budget, there was no fundamental structural deviation from the oligarchic tradition.

Legislations

Many of the legislations of Bengal legislature between July 1946 and May 1947 were not of controversial character in general and naturally did not face much opposition. Some Bills placed before the House and passed and these were the following - The Bengal Finance (Extending) Bills, 1946 (passed on July 27) The Calcutta Improvement (Howrah Amendment) Bill, 1946 (raised and passed on August 7, 1946); The Bengal Motor Spirit Sales Taxation (Amendment) Bill 1946 (passed on August 12, 1946); The Bengal Special Tribunals Continuance Bill 1946 (passed on September 1946); The Bengal Local

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Self-Government Association (Recognition Amendment) Bill, 1946 (passed on April 19, 1947); The Bengal Ordinance Temporary Enactment Bill, 1947 (passed on February 24, 1947).

The Bengal Non-Agricultural Tenancy Bill, 1946 was the important one and it was sent to the Select Committee. The Bill dealt with the legal status of the non-agricultural tenants and while placing the Bill in the House on August 3, 1946, the Minister Saiyed Muazzamuddin Hossain said, 'This is a bill which has been hanging fire for more than five years'. So, he urged that it should be taken into account as soon as possible. The Bill was passed unanimously by the House on May 9, 1947 and received congratulation for the Government by the Opposition. The opposition member Dhirendra Nath Datta said, 'This is a Bill which gives rights to the tenants and we always seek to extend our co-operation to the government when they take up any Bill which intends to give rights to the poor tenants'.

Though the Bargadar Bill was not placed in the Assembly it was of greater importance and created much excitement and enthusiasm. In 1940 the Land Revenue Commission had recommended two-third share of the crop per bargadars (share croppers) and in the same year the Kishan Sabha accept 'tebhaga' (two-third share) as a matter of policy at its annual session at Panjia. But at subsequent sessions no further progress was made on the issue. In September 1946 the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha decided to launch the 'tebhaga' movement in harvesting season. Sunil Sen, a participant in the same movement of Dinajpur district and a historian now, has written: 'Three months after the great Calcutta Killing and one month after the Noakhali riots, Bengal was in the vortex

of the Tebhaga Struggle. In the winter of 1946, the sharecroppers took the paddy to their thrashing floor and demanded two thirds share instead of half.\textsuperscript{69} Between December 1946 and January 1947 this movement spread to 19 districts of Bengal. But the progress of the movement was extremely uneven in the district.\textsuperscript{70} Gautam Chattopadhyay has said that bulk of the 10 million share croppers of East, North and Coastal Bengal were downtrodden rural poor Muslims, scheduled caste Hindus and tribal people, who were fighting for their rights to land and the crop, for human dignity and social rights, and against powerful and ferocious land sharks, the Jotedars (Kulaks) of Bengal both Muslims and caste Hindus. But the 'uneven' character of the 'tebhaga' movement as observed by Sunil Sen has also been explained by a young scholar who has said, 'It had taken the form of a fairly spontaneous and general movement in the Winter of 1946-47 only in the North Bengal district of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri and the reclaimed areas of the 24 Parganas in the South. ... Wide regions of east Bengal and west and central Bengal remained virtually unaffected by any sort of bargadars disaffection. A combination of structural constraints and the exigencies of the political situation explain the absence of any tebhaga movement in these regions'.\textsuperscript{72}

The mofussil leadership of the Congress was generally hostile to the 'tebhaga movement' because they came mostly from jotedar ranks. A big section of the Muslim League including the Revenue Minister Fazlur Rahaman were of the opinion that tebhaga ought to be conceded. In the first week of January 1947

\textsuperscript{69} Sunil Sen, Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47 (New Delhi, 1972), Preface.
\textsuperscript{71}
\textsuperscript{72} Sugata Bose, Agrarian Bengal (Bombay, 1987), p. 269.
the Revenue Minister confronted the Governor with a draft ordinance proposing to reduce the share paid by the bargadar from half to one third and to protect him from eviction. The Governor refused to issue the ordinance. Then it was decided that a bill should be brought before the Assembly. Accordingly a notification of the Bargadar's Temporary Regulation Bill, 1947 was issued. The main provisions of the Bill commonly known as Bargadar or Tebhaga Bill were as follows:

'where the jotedar supplied plough-cattle, plough and other agricultural implements and manure, the bargadar would get only half share of the produce, but if the jotedar did not supply these inputs the bargadars would be entitled to two-thirds share. Seeds would be shared according to who supplied it. The jotedar could evict bargadars on specific grounds: if he wanted to cultivate the land himself or with the aid of his family, if there has been any misuse of the land of if he (Bargadar) has failed to deliver to the owner such share of the produce as he is bound, subject to the provisions of this act'.

The news of the Tebhaga Bill gave tremendous fillip to the adhikar agitation in north Bengal.

Sugata Bose has pointed out that the implacable hostility of about 40 Muslim League MLAs who were rich jotedars ensured that the Government would never be able to introduce the Bargadar Bill in the legislature. The jotedars of North Bengal reacted to the looting of paddy from their Kholians (yard) by lodging charge of 'dacoity'. There was alleged lawlessness because of agricultural situation. During the budget discussions in the Assembly the

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74 Ibid.
Chief Minister H.S. Suhrawardy made a long statement on February 28 in which the point of agrarian struggle was referred to the suppressing lawlessness of the province. He first referred to strikes and disturbances which were taking place since 1946 and then he dwelt upon the agrarian struggles which intensified lawlessness. Extracts of his speech are reproduced here:

... There is not merely a general wave of unrest but of lawlessness and defiance of authority .... The unrest has also spread among the cultivators fortunately in a few restricted areas, where it has taken the form of tebhaga movement, in others, of non-payment of tanka rent and in still others of catching fish without authorisation from bheels or non-payment of chowkidari tax and agricultural loans .... Parallel trial courts have been set up .... Lands are being cultivated by force in cases side by side with jotedars .... Fortunately, as I have stated it is confined only to a few areas of Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Jalpaiguri, although some slight rumblings can be heard elsewhere.

'Between the 7th and the 17th of February 14 cases of paddy looting were reported in two unions of Balurghat Thana. I am not referring to the flood of telegrams which have been pouring in from these areas complaining of looting from the house of various jotedars, I am referring to those which have been investigated. This looting which has been done more or less on a mass scale was a result of constant propaganda inculcating a spirit of lawlessness'.

The League Ministry however defended all acts of massive repression on the sharecroppers and the Chief Minister explained that as it was the era of independence so they should proceed

steadily and constitutionally to reap the fruits of independence. The Congress benches were silent. Thus ended the Bargadar Bill episode.

The Bengal state Acquisition and Tenancy Bill, 1947 was introduced by the Government on April 21. The Revenue Minister Fazlur Rahaman said, 'I only fervently wish that on the eve of regaining our national independence the honourable members will rise to the occasion and support government in liquidating one of the first and worst legacies of a foreign rule which like the octopus spread its malevolent influence on every aspect of our national life for such a long period'.77 The Government planned for 'reconstruction of rural life and improvement of agriculture'.78 So measures were proposed 'for providing the cultivators with economic holdings'.79 The Revenue Minister stated: '... the interests of raiyat and under raiyat in lands under their khas possession should not be disturbed'.80 But there was not a single provision in the Bill that dealt with the rights of the bargadars. In the name of protecting the interests of the tenants the Bill only sought to maintain the jotedari system. In fact, the jotedar, who was a raiyat, had acquired land and turned it over to barga cultivation. The League ministry based on the jotedars was not expected to champion the cause of the bargadars. Sunil Sen has commented: 'It is curious that Jyoti Basu as the Communist spokesman in the Assembly welcomed 'the general principles in the Bill' which did not concede the tebhaga demand'.81 The Bill, however, was referred to the select committee and there it remained until

77 BLAP, vol. 72, No. 3, p. 133.
78 Ibid, p. 130.
79 Ibid, p. 131.
80 Ibid, April 21, 1947.
81 Peasant Movement in India (Calcutta, 1982), p. 118.
it was finally shelved with the coming of independence.

Others Activities

Besides discussions on budgets and legislations the House was also busy with business arising out of food crisis and political and communal situations. The first session of the new Assembly sat on July 14 to elect the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. There was contest for the posts and the League members won due to their absolute majority. Khan Bahadur Nurul Amin and Tofazzal Hossain were elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively. But press reported that in the first day there was no 'noticeable enthusiasm in the Assembly in striking contrast to the atmosphere which prevailed both in the lobby and inside the Chamber, when the first Fazlul Huq ministry faced for the first time the last Assembly' and the reason might be that 'though outwardly the League party presents spectacle of solid strength there seemed to have an atmosphere of uncertainty about the present composition of the ministry'. In the first day of the second session (budget session) on July 24, Bimal Chandra Sinha of the Congress raised an adjournment motion on the rise of prices of rice. Before this Surendra Mohan Ghose, the president of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee first warned 'the government for their failure to prevent the rise in prices of rice all over Bengal' and second 'that the people are not in a mood to tolerate a second famine in Bengal'. From the last part of May and in most part of June and July there was constant warning on the abnormal rise of prices of rice and 'the spectre of famine in Bengal'. B.C. Sinha in his adjournment motion in the Assembly, however, expressed great anxiety

82 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 15, 1946.
83 Ibid, May 18, 1946.
on the matter and said that this reminded the great famine of 1943. He said, 'starvation on a fairly wide scale has already begun. There are large areas where people are living on 'Kachu and jack-fruits ... people die on starvation'.

While seconding the motion Suresh Chandra Banerjee said that he had recently visited parts of Bengal and had witnessed the terrible distress prevailing amongst the masses owing to the high prices of rice and paddy. But much expected fire works were lacking in the food debate which was thoroughly dull and was participated by backbenchers. The new members, however succeeded in raising both the tune and the quality of the debate. Jyoti Basu's 'brilliant and sober observations' on the problem, Protap Chandra Guha Roy's 'forceful and effective crusade' against the Food Department and ruling party MLA Abdus Sabor's 'masterly report and tactic in canalising the debate', though opposing the motion, were much impressive and well received. Saboor said that the deterioration of food situation was due to the food policy of canalising was like this: 'I fully admit that the food policy enunciated and pursued section 93 government'. So he urged upon that 'this policy should be discouraged by all means and a new policy should be adopted. The next three months will be a crying time for Bengal so it will be dangerous for us now to launch into any long term plan on food.'

Khan Bahadur Abdul Gafiran, the Minister of Civil Supplies faced the House confidently this time though there were constant challenges hurdled on him and the House refused to accept his price-index. He categorically showed the proportionate rise of prices of rice in surplus, self-sufficient and deficit districts respectively. Finally he said, 'while it is not claimed that government

84 BLAP, vol. 71, No. 1, pp. 48-49.
have supplied foo-grains to everyone and it is conceded that the scale of distribution in non-rationed areas has been lower than the optimum and while therefore, certain amount of hardship has undoubtedly been caused, the stocks in the hands of government have been so utilised that every poor family within an area of shortage and high prices had received enough to be able to subsist. The motion on the rise of prices of rice, however, was lost by 125 to 86 votes. Immediately after this, Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar from the Opposition benches cried - 'What is the business now Sir? Will there be a price-distribution after this'? This comment reflected the occasional light mood of the House.

On July 26, the following uncommon resolution was moved by Tofazzal Ali of the ruling party in the House:

'The Assembly is of opinion that an humble address be presented to His Excellency the Governor of Bengal through the Honourable Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly requesting His Excellency to convey to His Excellency the Governor General of India the emphatic protest of this Assembly against the eviction of the Bengal immigrants in different parts of the Assam Valley and urges upon His Excellency the Governor General of India to issue a directive on His Excellency the — Governor of Assam to stop this eviction of the helpless Bengali immigrants in Assam and to rehabilitate those persons whose hearths and homes have been destroyed along with other belongings'.

The mover appealed to abolish the line system in Assam which he characterised 'was a replica of the Pegging Act of South Africa'.

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid (July 26, 1946).
and had 'legal aspect, economic aspect and moral aspect'. He mentioned that an address to the Governor of Bengal was made by the upper House on March 16, 1943 to abolish 'this very line system of Assam, and that 'was passed unanimously and agreed to even by my friends who occupy the other side of the House in this chamber'. Tofazzal Ali also explained the line system with the words: 'Sir the 'line system' is a sort of demarcation. A line has been drawn at a certain place beyond which the immigrants from Bengal are not allowed to acquire land either by purchase, grant or settlement and what is more as founding even by marriage. If an immigrant marries an Assamese girl the Children of that marriage, because of the line system will not be able to inherit the property of the mother, even though under the personal law of the mother the children are heirs of the legacy of the mother'.

The resolution as it was framed gave rise to a series of points of order from the Opposition. As regards its admissibility much time elapsed before the motion was allowed for consideration. Niharendra Dutta Majumdar contended that under the Assembly's Procedure and Rules the Speaker was not empowered to allow discussion of a motion of this description on Friday, which was fixed for transaction of non-official business. That would be an encroachment on the privilege of members. Raising another point of order J.C. Gupta argued that as the motion did not relate to a subject concerned with the Bengal Government it was inadmissible. Moreover the motion sought to present an address to the Governor and to request him to ask the Governor-General to issue a directive to the Ministry of Assam. J.C. Gupta said that under the Act of 1935 the Governor General was not empowered to issue any directive.

90 BLAP, vol. 71, No. 1, p. 90.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
to any Ministry in relation to subjects within the Ministerial sphere. The Speaker disposed of the first point of order by ruling that the matter did not come within the definition of resolutions referred to by Niharendra Dutta Majumdar and as regards the second one it was said that any matter that concerned the sufferings of Bengalis should receive the sympathetic consideration of the legislature. While allowing that the motion was in order the Speaker Nurul Amin appealed to all sections of the House to see that the proceedings were conducted without heat and acrimony.

Then the mover of the resolution, Tofazzal Ali while crossing his time limit (15 minutes) asked for more time Niharendra Dutta Majumdar requested the Speaker to give the mover more time, to 'place his whole case before the House because it needs very careful consideration. The subject is grave and the House ought to get the fullest scope to discuss it'. A.M.A. Zaman was constantly interrupted by the League members when he rose to oppose the motion. He made the previous Sadulla Ministry responsible for the 'line system' about which Tofazzal Ali already said that he did not spare even the effiminates in the Cabinet headed by Syed Mohammed Sadullah. Habibulla Chowdhury of the Muslim League congratulated Tofazzal Ali for moving the motion first and he said that the problem which they were discussing was deeply connected with the economic, political and all other types of problems of Bengal. Habibulla Chowdhury also explained that how the peasants of Bengal were being invited to Assam and how did they make barren lands fertile and did grow more food cutting jungles. At that time a type of Zamindars, money-lenders and capitalists felt that if in this way a numberless 'projas' (peasants) of Bengal would come to Assam then

their exploitation and exaction would be hampered. So in collusion with the British bureaucracy they made an order passed on line system. This was neither the order of the Government nor the law of the Assam council. This was the executive order of the district officials. This system was resisting not only the Bengalis but also the people of Sylhet to go to Assam or to acquire land there who were known as Bengali Assamese. Then Habibulla asked the House to seriously take up the question of giving relief to suffering Bengalis and defending their rights and culture in Assam. Jyoti Basu ridiculed the idea that an appeal should be made to the Viceroy and the Governors for the redress of a grievance of this nature. The resolution was still under discussion when the Assembly rose for the day and it remained inconclusive.

The communal question and communal disturbances which were in high peak during this time were the direct corollary of the decision of the Cabinet Mission and the Pakistan movement. The decision of the Mission was announced on May 16, 1946. It proposed to divide India into three groups of states - (A) the Hindu majority provinces (Madras, Bombay, Central province, United provinces, Bihar and Orissa), (B) the Muslim majority provinces (Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Baluchisthan and Sind) and (C) Bengal and Assam — which were to frame constitution of themselves. So they were to set up a constitution body through their own representatives and in the meantime the representatives of the main political parties would form an Interim Government at the centre, under the Viceroy. After the finalisation of the constitution for independent India the final transfer of power would take place.

The Congress and the Muslim League had mixed reactions to the plans of the Cabinet Mission. The Congress welcomed it because it rejected the Pakistan proposal and recommended for scheme based on the concept of a united India, but was highly critical of the system of grouping and the delay in the transfer of power. The Muslim League on the other hand, expressed resentment because there was no scheme for Pakistan, but welcomed the Grouping Scheme. Through much heated debate the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on June 25, 1946 and accepted the long-term plan of the Cabinet Mission. Regarding the acceptance of the Constituent Assembly Jawaharlal Nehru observed on July 10, 'What we do there, we are entirely and absolutely free to determine, the Assembly itself being a sovereign body'.

The Muslim League was not happy with the situation. So on July 19, the Council of the All India Muslim League in Bombay adopted a resolution to take direct action against the British Government for the achievement of Pakistan. After the Council had adopted the Direct Action Resolution, leaders of the League coming from all parts of India ceremoniously relinquished titles conferred upon them by the British Government and promised their unqualified support for Jinnah. The Working Committee of the League declared August 16 as a Direct Action Day. It instructed the Muslims to suspend all business on the 16th of August and observe complete hartal and directed provincial and district Leagues to hold public meetings throughout the country on that day to explain the resolutions.

95 Mansergh, op.cit., vol. VIII, Document No. 16.
The observance of 'Direct Action Day' followed by the Calcutta riots called as the 'Great Calcutta Killing' was of vital significance for the League and the Congress of Bengal. In fact throughout the second half of 1946 and the first quarter of 1947 communal strife raged bitterly all over Bengal. There was virtual Civil War for the time being. Members of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities lost sense for some time. The Sikhs also created more havoc by controlling the transportation in the city. The Calcutta killing was the focal point in the press and in the Assembly. The League was made responsible for it, and it was blamed for declaring holiday on 16th August. It was characterised as the League's 'Direct Action Day Sequel'. But Abul Hashim, the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League said: 'The Muslim League had no knowledge, no apprehension and no anticipation as to the unprecedented violence that started in the morning and continued in the afternoon of the 16th of August when we were all in the midst of the meeting held at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument. The Muslims were unarmed and unprepared to meet the situation. Men may lie but circumstances never lie. I brought from Burdwan with me my two sons Badruddin Mohammed Omar, a boy of 15 and Shahabuddin Mohammed Ali, a boy of 8 to show them the great gathering that was expected on the occasion at Calcutta. I took my sons to the Maidan and Lal Miah of Faridpur took his grandson aged six or seven. If we apprehended any danger we would not have taken our sons and grandsons to the Maidan'. In his letter to P. Lawrence, Secretary of State, the Governor of Bengal

96 BLAP, vol. 71, No. 3 (Sept. 12, 13, 20, 1946 - Many opposition members blamed the Ministry for this).
97 The Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 17, 1946.
F. Burrows justified the declaration of August 16 as Government holiday with the following words:

'The decision of my Ministry to declare a holiday under the Negotiable Instrument Act on August 16 has been a matter of some controversy ... But the decision was taken with my full knowledge and approval, you will recall that I mentioned the point to you at Delhi on August 8th ... If shops and markets had been generally open, I believe that there would have been even more looting and murder than there was, the holiday gave the peaceable citizens the chance of staying at home'.

The Chief Minister H.S. Suhrawardy in reply to Opposition's no-confidence motion against him and against his Ministry stated:

'The 16th August had been declared by me a holiday. That was done for the purpose of minimizing conflicts but the Hindu newspapers and leaders deliberately interpreted it in a different lights and exhorted their young men to oppose it in all possible way'.

The second session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly (1946) was deeply disturbed over the communal situation arising out of the Calcutta riots. Two motions of no-confidence against the League Ministry and the Chief Minister were moved by Dhirendranath Datta and Bimal Coomar Ghose respectively and those were accepted for discussion. The Chief Minister, Suhrawardy readily commented:

'I am glad that the House has given this opportunity to the members of the House to discuss the cataclysm which overtook Calcutta and which we all deplore. I am glad Sir, because this gives me an opportunity to place before this House as well as before the

country the events which have taken place so that the House may be able to judge for itself. Whether the remarks made in the paper against me and the Ministry are justified or not. D.N. Datta blamed the government that as custodian of laws 'they themselves are breakers of law and also made the people to break the law' and secondly the police and Executive Officers failed 'to do their duties of maintaining law and order and the Council of Ministers can not escape responsibility and they are stand condemned'.

Bimal Coomar Ghose admitted that he was 'impressed by the colour­ful personality of the Chief Minister' and mentioned 'the large­hearted and courageous manner in which he had handled two incidents - one connected with the demonstration for the release of political prisoners and the other with the arrest of a member of this House'. So to move the motion against that personality was 'painful' to him. His speech was divided into three parts - first description of certain facts up to August 15, second four catastrophic days (16-19) and third aftermath of Calcutta's terrible ordeal and 'the interests of the future political and economic well being of the province itself' for which 'the Chief Minister must vacate his high office'.

Regarding the members of the Congress benches the ruling party member Abul Hashim said, 'if they could rise above their own peculiar interests and could see things objectively and make an analysis of the grievances of the Muslims in a dispassionate attitude, they would have, instead of bringing a motion of no-confidence against this Ministry particularly against the Home Minister and the Chief Minister, the Hon'ble Mr. Suhrawardy, brought a motion of

102 Ibid, p. 96.
103 Ibid, pp. 96-97.
confidence in him ... I hear from the Congress benches one of our friends charging Mr. Suhrawardy for making the Commissioner of Police a scapegoat. I feel a thousand pity because in the ordinary course of business one could never expect the members of the Congress, representing a great organisation which during recent years held aloft the torch of revolution and independence in India to say things like this and plead in defence of the bureaucratic machinery of the Government. 104

While supporting the motions Ishwar Das Jalan of the Opposition emphasized 'that so far as the Government of Bengal is concerned, it had failed to preserve law and order, not only in a lane or a bye lane but in the broadest streets of Calcutta, not only for an hour or two but for days together' 105 and he asked that while Suhrawardy was in the Control Room why such catastrophe happened? Protap Guha Roy also described the horrible scene of Calcutta. The Minister Shamsuddin Ahmed mainly quoted the Basumati of 4th, 10th and 14th August which provoked communalism. Ganendra Bhattecharjee blamed the Ministry for their corruption, inability and partiality. Bijoy Krishna Sarkar said that the ordinary Muslim youth did not support it but the whole responsibility laid on the interested Muslim League leaders. Nisith Nath Kundu accused the Ministry for it and the inactivity of the Police. Niharendu DuttaMajumder said that if the 'not guilty plea of the Chief Minister is to be taken as true, that plea would be tantamount to placing Governor Burrows and the Commissioner of Police on the dock.' 106 Jyoti Basu commented that the British Imperialists in India were the main criminals for the communal riot and asked that what were

105 Ibid, p. 103.
the secret plans discussed at the Governor's Conference presided over by the Viceroy after which the Sind Governor disallowed the declaration of holiday on August 16 and the Bengal Governor did the contrary in Calcutta. Regarding the responsibility of the Governor Gautam Chottopadhyay has quoted the interview of an eminent historian with Francis Tucker, then G.O.C. of the Eastern Command. Tucker declared, 'The police cannot be held responsible for the delay in calling in the troops. They asked for military help as early as 2 p.m. on the first day. As a result of this request the Governor, Sir Francis Burrows, made a tour of the city ... and decided that the time had not yet come for military aid ... The police again urged that the military should be called immediately. A second drive through the city was made during the evening of the first day of rioting, after which it was decided that the situation still did not warrant the use of troops ... From August 19th the situation was under control and all that was left for the army to do was to carry out the terrible task of cleaning the streets of the bodies of the victims of the killing'.

Any way the Government and the Chief Minister were bitterly attacked by stalwarts like Shyamaprasad Mookerjee in his long speech. The extract of his speech was like this: 'What happened is not the result of sudden explosion but it is the culmination of an administration, inefficient corrupt and communal which has disfigured the life of this great province .... The Muslim League, the spoilt and pampered child of the British imperialists for the last thirty years, was disowned for the first time by the British Labour Government .... We are pole asunder .... What we witnessed

in Calcutta was not an ordinary communal riot: its motive was political .... Now if the Muslims of Bengal under the leadership of the Muslim League feel that they can exterminate the Hindus, that is a fantastic idea which can never be given effect to, three and a half crores can never exterminate three crores nor can three crores exterminate three and half crores .... M.A.H. Ispahani of the League hold the press particularly the 'Hindu press' 'substantially responsible for the unfortunate and regrettable happening in Calcutta for four days'. The League member Mohammad Habibulla Chowdhury made the Wavell plan and the Cabinet Mission wholly responsible for the situation and alleged the leaders of the Congress as puppets of the British Imperialism.

The member of the Anglo-Indian Group G.C.D. Wilks's voice in the House was quite different and it seems to be a brilliant one free from the bias of the Opposition. He strongly condemned the 'complete breakdown of government machinery for the maintenance of law and order 'during the ill-fated days of last month'. He felt anxious about the fate of the province in the event of the 'present Ministry falling'. Then he continued that an alternative to this Ministry was the enforcement of section 93 Government. This enforcement would be disastrous to the province. Bengal had just emerged from an administration of this type and its ills had hardly left the province. Then he said: 'our country is on the eve of independence and we therefore must strive at all costs to uphold a parliamentary form of government. Reversion to section 93 therefore would put the clock back a hundred years'. So he requested the members with the words: 'A change of heart rather than a change of leadership is required to save Bengal from anarchy.

109 BLAP, vol. 71, No. 3, pp. 139-146.
110 Ibid, p. 130.
Therefore, I call upon the present Ministry and all honourable members of the House to save what goodwill there is left and to go all out to form a coalition - a coalition Ministry of all parties including the minorities, so that good government may prevail. Inefficiency and graft must be struck out with a firm hand, but this hand must not be communal ... any change of Ministry must be through negotiation and not through defeat'. The European member D. Gladding denied the responsibility of the Cabinet Mission for the calamity.

A.K. Fazlul Huq said that it was a purely fiendish fury with which both Hindus and Muslims had been murdered. His was an emotional speech where he suggested: 'While we are shouting here, the fate of India is going to be decided not by resolutions here and there, but in White Hall and in Delhi. It would have been better if we had watched and seen what would be the upshot and the result of the talks which are now going on between the Viceroy and the Party leaders. I am optimistic in this respect. I feel Sir that all will end well. If there is a coalition government at the centre there is no reason why there should not be a coalition government in all the provinces (cries of hear from the government Party benches) .... I want to see peace established in the country'. The Opposition leader in the House Kiran Shankar Roy urged the government 'to put down goondaism' which was responsible for the massacre and he extended 'full co-operation for bringing communal harmony and for crushing hooliganism'.

In his reply the Chief Minister expressed his 'humble tribute of penitence and regret to the innocents who were killed and...
sympathies and condolence to the members of the bereaved families, to the widows and orphans. He characterised it the 'most terrible catastrophe in the annals of India within recent times'. As the political background of the 16th August he said that 'the cabinet Mission destroyed the Muslim League, and 'installed the Congress' and 'sowed the seeds of dissention between us two and quickly stepped away to watch the results'. He again said that 'the second series of links in the chain which was responsible for the catastrophe was the general spirit of lawlessness in the province which was prevailing for some time' and in this connection the action against the I.N.A. agitations, reaction of the movement of the R.I.N., Calcutta Tramways strike (September 1945) Postal Strike (July 1946) etc. were mentioned. The elections of Great Britain in 1945 had repercussions in India also.

The motion against the Ministry was lost by 131 to 87 votes and that against the Chief Minister was lost by 130 to 85 votes. The European group and the Communist members remained neutral.

The discussions on the two motions, however reflected the situation and the trend of future events as well as the feelings of the parties. Some of the Opposition members were suffering from communal bias as were the ruling party members. But the Chief Minister, the leader of the Opposition, Kiran Shankar Roy, Fazlul Huq, the Anglo Indian member Wilks and some others gave balanced and reasonable speech. They were anxious about the future of Bengal as well as of India. They wanted to see that the tinge of communalism must be crushed and in the meantime the idea of united Bengal was taking shape. Dhirendra Nath Datta while moving his motion of

115 Ibid.
no confidence against the Ministry mentioned: 'the Honourable Mr. Suhrawardy in an interview in Delhi on August 10 forecast declaration of complete independence by Bengal and setting up a parallel government'.\textsuperscript{116} As a probable result of putting in Congress in power this declaration of Suhrawardy was taken as 'threat'.\textsuperscript{117}

The repercussions of the Calcutta riots spread to Noakhali and then to Bihar. Gandhiji rushed to Noakhali to bring confidence in the minds of the people. At the insistence of Gandhiji, a peace mission was to go to Noakhali. A Committee was formed composed of an equal number of Hindus and Muslim for the whole of Bengal with the Chief Minister as the Chairman, to bring about communal peace in the province - 'a peace not imposed from without by the aid of the military and the police but by the spontaneous heartfelt efforts'.\textsuperscript{118} But some (Hindus) objected that the aggrieved Hindus were not the majority members. Gandhiji met all these objections by saying that the Committee was not intended to be used as an arena for a communal or political tussle but a platform for united action by groups that had come together to work for a common goal namely that of achieving communal peace based on the unity of hearts.\textsuperscript{119}

**Bengal United or Divided?**

'I am rather puzzled and worried', noted the Viceroy Wavell on November 4, 1946 'about the matter of getting the Muslim League

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} BLAP, vol. 71, No. 3, p. 90.
\item \textsuperscript{117} The Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 11, 1946.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Pyarilal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase (Ahmedabad, 1956), vol. II, Book 1, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid, pp. 8-9.
\end{itemize}
into the Constituent Assembly'. The British Government was not feeling easy with the Muslim League and the League was not happy with the policy of the British Government. By January 1947 matters came to a standstill. When the Government declared in February 1947 that they would leave India within fifteen months, the Bengal Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha appealed for the partition of the Province which according to them would offer a peaceful solution to the communal problem. The Governor of Bengal, F. Burrows wrote to the Viceroy Lord Wavell on March 19, 1947:

'The movement for partitioning Bengal is gathering momentum. Hindu opinion is at present very divided. For once Sarat Bose and Gandhi see eye to eye and both condemn the movement of which Shyamaprasad Mookerjee and the Hindu Mahasabha are the chief protagonists. Suhrawardy has made a number of speeches on the subject, his line being that Bengal must be independent of the centre, that Hindu and Muslim Bengalis must work in harmony for the common prosperity of the province, and that one party rule in this province and other provinces must end'. In fact, the Chief Minister Suhrawardy tried for an independent united Bengal State and Abul Hashim, Mohammad Ali of Bogura, Fazlul Rahman of the Dacca University, Malik of Nadia were with him. From the Congress side, Sarat Bose, Satya Ranjan Bakshi and others were favourably disposed towards the idea.

The next Viceroy Lord Mountbatten after interview with Suhrawardy stated in his secret report (August 26, 1946):

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120 Mansergh, op.cit., vol. IX, Document No. 1,
'I told him that I was ardently against all forms of partition .... I had been called upon to partition the Punjab, Bengal and Assam and I expressed my regret that these provinces should be partitioned, but said that it was unavoidable.

'Mr. Suhrawardy told me that in the case of Bengal, this was far from being the case, and that since my plan included a vote on whether a Province should be partitioned or not and if not partitioned whether it was to join Pakistan, Hindusthan, or remain independent, he could tell me now that given enough time he was confident that he could get Bengal to remain as a complete entity. He told me that he could get Mr. Jinnah to agree that it need not join Pakistan if it was prepared to remain united'.

The Governor of Bengal P. Burrows said that Suhrawardy had made it very clear that he was in favour of an independent united Bengal. Moreover, Jinnah had agreed to the concept of an independent Bengal separate from Pakistan. Lord Ismay, the adviser of Mountbatten stated that Jinnah had told him twice that he contemplated two separate sovereign independent states, that is, the Punjab and Bengal.

The official correspondence stated: 'the proposal for a separate West Bengal is at present primarily a Hindu Mahasabha idea and though it has had a guaranteed blessing from some high ranking Congress leaders at Delhi, the Congress Party is not yet committed to it and opinion among Hindus in Bengal is still very divided. So far as we know, K.S. Ray himself has not publicly committed himself to any scheme of the kind though it is obvious

125 Ibid.
from his visit to His Excellency 'that he sees and is ready to exploit the bargaining value of the movement vis-a-vis Suhrawardy's pleas for an independent Bengal in which the 45% Hindu element will have their fair share'.

Sardar Patel was very much concerned about the partition issue. On the 13th of May 1947 he wrote to Kshitish Chandra Neogy (MIA - Central) 'You must have noticed from the activities of Mr. Suhrawardy in Calcutta that he is considerably unnerved by the agitation of partition of Bengal which is sure to separate Calcutta from Eastern Bengal which is destined to be the League portion of Pakistan if it persists in its demand. I am afraid this cry of a sovereign independent Bengal is a trap in which even Kiran Shankar (Roy) may fall with Sarat Babu. The only way to save the Hindus of Bengal is to insist on partition of Bengal'. In the same letter Patel also asserted, 'we shall take all possible precautions to prevent such a catastrophe'. Shyamaprasad Mookerjee wrote to Sardar Patel that Sarat Bose was 'doing enormous mischief by trying to negotiate with Suhrawardy on the basis of sovereign Bengal. He has no support whatsoever from the Hindus ... We shall have no safety whatsoever in Bengal. We demand the creation of two provinces out of the present boundaries of Bengal - Pakistan or no Pakistan'. Sardar Patel assured Shyamaprasad with the following words - 'You can depend on us to deal with the situation effectively and befittingly. The future of Hindus in Bengal is quite safe so long as they stand firm and continue to give us such support as only they can'.

126 Mansergh, op.cit., vol. x, Document No. 5.
128 Ibid, Letter No. 42.
129 Ibid, Letter No. 43.
During this time Patel in a letter to Sarat Bose regretted that the latter was dissociating himself from all India as well as provincial politics. In reply Sarat Bose wrote that he had been doing it due to broken health. On the partition question the other portion of the letter which reflected his mind ran like this: 'Having been in close touch with public opinion both in West and East Bengal I can say that it is not a fact that Bengali Hindus unanimously demand partition. As far as East Bengal is concerned, there is not the slightest doubt that the overwhelming majority of Hindus are opposed to partition. As regards West Bengal, the agitation for partition has gained ground because the Congress came to the aid of the Hindu Mahasabha and also because communal passions have been roused among the Hindus on account of the happenings since August last. The demand for Pakistan is more or less confined to the middle classes. When the full implications of partition are realised and when people here find that all that they will get for Western Bengal province will be roughly one-third of the area of Bengal and only about half of the total Hindu population in Bengal, the agitation for partition will surely lose support. I entirely agree with you that we should take a united stand but I shall say at the same time that the united stand should be for a united Bengal and a united India. Future generations will, I am afraid, condemn us for conceding division of India and supporting partition of Bengal and the Punjab.'

In spite of all arguments partition could not be averted. Lord Mountbatten prepared a scheme for the partition of India. After discussion with the political leaders of the Congress and the League he prepared a final plan on June 3, which was accepted.

by both the parties. There was a provision in the Mountbatten Plan regarding the approval of the Bengal Provincial Legislatures for joining either India or Pakistan and also to find out whether they wanted partition of Bengal.

Recently the National Awami Party Leader of Pakistan Wali Khan has said: 'The leaders of the Muslim League aver that the partition of the provinces was the policy of the British. This is downright false'.¹³¹ In case of Punjab he has mentioned the controversy with regard to Kalat but in case of Bengal he has just stated: 'At Suhrawardy's insistence, they (the Muslim League) passed a resolution for the complete independence of a United Bengal then they proceeded to divide Bengal ....'¹³² But these words can not and does not disprove that the British were the real planners of Partition of the Province. Penderal Moon, pointed out that Lord Mountbatten produced a plan for the partition of the country to which the principal parties were willing to agree. He owed this plan to the knowledge and insight of his Reforms Secretary, V.P. Menon. His own tact and persuasiveness helped to secure its general acceptance.¹³³ For Jinnah 'the plan was a bitter pill', 'but he had to bow to facts and logic'.¹³⁴

However, a Joint Session of both the houses of the Legislature of Bengal was held on June 20 presided over by K.B. Nurul Amin to decide whether they would join India or Pakistan. Since the Muslim League commanded majority in the joint meeting of the two houses, they decided to join Pakistan and there were 126 votes against and 90 for, to keep the province united. Then the members of the

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133 Divide and Quit India (London, 1961), p. 66.
134 Ibid, p. 68.
Legislature representing East Bengal districts under the Chair-
manship of Nurul Amin met separately to decide whether they wanted
a united Bengal or partition of Bengal. The East Bengal group of
Muslim League and many Scheduled Caste members of the Legislature
voted by 106 to 35 against partition according to the mandate of
the Muslim League. Since in that house the Muslims were in a
majority their decision was carried. After that the West Bengal
Group of Legislature met separately under the presidentship of
Maharaja Udaychand Mahatab of Burdwan. Here also the Muslim mem-
bbers voted against partition and the Hindus having majority voted
in favour of partition of Bengal by 58 to 21 votes. The whole
voting episode was a show because the decision to partition the
province had already been taken elsewhere. Another question to
be settled in the Bengal Legislative Assembly was: which consti-
tuent assembly should draft the Constitution. The Hindus favoured
the existing (Indian) Assembly, and the Muslims and some of the
Scheduled Caste Hindus were in favour of a new (Pakistani)
Assembly. The boundary Commission was appointed on the 30th
of June and Bengal was partitioned. India got independence but
at the cost of millions of innocent people.

135 BLAP, June 20, 1947.