CHAPTER- IV

SAADULLA MINISTRIES (1937-1946) AND THE POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION

4.1. First, Second and Third Saadulla Ministries (1937-41) and the Immigration Issue:

As already stated, the first popular Ministry under the Government of India Act, 1935 was formed by Saadulla on 1st April, 1937 and since then till the elections of 1946, he remained the Premier of Assam, with short breaks of a period of about two years. During the tenure of the first Saadulla Ministry, a Resolution was moved by Munawwar Ali in the Assembly seeking abolition of the Line System, which is already discussed in the previous chapter. The resolution was finally withdrawn as the Government through its Revenue Minister promised to appoint a committee representing various interests to look into the matter from diverse angles and to make recommendations on the vital issue of immigration, settlement and the Line System. He also informed that the Government would act only on the recommendation of the Committee so appointed

As promised in the Assembly the Government appointed a Committee in January 1938 commonly known as the Line System Enquiry Committee, which was said to have represented the various interests concerned and composed of the "representatives of every group and interest". It consisted of three Assam valley Hindu members including one from the Scheduled castes; one Tribal member; Three Muslim members - one from the so-called immigrant settlers; one from

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2. M.Kar, Muslims in Assam Politics, New Delhi, Omsons, 1990, p. 49 [Hereinafter Kar (n.2)]
European Members and the Revenue Secretary. 4

The Committee submitted its report in February, 1938. 5 The report as submitted by the Committee did neither contain any strong recommendation nor any clear-cut suggestion for the solution of the problem for it was said to be "a curious amalgam of conflicts, contradictions and compromises" 6. While some members supported the abolition of the Line System, others supported its retention. In fact, "While the Muslim members wanted complete withdrawal, the majority, suggested a modification in the existing system." 7. The representatives of the indigenous population, viz, Assamese, Tribal and Scheduled Castes - all recommended that the Line System should be retained and that all steps should be taken to stop the influx of the immigrants into the State. 8 As a result of the conflict of views, two reports - one 'Minority Report' and one 'Majority Report' were prepared. 9 But as the members subsequently considered it their duty to arrive at a compromise between the conflicting views and to find a via-media between the two, they decided to submit the recommendations as a 'United Committee' instead of presenting a minority and majority report, and thereby suggested a working solution of an extremely complicated problem. 10

In its report the committee favoured retaining "a certain amount of control in indicating areas" where the immigrants might take up land and could settle, "for the purpose of better administration and avoidance of collision as well as to protect

5. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 1417.
interests" of the indigenous population. Besides, "a larger unit of restriction should be adopted, such as the Mauzas or block of Mauzas", which were to be protected from encroachment, and at the same time, the "artificial restrictions" imposed in the way of immigrants acquiring 'Patta land', such as keeping 'Pattas' annual, should be abolished. Further, it was recommended that the lands proved unattractive to the Assamese should be settled with the immigrants, the colonization schemes were to be extended, and the "haphazard method of settlement by squatting must come to an end." In conclusion, the committee touched upon the most important implementation part and observed: "All our recommendations, however, will come to nothing without firmness of administration, avoidance of unnecessary interference and an adequate and competent staff to enforce the executive orders which are passed."

It is to be noted that by the time the Line System Committee submitted its report, Saadulla had already formed the second Coalition-Ministry under the compelling circumstances, by including two Muslim League Members in the cabinet and had to join the League himself. In fact, faced with the repeated assault of the Congress supported by the League in the Assembly, since the formation of the first coalition Ministry, Saadulla was forced to woo the Muslim League, the Assembly party of which under the leadership of AbdulMatin Choudhury had by then increased its strength to ten. To show his allegiance to the League, he attended All India Annual Conference of the Muslim League in October, 1937. Besides, he wanted to reshuffle his Ministry by accommodating two Muslim League members and asked his two Muslim Cabinet colleagues - Muhammad Waheed and Ali Hyder Khan of the United Muslim Party to resign. But when the two Ministers

11. Ibid.
refused to submit resignation. Saadulla had no other option but to resign on 4th February, 1938. He formed the 2nd Coalition Ministry on 5th February, 1938 by accommodating two Muslim League stalwarts of the province like Abdul Matin Choudhury and Munawwar Ali of Sylhet, in the Cabinet. In spite of this, Saadulla failed to command absolute majority in the Assembly and within few months it became impossible on his part to continue with the Government as many supporters of his ruling coalition began to join the opposition. On 12th September, 1938, four no-confidence motions were moved in the Assembly without any accompanying speeches. On 13th September, 1938, Saadulla submitted resignation even before the debate on the motion could be resumed. He informed the House that he had submitted his resignation to the Governor as he had found that several members of the Coalition had left to join the opposition.

Thus before any action could be taken on the Report of the Line system, the second Saadulla Ministry was ousted from power. It was followed by the first Congress-Coalition Ministry under Gopinath Bordoloi which was formed on 12th September, 1938. Although the Bordoloi Ministry got a time of more than 13 months to deal with the problem of the Line system and the immigration issue before it resigned on 15th November, 1939 on a larger issue of national importance,

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<tr>
<th>Minister</th>
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<tr>
<td>Muhammad Saadulla</td>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>Premier, Finance, Home &amp; Public works</td>
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<td>J.J.M. Nichols Roy</td>
<td>Progressive Nationalist Party</td>
<td>Local Self-Govt. and Medicine</td>
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<td>Rohini Kumar Choudhury</td>
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<td>Abdul Matin Choudhury</td>
<td>Muslim League</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akshay Kumar Das</td>
<td>Constitutionalists</td>
<td>Registration, Legislative and General Department</td>
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13. Ibid. Composition of the Second Coalition Ministry formed by Saadulla was as follows -

17. PHA-III,p.9.
18. In the wake of the Second World War, Great Britain was at war on Germany on 3 September, 1939 and India was declared a belligerent the following day without consulting the Indians, and the declared War aims did not include India's independence. The All India Congress Working Committee, therefore, meeting at Wardha on 22 October, 1939, called upon all the Congress Ministers to resign. As a result, the first Congress- Coalition Ministry in Assam had to resign as per the direction of the All India Congress Working Committee. (For details please see Guha, op.,cit p. 237).
it could not take any action on the complicated issue and also on the Report of the Line System Enquiry Committee\(^\text{19}\). However, few days before its resignation, the Congress-Coalition Government adopted a resolution which was published in a Gazette Extraordinary dated 4th November, 1939, accepting the report of the Line System Committee in general terms and adopting the following policies-

(a) They realized the importance of maintaining grazing and forest reserves and as such immediate eviction of encroachers from such areas;

(b) The interests of the tribal and backward people were to be guarded and with that view large blocks of submontane areas inhibited by tribals were to be made prohibited areas;

(c) Due provision was also made for the reservation of large area for natural expansion of indigenous population and a planned settlement was contemplated in the available waste land.\(^\text{20}\)

After the resignation of the Congress Coalition Ministry, the third Saadulla Ministry assumed the reigns of power on 17th November, 1939.\(^\text{21}\) On returning to power, Saadulla was faced with the same difficult question of Immigration, Land Settlement and the Line System. He, therefore, convened an All-Party conference which was said to be attended by "the representatives of all the parties concerned and all the interests involved"\(^\text{22}\). It was said to have the representation from Scheduled Castes, Tribal Group and above all from the Congress Party. In the conference, a considerable amount of agreement was reached on a number of important points, which was published in a Government Resolution dated 21st June, 1940.\(^\text{23}\)

The main features of the resolution was the 'Development Schemes' emodied in paragraph-3 of the Resolution which says:

\(^{19}\) Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol-II, No:- 22, 6th December, 1941, p.1417.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.1403.

\(^{21}\) Guha, op cit., p.264.

\(^{22}\) Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol-II, No: -22, 6th December, 1941 p.1417.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp-1412-17.
"Government propose to start Development Schemes, somewhat on the lines of the Barpathar Scheme, in as many areas of the province as possible, where large blocks of unopened land suitable for settlement are available. In these after reserving 30 percent, for the expansion of the existing population, all squatting will be prohibited and smaller blocks will be created, and allotted for settlement by members of all the different communities who are in need of land, viz., the indigenous Assamese, Tribal people, Scheduled Castes and Immigrants."

Thus, the Government policy stipulated that after reserving thirty percent of available cultivable waste lands, large blocks of land would be constituted into development areas and settled on payment of premium, smaller blocks to be given to all communities according to needs, squatting to be prohibited. It was stated that the Government wanted separate blocks to be constituted for different categories of people - for the indigenous, for the Tribals, for the Scheduled Castes, for the Hindus as well as for the immigrants - so that each community could cultivate their own block without any hindrance or encroachment from the other party. It was also stipulated that the landless people should be given land and accordingly anyone possessing 5 Bighas of Land or less was defined as landless, and the maximum limit of land was laid down as 30 Bighas per family under the scheme. Besides, for the purpose of restricting settlement of land with persons coming from outside the province, it was limited to people "coming to the province before the 1st of January, 1938." Finally, it was stated that the question of maintaining the Line system or abolishing it, was dropped for the time being though it was agreed by all that the Tribal and Scheduled people required adequate protection which was accepted by the Government. 25

24. Ibid., pp-1412.
25. Ibid., pp. 1413-1424.
The Saadulla Government also claimed to have improved upon the existing policy of the Congress-Coalition Government by - first, discouraging immigrants since 1 January, 1938; second, limiting settlement of land to thirty bighas per family; third, reserving thirty percent of available land for future generations; fourth, providing for development of areas concerned; and finally, removing vagueness of provisions which might go against the indigenous people.  

On the basis of the policy laid down in the Government Resolution of 21 June, 1940, the Government decided to settle lands in the development areas with three categories of people - First, those who came before 1 January, 1938; 2nd whose lands were eroded by the Brahmaputra; and third, those liable to be evicted from lines villages and reserves. Settlement would be on block system, different communities to be given land separately. A special officer was also to be appointed by the Government to examine whether the proposed areas could be opened for settlement without any detriment to the district's normal requirements of grazing and forest areas. By March, 1941, a Special Officer appointed in Nowgong reported that 65 thousand bighas of land were available and suggested settlement of most of the blocks with the indigenous people, only a minor portion being available for the immigrants.

Although the Saadulla Government claimed to have been guided by the "Principle of Justice", "Policy of live, and let live" and "a spirit of compromise arrived at by common consent" the Government policy satisfied neither the Muslims nor the Hindus. Regarding the Hindu attitude on the policy it is observed that

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26. Kar (n.2), pp.55-56; For details please see Saadulla's Speech in Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, VOL-II, No:- 22, 6th December 1941, pp.1416-1424.  
27. Kar (n.2), p.56.  
29. Kar (n.2), p.56.  
31. Ibid., p.56; The immigrant Muslim legislators in particular, were critical of the policy. For details please see Ibid., pp. 56-57.
there remained "shrewd suspicion in the Hindu minds" that the policy of land settlement with the immigrants had been launched "only with a view to bring in more immigrants to this province with the ultimate object of swelling the number of Muhammadans." 32 "The Assamese Hindu opinion, was therefore, "almost hysterical in denouncing the development scheme." 33 Such attitude of the Assamese Hindus got clearly reflected in the views of Lokeshwar Baruah, an Assamese Member, who moved a resolution in the Assembly on 6th December, 1941 disapproving the land settlement policy of the Saadulla Government. Baruah's resolution was strongly supported by Gopinath Bardoloi by adding an amendment to the same. 34

It is interesting to note that the Muslim public opinion particularly that of the immigrant Muslims, was also opposed to the Government policy. The opposition was reflected in the views of immigrant legislators who voiced opposition to the policy while participating in the Budget Session, 1940-41 of the Assam Legislative Assembly. Abdur Rouf of Barpeta while criticizing the Government policy, said, "They are very particular about providing land to tigers, rhinos and buffaloes and other wild animals but they won't give a single bigha of land to landless immigrants to live upon." He also complained that while the immigrants were not getting land to cultivate, the Government had reserved twenty lakh bighas of grazing grounds for half a lakh buffaloes. He was also critical of the eviction of the immigrants and informed that the Government had already started the policy of eviction of immigrants. 35

Motior Rahman Mia, another immigrant member from Goalpara, apprehended a bleak future for immigrants in the province. He said that for last

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32. M. Kar, Muslims in Assam's Politics (1946-1991), New Delhi, Vikas, 1997, p.89. [Hereinafter Kar (n.32)]
33. Guha, op.cit., p.263.
34. The Assamese Hindu opinion got reflected in the elaborate speech of Lokeshwar Barua in the Assam Assembly who moved a resolution in the Assembly on 6th December, 1941 disapproving the Land Settlement policy of the Government. Barua was supported by Gopinath Bordoloi who added an amendment to the Resolution. For details please see Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, VOL-II, No: - 22, 6th December, 1941, pp.1401-1416.
few years, they were crying hoarse for equal rights for migrants by abolishing the discriminatory Line System, but the Government paid no heed to their appeals. He expressed that under Saadulla's rule neither the Muslims nor the Hindus were happy and complained that Saadulla did not keep the promise he made in 1940 at the Assam Provincial Muslim League Conference at Ghagmari that he would provide the landless people with land in four months. Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani of Goalpara also joined other immigrant members in criticizing the Government policy 36.

As to the complain of the Hindus that the Government policy particularly the Development Scheme was intended to increase the number of Muhammadans, Sayidur Rahman, the Finance Minister said that the Development Scheme had been conceived in a spirit of helping the helpless people of all classes. He claimed that the Government had been inspired by the sincere desire to help the indigenous people and also those who had come to this province to make it their home 37. The Development Schemes, however, were not started till March, 1942, though certain areas were notified as "Development Blocks" 38.

In the meantime, the suspicion of the Assamese people, mainly the Assamese Hindus was increasing. The moving of a resolution by Lokheswar Baruah has already been stated 39. A state-wide opposition against the Government was gradually mounting. In fact, "as the influx of immigrants was gradually titling population ratio, a legitimate fear nagged the indigenous Hindus of Assam that they would in due course be swamped and Assam would be converted into a Muslim majority province" 40. Some of the actions of Saadulla also said to have confirmed such apprehensions. For example, during the Census operations of 1941 he is said to

36. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
39. For details please see Lakheswar Baruah's speech in moving the resolution in Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, VOL-II, No. 22, December 6, 1941 pp. 1401-1408.
40. PHA - III, p. 266.
have instructed that the population should be classified on the basis of communities and not on the basis of religion, for which the Census figures of 1941 indicated a considerable reduction in the Hindu population". 41

Thus, "the Land Department Scheme and the Census Policy of Saadulla were subjected to severe public criticisms all over the province" 42 and mainly in the Assamese circles. Besides, another incident which worsened the situation was, the brutal Lathi-charge on the protesting students on 6th December, 1941, who were protesting against participation in the Second World War by shouting "not a man, not a pie to the imperialist war." 43 This incident was followed by anti-war protests all over the province. 44

Under the circumstances, Ruhini Kumar Choudhuri resigned from the Saadulla Ministry on 9th December, 1941 - in the wake of which many no-confidence motions were tabled in the Assembly. This was followed by the resignation of Saadulla on 12th December, 1941, after which some attempts at forming an alternative Ministry were made, which failed 45. Finally Governor's Rule (under Sec-93) was proclaimed on 25th December, 1941 which meant 'the suspension of the legislature and take-over of the reigns of administration personally by the Governor'. 46

4.2. Fourth Saadulla Ministry (25th August, 1942- 23 March, 1945) and the Immigration Issue (Implementation of 'Grow More Food' Scheme):

However, Saadulla did not have to remain in the wilderness for long. 47 After

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41. Ibid., p.267. In fact, a large number of tribal people who had earlier enrolled themselves as Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, were now included under the head "Tribal" in the Census figures of 1941. This meant that the Hindu Tribals were not included in the Hindu population. Consequently, the Census Figures indicated a considerable reduction in the Hindu population. (Please see Ibid pp. 266-67).
42. Ibid., p. 268.
43. Quoted in Guha, op.cit., p.268.
44. For details please see Ibid., pp. 268-270.
45. For details please see Ibid., pp. 268-270.
46. Ibid., p. 270.
47. PHA -III., p. 268.
the passing of historic 'Quit India' resolution by the All India Congress Committee on 8th August, 1942, the general spirit of the movement and Gandhiji's message of 'Do or Die' began to spread like wildfire throughout the country including Assam. The Government of Assam, as a pre-cautionary measure, decided to arrest the prominent Congress leaders of the Province. As a result, in between 9th August to 15th August, all the important leaders of the Assam Congress including Gopinath Bardoloi were arrested. Subsequently, there were Spontaneous mass protests and processions and protest 'hartals' were organized by the people throughout the province 48.

The arrest of the Congress leaders, on the other hand, created conditions for Saadulla's return to power, especially when the Government was keen on installing a popular Ministry to combat the mass upsurge of 1942. Thus Section-93 was revoked and Saadulla returned to power on 25th August, 1942. 49 On his return to power Saadulla was supported along with the Muslim League, by the People's Party, European Group, Indian Planters and Tribal members. 50 He was said to have been actively supported by Rupanath Brahma, Rabindra Chandra Kachari and Karkachandra Doley 51. In this way, a fourth Saadulla (coalition) Ministry was formed. 52

At the time when Saadulla formed his fourth Ministry, some provinces of India were seriously struck by acute shortage of food stuffs. In fact, during 1942-43, there occurred serious food crisis in many parts of the country as a result of Bengal Famine and World War-II. 53 In order to meet the situation, the

48. Guha, op.cit., pp. 271-72; For details please see Ibid., pp. 270-272. For details on the Quit India Movement in Assam please see Ibid., pp. 270-77. Also see K.N. Dutt, Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1993 (Reprint) pp. 96-106.
49. PHA-III, p. 268; Also Guha, op.cit., p.272.
51. PHA-III, p.268.
Government of India introduced a scheme called "Grow More Food" and ordered the provincial Governments to implement it with immediate effect. On 11 January, 1943, A.G. Patton, the Revenue Secretary, Government of Assam, wrote to the Commissioner, Assam valley that the Government was committed to implement the "Grow More Food" scheme which was initiated by the Government of India and to be too vigorous in the matter of eviction would nullify the "Grow More Food" campaign. He also asked the Commissioner to send proposals for opening new colonisation areas.

Under the "Grow More Food" Campaign, the Government of India had desired the extension of cultivation in Assam from 52.8 Lakhs of Acres to 57 Lakhs during 1943. But the Government of Assam felt that as the year had advanced too far, it was not possible to reach such a target. The Government, however, adopted the policy that no pains should be spared to increase the acreage under rice crops by whatever means possible. In order to achieve the goal, the Government decided to accelerate land settlement in Kamrup, Nowgong and Darrang to extend areas of immigrant colonies and to settle more lands with immigrants owing to the imperative necessity of growing more food. For this purpose, the Government also considered the need of deforesting a part of the Lakhowa Forest Reserves in Nowgong, throwing open grazing reserves in excess of requirement, and settlement of immigrants in lands previously closed to them in certain areas.

The question of eviction and general policy of land settlement engaged Government's attention in view of the implementation of the scheme "Grow More Food". The matter was discussed in a meeting of the Revenue Minister, Revenue Secretary and the Commissioner, Assam Valley. The Commissioner, Assam Valley was opposed to the condemnation of encroachment on the plea of 'Grow More Food'

55. Assam Secretariat File No. RD-3/32, pp.5-6, Revenue Secretary to Commissioner of Divisions, cited in Kar (n.2) p.59.
56. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
Campaign but suggested allotment of land to immigrants in new areas. The Revenue Minister Munawwar Ali, was of the opinion that where a number of persons were due to be evicted, it would be better, in view of the 'Grow More Food' campaign, to leave them where they were pending the revision of the policy of the Government with reference to eviction. He, therefore, asked the D.C., Nowgong, to suspend all eviction operations for the time being. The Revenue Secretary, suggested stay of eviction from areas of standing crops of three hundred Bighas. The whole matter, was however, left to the Minister for formulation of a modified policy to be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration\(^57\).

On 24th July, 1943, the Cabinet discussed the issue of land settlement with special emphasis on Abolition of Line System, Opening of Grazing Reserves and Eviction of Encroaches. There were serious differences of opinion among the Ministers on these issues and as no decision could he arrived at, the Governor asked the Revenue Secretary to prepare a draft embodying the points of the greatest common measure in a concrete form to enable the Government after the next discussion, to issue an agreed solution. Accordingly, A.G. Patton, the Revenue Secretary, modified the draft for Cabinet Discussion and simultaneously on the instruction of the Primier Saadulla, prepared a detailed memorandum on Assam's Wasteland and Immigrant Policy, which was the first of its kind prepared on Government initiative. As a matter of policy, the Saadulla Cabinet reverted to their old policy of settlement without taking any decision on encroachment and eviction\(^58\). The new land settlement policy was adopted in the cabinet meeting of 21 August, 1943. The decision of the cabinet meeting on land settlement policy was published in the form of a Government Resolution on 24th August, 1943.\(^59\)

Thus, the fourth Saadulla Ministry adopted a new resolution on land

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57. Minutes of Discussion among Ministers, Commissioner and Secretary, Assam Secretariat- File No. RD-3/32 , p. 8, cited in Ibid., pp. 60-61.
58. Ibid., pp.62-64.
59. Ibid., pp.64, 83; Also see Guha, op.cit., p.281.
settlement under the slogan 'Grow More Food' on 24th August, 1943. The preamble to the Resolution enumerated three urgent needs such as Growing of More Food; increase of provincial revenue; and settlement of more landless people. The main features of the Resolution were as follows -

(a) In Kamrup and Darrang, further indigenous settlement to submontane areas to be encouraged and in other areas, colonization areas to be enlarged by giving more lands to immigrants;
(b) Resumed distribution of wastelands in Nowgong as per the Development Scheme as devised by the previous Saadulla Ministry's Resolution of 21 June, 1940;
(c) Deforestation of surplus Grazing Reserves in Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong, after an enquiry and estimate to be made by a special officer;
(d) Same policy of dereservation in Lakhimpur and Sibsagar but surplus lands to be reserved for further settlement by the indigenous people; and
(e) Deforestation of the part or whole of the Laokhowa and Orang Forest Reserves in Nowgong and Darrang respectively to be considered by the special officer, for throwing open to settlement.

In the meantime, the 'Grow More Food' campaign was intensified all over India and the Government of Assam also began to intensify the pace of implementation of the scheme in the province. Though the Revenue Secretary had pointed to the dangers of identifying the short term purpose of 'Growing More Food' with long term problem of immigration and land settlement, the Saadulla Government, ignoring his advice, reviewed their whole policy of immigration and land settlement in the interest of the campaign. The Government issued supplementary instructions affecting drastic changes in the policy laid down in the Resolution of 24th August,

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60. Guha, Loc.cit.
61. Govt. of Assam, Revenue Department's Proceedings No: RD-43/13, cited in Kar (n.2), p. 83; Also see Guha, Loc.cit.
1943. On 28th August, 1943, same vital decisions of the Government were communicated to the Commissioners of Divisions for immediate implementation. Some of which were as follows -

(a) Quickest settlement of largest areas by extension of both colonization and development blocks, additional areas for immigrant settlement;
(b) The Deputy Commissioner, Nowgong was asked to submit fresh proposals as to which area should be opened for which classes or communities among applicants and the criterion to be followed should be the needs of the respective communities rather than the proportion of the respective populations in the district or province.
(c) All surplus lands in the reserves were to be opened to settlement, the estimate being made by a Special Officer, S.P. Desai, ICS.
(d) Regarding eviction of encroachers, it was laid down that all new encroachers, into Government reserves, defined as those coming later than 1st January, 1943, were to be evicted if the special officer did not recommend the reservation of those reserves but if their number was too large in comparison to the indigenous people, no eviction was to be carried out. In respect to the encroachments on the lands reserved for the Assamese and tribal people all annual 'Pattas' were to be converted into periodic 'Pattas' except in tribal areas where evictions of encroachers coming later than January, 1942, were to be effected.

The above decisions of the Government were of far-reaching consequences. They provided impetus to old encroachers and at the same time encouraged new arrivals. In the resolutions of 1940 and 1942, the Government had taken the responsibility of providing lands to those who had come before 1st January, 1938, but now many of them who had come after that date were given settlements.

62. Kar (n.2), p.64.
Besides, the condemnation of encroachments by the very many latitudes and relaxations now provided by the Government is said to have invited further flow of immigrants into the province. Of course, many of those fresh batches of immigrants were under the compulsion of the Bengal famine. This aspect of the question received very little importance in all studies of the problem of immigration and mainly those done by the Assamese observers. Thus, Saadulla Government deviated from Reid's principle of 1942, in respect of eviction, opening of grazing reserves and allowing immigrants to settle in previously closed areas. In view of the continued influx of immigrants and deviations from some of the previously accepted principles, it appeared to the Hindu minds that on the plea of "Growing More Food" campaign, Saadulla Government was encouraging immigration and opening out large areas to the Muslim immigrants to increase the numerical strength of the Muslims in the province. They saw in the Government policy a "Communal Game" of the 'League majority' Saadulla Government which was suspected of evil designs. The organizations of the Hindus like the All India Hindu Mahasabha and the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha, Sibsagar Ahom Sabha, Assam Mauzadar Association etc. strongly reacted against the Government policy. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha and All India Hindu Mahasabha raised the cries of the Assamese and Hindu being in danger in view of the land settlement policy followed by the Saadulla Government.

Meanwhile, S.P. Desai, ICS, was appointed Special Officer on 21st September, 1943 to estimate surplus grazing reserves and to ascertain what portion of professional grazing reserves could be declared as surplus available for

64. Ibid., p.64; Also see Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, VOL-1, No.4, 6th March, 1945, pp. 201-03.
65. Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, VOL-1, No.4, 6th March, 1945, pp. 194-95.
66. Kar (n.2), p. 60
67. Ibid., p.60; Also see Sarveswar Baruah's speech in Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol-1, No:-4, 6th March, 1945, pp. 203.
68. Kar(n.2), p.64.
69. For details please see Ibid pp.66-68 and PHA-III p.269.
70. Guha, op.cit., p.282.
settlement. He was generally opposed to de-reservation of grazing reserves in the interest of the cattle and milk supply and well being of the people. His conclusion was that there was no surplus land available for new settlement. The cabinet deliberated on Desai's Report on 4th February, 1944 and rejected his suggestion of not de-reserving the Grazing Reserves. The Government was of the view that Desai "had over emphasized the value of a few thousand animals grazed in the professional Grazing Reserves as compared with the infinitely larger number running into millions which were kept outside the reserves and inevitably constituted the main force of milk products for the people of Assam. Thus, ignoring Desai's report the Government decided to go ahead with the policy of opening of reserves and giving preference to immigrants in matters of settlement in deserved areas, and wanted the land declared as surplus to be brought under cultivation by March, 1944, in tune with the "Grow More Food", campaign. In the meantime, all evictions were suspended by an order of the Government on 17th January, 1944.

It is interesting to note that apart from the Hindu and Assamese opposition to the Government policy, even the Muslims, the immigrant Muslims to be specific, were also not satisfied and it seemed that nothing short of the abolition of the Line System would satisfy the Muslim immigrants and their leader Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. The Assam Provincial Muslims League conference was held at Barpeta on 8th and 9th April, 1944, which passed a resolution demanding abolition of the Line System. Barpeta, the venue of the conference, was a strong hold of the immigrants and particularly their leader Maulana Bhasani. Saadulla also

71. Ibid., p.281. also Kar (n.2), p.69.
73. Guha, Loc.cit.
74. Kar (n.2) pp. 70-71.
75. For details please see Ibid.
78. Kar (n.2), p.73
participated in the conference although the slogans in the form of writings like "Minister Give us Land or Resign" were there in the walls of the 'pandal' to greet him. He appealed for support to his Government's policy "since the Line system had already been relaxed a great deal with a view to its gradual abolition." That the Government policy was gradually leading to the abolition of the Line system, at that point of time was confirmed from the view of the Revenue Minister of the Government about a year later as informed by an Assamese Member in the Assembly on 6th March, 1945. According to the member, the Revenue Minister said, "...the Line System will cease to exist with the introduction of the present Government scheme and that no separate announcement was needed as the abolition of the Line System was explicit in the policy adopted by the Government." Anyway, the defence of the Government policy advanced by Saadulla in the conference could not satisfy the immigrant leader Bhasani and there ensued a debate between the two on the matter that ultimately said to have led to a quarrel between the two which remained unresolved in the days to come despite the attempt of the All India Muslim League to sort out the same.

In view of the strained relationship between Bhasani and Saadulla that obviously led to the worsening of the relationship between Saadulla and the League organization at that point of time, the 4th Saadulla Ministry was confronted with deep political crisis. Despite the Government attempts to satisfy the Hindus as well as the Immigrants, criticism of Government policy by both did not cease. Under the circumstances the Government once again came to feel the need of an agreed solution on the matter of Land settlement policy. Suggestion was also

82. Ibid.
83. Kar (n.2), pp.72-74.
84. Ibid., p.74.
advanced by the members of the opposition as well as the Governor to convene a conference so that the whole question of land settlement could be considered and be given an opportunity to remove the discontent existing among the Assamese people. Saadulla accepted the suggestion without holding any prior consultations with the Muslim League Party and not taking the party into confidence. Accordingly, an All Party Conference was held under the chairmanship of Saadulla at Shillong on 16th - 19th December, 1944. The conference was attended by the representatives of different parties including Gopinath Bardoloi, the leader of the Congress party, which made a number of recommendations requiring certain basic changes in the existing Land Settlement Policy of the Government. Despite disagreement of the two Muslim League participants who dissented (both of whom were immigrant Muslims), the Government accepted the recommendations of the Conference. It is observed that this time Saadulla "chose not to stand by the rigid Muslim League policy on this issue and agreed in essence, to whatever is being suggested by the Congress Party." 

On the basis of the recommendations of the All Party Conference, the Government decided to modify its existing policy and adopted a fresh Resolution on wasteland settlement on 16th January, 1945, the main features of which were as under -

(a) No more settlement on grazing Reserves except for encroachers till 1st January, 1938. Reserves, even if surplus, were henceforth to remain untouched except where these had already been settled;

(b) All "More recent" encroachers except those who lost lands due to erosion or military constructions, to be evicted, the latter being given six months' time to move to new lands provided by the Government. Subject to this, grazing reserves were to

85. Guha, op.cit., p.284; PHA-III. p.269.c
be kept intact "by eviction of trespassers, past, present and future", but considering the hardship of the evictees Government authorized Deputy Commissioners to use their discretion in according them special Status.

(c) A uniform plan for Wasteland Settlement in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong with the landless people of all categories including pre-1938 immigrants. Land was to be allotted to members of various communities in separate community-wise blocks, the ceiling of such allotments was fixed as 30 bighas per family. A landless person was defined as one who owned less than 5 bighas of land. If enough land was not available in the four districts, as mentioned, for settling the landless, North Lakhimpur Sub-division was also to be opened up.

(d) Thirty per cent of cultivable wasteland in each district for future expansion of the population;

(e) Creation of Tribal belts forbidding settlement of others in those belts; and

(f) Formation of Provincial Standing Advisory Committee consisting initially of the Members attending the conference and Standing District Committees of the Legislature to advise Government on smooth working of the plan to be formed\(^\text{88}\).

The above resolution, however, could not be put into operation due to opposition of the Muslim League as well as the Congress party although the Congress party's influence was the most dominant, as already stated, in the adoption of the recommendations of the conference which formed the basis of the resolution\(^\text{89}\). Muslim League's opposition was quite understandable as the resolution was not acceptable to the Immigrant Muslims and their leader Bhasani, who was the President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League. In fact, the immigrant Muslims constituted the main component of the support-base of the League for which their interest could not be seen as separate from that of the party at that point of time\(^\text{90}\).

\(^{88}\) The Assam Tribune, 26th January, 1945 cited in Ibid. p. 285; Kar(n-13) p.75; PHA-III, p.269.(32)

\(^{89}\) Guha, op.cit., pp.284, 286.

\(^{90}\) Please see Ibid., pp. 282-85.
In a meeting of the Assam provincial Muslim League Council at Guwahati on 28th January, 1945 under the chairmanship of Bhasani, the demand for abolition of the Line system was reiterated. It is interesting to note that even the Congress Party, the main guiding force behind the conference decisions, declined to back the resolution as the Assamese people began to discover certain "built-in-loopholes" in the resolution which according to them, were detrimental to the interest of the indigenous population.

It was alleged on the floor of the Assembly that an attempt was "clearly visible on the past of the Government to whittle down some of the safeguards which were provided to protect the interest of the indigenous people" so much so that the Assamese Party Leaders representing the indigenous people felt perturbed on receiving the official report and sent "a joint note of protest against certain omissions and modifications which affected the interests of the indigenous people adversely." It was also alleged that "The recommendations of the Assamese party leaders - in several respects - have been either omitted or altered" in working out the official Report "for which they had to submit a joint note pointing out their objections in that matter."  

The first Assamese objection was against the "five bigha landless clause" in the resolution which they thought, was "likely to hit the Assamese families hard, in as much as the percentage of Assamese families owning less than 5 bighas of land" was microscopic if not altogether nil. Because of the clause, most of the Assamese cultivators who owned more than 5 bighas of land could not claim themselves to be landless to establish claim for further land for settlement and therefore the "five bighas” landless clause operated as a handicap for them. Secondly, the Resolution
empowered the local officers with extensive discretionary authority "to keep in possession encroachers who had been in occupation of and cultivating land in the grazing reserves over three years". This meant that, "even the post-1937 immigrants could get land if they were in illegal occupation of land in Grazing Reserves" for the prescribed period of time. Further, as Tribal belts were yet to be delimited, the Assamese people felt that much room was left for administrative manipulation and bungling".  

Apart from pointing to the loopholes in the Resolution, the Assamese people were apprehensive and expressed sufficient doubt about the intentions of the Government in enforcing the conference decisions as reflected in the Resolution. Such doubt and apprehension were well reflected in the views of the representatives of the Assamese people. It was alleged on the floor of the Assembly by Beliram Das, an Assamese member on 6th March, 1945 that he was very much doubtful regarding "the sincerity of the Government regarding eviction of immigrants from Grazing Reserves" as on the basis of personal verification, he found that despite the All Party Conference decisions of December, 1944, "encroachments to professional and village grazing grounds" were going on unchecked and unhindered". He also raised a serious allegation against the Revenue Minister Munawwar Ali, who he presumed, to have "advised the local officers not to evict the encroachers". He further alleged that the Revenue Minister had assured the Muslim League Party in its Council Meeting that "if he could remain as Revenue Minister, at least for another two years, he would convert this province into a Muslim majority Province". Another Assamese member Sarveswar Baruah also expressed doubt about the intention of the Government. He alleged that the Government, in its anxiety to accelerate settlement of lands with immigrants by dereserving professional grazing reserves on the handy plea of "Grow More Food"

96. Ibid.
Campaign, had thrown open large areas of the Reserves for settlement, driving away large numbers of graziers from them. This in its turn accelerated the influx of immigrants and not only the dereserved areas but also the reserved areas of the professional and other Reserves were encroached upon by the new-comers who were emboldened, according to him, by the "conspicuous lack of firmness on the part of the Government" in enforcing eviction orders. He also alleged that the Revenue Minister instead of doing anything for the helpless graziers and indigenous people engaged himself in encouraging the encroachers, during his tours to the immigrant areas, by saying "that they need not to have fear from anybody not even from the Deputy Commissioners - as the Raj was a Muslim Raj". He further accused the Government of making "certain omissions and modifications" in the recommendations of the Assamese Party Leaders in working out the Government Resolution (on the basis of December, 1944, All Party Conference), which "affected the interest of indigenous people adversely." He did forecast the actual working of the Government Resolution in the direction of the gradual abolition of the Line System as the Revenue Minister hinted, according to him, that "with the introduction of the present Government scheme", the Line System would "cease to exist" and that "no separate announcement was needed as the abolition of the Line system was explicit in the policy adopted by the Government". In brief, Baruah assessed the Government policy, from the communal view point, in this manner - "In this matter, Sir, the attitude of the Government has been nothing else than a steam-roller policy to crush the people of the soil and to favour the huge and rapid influx of Muslim immigrants from Bengal - so as to convert Assam as speedily into Pakistan as possible."98

It is noteworthy that the immigrant Muslims and Assamese People had interests diametrically opposed to each other, still both the sections were opposed to the

98. Speech of Sarveswar Barua in Ibid., pp. 203-206.
Government policy and expressed their dissatisfaction from their diverse view points. While the general Assamese grievance was that the Government was pro-immigrant in its Immigrant policy, the immigrants complained of their deprivation from various facilities and of lack of firmness on the part of Government to remove shackles on the way of their acquisition of land and settlement and making sufficient lands available for all of them by abolishing the discriminatory Line System. The general dissatisfaction of the immigrants towards the Government policy got reflected in the speech of Motior Rahman Mia, a member of the Assembly representing the immigrants, while participating in the budget discussion of the Assembly on 6th March, 1945. He enumerated a number of grievances of the immigrants and complained of their deprivation in different spheres such as employment opportunity, contract, business, education, medical facility etc. and tried to attract the attention of the Government in these matters. Most importantly, he strongly criticized the Line System, which he termed as discriminatory, which according to him, acted as an obstacle in the way of the progress, development and expansion of the immigrants. He alleged that the Line System was devised as a means to deprive the immigrant Muslims from good cultivable plots of land to confine them within the bonds of the artificially created lines. He also complained of certain incidents of atrocities committed by the armed police forces of the Government in the name of eviction in between 3rd February to 10th February, 1945. The houses of the immigrants, according to him, were broken, burnt down and they were being brutally beaten up by the armed police forces in certain immigrant areas including Barpeta. He regretted that such incidents occurred in Barpeta when the Revenue Minister Munawwar Ali was present there in Barpeta. He even cited the instances of the defamation and burning of the 'Holy Quran' by the armed forces. In fine, he demanded abolition of the Line System, allowing Immigrants to continue wherever they had settled by constructing houses and were doing cultivation, and finally demanded proper enquiry and action to be
taken against those who committed the inhuman acts of atrocity on the immigrants and those who were involved in the incidents of defamation of the 'Holy Book'. He finally made it clear that if the Government was not in a position to assure protection of life and property of the immigrants and to address their grievances, it would no longer be possible for the Immigrants to extend their support to the fourth Saadulla Ministry.

4.3. **Saadulla-Bardoloi-Choudhury Tripartite Agreement, Formation of Fifth Saadulla Ministry & the Issue of Immigration (23 March, 1945 - 1946 Elections)**:

   In view of the rejection of the Government Land Policy both by the Congress and the Muslim League, the Saadulla Ministry became shaky and towards the end of January, 1945, the news of an emerging Saadulla-Rohini Kumar Choudhury Coalition Ministry with Congress support, came into light. In fact, under the circumstances, Saadulla is said to have feared his position and came forward to make an agreement with Gopinath Bardoloi and Rohini Kumar Choudhury. Bardoloi was ready to support such a coalition under certain conditions. On 20th March, 1945, the three leaders met together and after three days' discussion agreed upon certain important points and this gave birth to Saadulla-Choudhury-Bardoloi tripartite agreement on 22nd March, 1945 to form a new Coalition Ministry by reconstituting the existing one.

   The five vital points on which the leaders agreed upon, were as follows -

   (i) The restoration of civil liberties and the gradual release of political prisoners;

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99. For details please see Motior Rahman Mia's speech (in Bengali) in the Assembly, in Ibid., pp. 194-196.
100. The Assam Tribune, 2 February, 1945, cited in Guha, op.cit., p.286.
101. PHA-III, p.270.
102. Guha, op.cit., p. 288 ; For details on the circumstances leading to the Tripartite Agreement, please see Ibid., pp. 285-290.
(ii) A suitable policy for procurement and distribution of essential goods, with a view to remove corruption;

(iii) A revision of the land settlement policy with a view to accommodate claims of the sons of the soil;

(iv) An agreed distribution of local board seats among the main contending groups; and

(v) The reconstitution of the Saadulla Ministry on an all-party basis.\(^\text{103}\)

As per the agreement, Saadulla resigned on 23rd March, 1945 and reconstituted his cabinet to include all the five Muslim Ministers from his last Cabinet, one tribal Minister Chosen by the tribal group and four non-Muslim Ministers including one representative of the Scheduled Caste, selected by the opposition, i.e., the Congress.\(^\text{104}\). Thus, the 5th and last Saadulla (Coalition) Ministry came into existence.\(^\text{105}\). Although, the five Muslim League Ministers were retained in the cabinet, the two important portfolios of Revenue and Finance were taken out of their hands. The controversial Revenue Ministry was given to Rohini Kumar Choudhury, which somehow seemed to have appeased the Assamese sentiment. Besides, all the non-Muslim Ministers were practically Congress nominees, although the Congressmen themselves did not join the Ministry.\(^\text{106}\). It is observed that, "The Congress while supporting the Ministry but refusing the office, was nevertheless, exercising its influence so far as the formation of the Ministry was concerned".\(^\text{107}\). Though the Ministry was supported by the Congress, some leading Congressman felt unhappy over the tripartite agreement. Muhammad Tyyebulla,

\(^{103}\) Ibid., p. 289.

\(^{104}\) Ibid.


\(^{106}\) Guha, Loc.cit; PHA-III, pp. 270-271.

\(^{107}\) PHA-III, pp-270-71.
the APCC President, said that Bardoloi had no right to use the name of the Congress in signing an agreement with the war-collaborators like Saadulla and Choudhury. He also sent a memorandum to the Congress High Command and asked to discuss the matter in the next working Committee meeting.\textsuperscript{108}

It is expressed that the formation of a coalition Ministry with persons more or less acceptable to everybody was rather an easy task, as compared to the fulfillment of the remaining part of the Tripartite Agreement, mainly the revision of the land settlement policy, which definitely needed a careful handling. The Cabinet is said to have dared not to adopt a new resolution on the subject until 18th June, 1945, due to "intricacies of the situation" and various obstacles put forward by the League."\textsuperscript{109} The resolution was adopted on 18th June, 1945. Thus, the newly constituted Ministry took a time of about four months in announcing its new land settlement policy under which a landless family was re-defined as one possessing less than twenty bighas of land; all grazing reserves were to be maintained intact and all encroachers to be indiscriminately evicted therefrom, as a matter of policy. In brief, the principles agreed upon in the December, 1944 All-Party Conference, were, said to have been fully restored in all respects\textsuperscript{110}.

However, in the coming days the Government's "halting and half-hearted" action in fully implementing the terms of the Agreement provided Bardoloi with the plea to "Wrangle out" of the so-called "unwise marriage of convenience" i.e., the Coalition formed on the basis of the Tripartite Agreement, which was already under heavy fire from his critics in APCC, as already stated.\textsuperscript{111} In fact, Saadulla was also working under severe constraints and immense pressure from the side of the League Organization. The Central Parliamentary Board of the Party had frowned

\textsuperscript{108} Muhammad Tayyebulla, Between the Symbol and the Idol at Last, New Delhi, 1964, pp. 158-160, cited in Ibid; Guha, op.cit., p.291.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} The Assam Tribune, 27th July, 1945, cited in Ibid., pp. 290-91.
\textsuperscript{111} Guha, op.cit., p.291.
upon the resolution of 18 June and advised for its modification. The crux of these modifications was that such immigrants as had already sown at least one crop, should be entitled to settlement, irrespective of their arrival dates in the Brahmaputra Valley or of the legality of their squatting on grazing reserves. On 28th July, 1945, Saadulla apprised Rohini Kumar Choudhury, the Land Revenue Minister, of the suggested modifications and latter communicated the same to the APCC leaders.\textsuperscript{112}

The Congress coalition Party and the Independent Muslim Party held a joint meeting on 14th - 15th August, 1946, in which the suggestions of the Muslim League for further modification of the Land Policy, as already stated, were rejected. Bardoloi was also authorized by the joint meeting to protest on their behalf, against the non-implementation of the Agreement. Bardoloi accordingly wrote to Saadulla on 21 August, 1945\textsuperscript{113}. In this way, ultimately Bardoloi withdrew support from the Coalition Ministry on the ground of non-implementation of the agreement fully by Saadulla\textsuperscript{114}.

Thus ended the said so-called "New Era in Assam" which is said to have begun with the formation of the Fifth Coalition Ministry by Saadulla with Congress-support as an outcome of the Tripartite Agreement. The superannuated Assam Legislature was dissolved on 1st October, 1945, while the fifth and the last Saadulla Ministry was to continue until the general election which was to be held in the second week of February, 1946. In fact, Saadulla was allowed to continue as the Head of a Care-taker Government till the elections. \textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112} Saadulla to Rohinikumar Choudhury, 28 July, 1945, in the file containing 'Leaders' Correspondence' APCC papers, Packet No:- 43, Congress Bhawan, Guwahati, cited in Ibid., p.292.
\textsuperscript{113} Bardoloi to Saadulla, 21 August, 1945, APCC Papers, Pkt. No:- 43, Congress Bhavan, Gauhati, cited in Ibid., p. 292.
\textsuperscript{114} PHA-III,p.271.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid; Guha, Loc.cit.
4.4. **Assessment:**

In this way ended the long spell of Saadulla Cabinets and with that Saadulla's attempt at solving the problem of the Line System and Muslim immigrants. The main charge against his successive Cabinets in this respect, levelled mainly by the Congress and the Assamese Hindus, was that Saadulla's Governments deliberately allowed and encouraged immigration and settlement of large number of Muslim farmers from Bengal with the ulterior motive of converting Assam into a Muslim-majority province. The main charge against the Saadulla Cabinet as summarized by the Congress, is as under -

"Sir Muhammad Saadulla's League Ministry, according to many local leaders connived at this unauthorized mass immigration, designed by Muslim League leaders in Assam and Bengal, to swell the Muslim numerical strength and with the continual large scale influx of Muslim tenants from the neighboring province of Bengal who occupied strips of wastelands and grazing reserves in the hills and plains of Assam, there began in Assam a silent but rapid process of conversion into Pakistan." 116

Another important charge levelled against Saadulla was that his Government had manipulated the 1941 Census deflating the number of Hindus and inflating the figures of the Muslim population. It was alleged that the Census superintendent was instructed to manipulate the Census as "to inflate the figures of the Muslim population"117 The main objection of the Hindus as well as the Congress was against the method of tabulation by community alone and not by religion as well118.

It is interesting to note that no authenticated document was cited to justify many of the charges levelled against Saadulla to prove his direct involvement. Besides, it is observed that many of the charges have been denied by Saadulla by

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116. Quoted in Kar (n.2), p. 76.
117. Quoted in Ibid.
118. Ibid.
providing reasonable defence to which no counter argument was put forward by his critics. For example, regarding the community-wise tabulations in 1941 Census, Saadulla clarified in 1942 that his Government was not responsible for community-wise tabulations which were done as ordered by the Central Government. He also reflected and challenged the question of planned invasion of grazing reserves by citing relevant figures. As to the planned invasion of other cultivable wastelands and the alleged role of Bengal Muslims in it, Saadulla replied in the Assembly on 31st March, 1946 in this manner -

"Now let me remove a few misconceptions. It has been stated by various friends opposite that it is a planned immigration. My Hon'ble friend the Minister in charge also has some misconceptions, for in his budget speech he makes an appeal to the Bengal Government to dissuade these people to come to Assam. Now every student of politics knows that Muslims are in majority in Bengal only about 56 percent. And you think that the Muslims of Bengal are so foolish as to jeopardize their meagre majority by a planned drive to send Muslim people to Assam?"

It is said that none from the opposition side counter-acted the above argument advanced by Saadulla. Saadulla further refuted another serious allegation thus:

"The insinuation has been that since the passing of the Pakistan resolution... We have started bringing these people... The bulk of the immigration has already been there from before and not after the Pakistan Resolution... Absurdity can not go further than this."  

He also complained of the "lack of trust" of the Assamese Hindus and of
the opposition in the working of his Governments, the trust which he could not
win even after reconstituting his Ministry in March, 1945 on 50:50 basis, He said:

"From the end of March, 1945. I had the honour to work with five Hon'ble
Members of my team all selected by my friend, the then opposition Leader, Srijut
Gopinath Bardoloi… It is said, 'If human memory is short, official memory is
shorter still'. So every one has forgotten that my Cabinet was constituted on 50:50
basis between five Muslim Leaguers and five chosen representatives of the
Congress. Yet sir, you could not trust the doing of that body”.123

These complaints and arguments which were put forward by Saadulla, were
said to have never been answered by the Hindu representatives who levelled
countless allegations against Saadulla Cabinets124.

The questions were also raised on the cited figures on the basis of which the
phenomenon of immigration was projected by the opposition and by the Assamese
Hindus. In this respect the views of R.B. Vaghaiwalla, Superintendent of Census
Operation, Assam 1951 who said that the reports of the "heavy stream" of
immigration, was to a great extent "exaggerated." One of the reasons for this,
according to him, was that there was no tabulation of birth-place return in the
census of 1941 and that birth places were recorded separately in 1951 only, for the
Assam districts. Although he had admitted the fact of increased influx of
immigrants during Saadulla regimes, at the same time he also referred to the
exaggerated reports. He said:

"There have been many grossly exaggerated reports of the recent heavy
stream of immigration into Assam, not only in the press and on the platform but
also in the authoritative circles. It has been stated by some that in recent times,
about 5 Lakhs of Muslim immigrants came to Assam, 1.5 Lakhs to Cachar alone.
A study of the census figures reveals how exaggerated these reports were."

He further stated that the total number of immigrants for the last two decades ie, from 1931 to 1951 could not possibly exceed 4,30,000 for the entire two decades125.

Thus, many question marks were put on the allegations against Saadulla and many of such vital questions were not answered by his critics. Anyway, the long span of Saadulla Cabinets was marked by the bitter criticisms of the Government policy mainly by the Assamese Hindus and many of those were based on the points discussed above. In brief, his Government was mainly accused of being Pro-immigrant and pro-Pakistan in respect of immigration and Land settlement. Although Saadulla's direct role in encouraging immigration and settling more and more Muslim immigrants in the province can not be proved by universally acceptable evidences and by available documents, yet it is widely accepted that the phenomenon of immigration got a fresh impetus with Saadulla and his Muslims League Colleagues' assuming of office and also that during his regime, the communal gulf between the Muslims and the Hindus and more specifically between the Assamese Hindus and immigrants and other Muslims on the issue of immigration got further enlarged. The situation became worse when the issue of immigration and Land settlement began to be linked with Pakistan movement of All India Muslim League which desired to see Assam as a component part of the proposed State of Pakistan. The era of Saadulla cabinets was also marked by the suspicion and lack of trust of the Assamese Hindus in the actual intention of the Government. They seemed to be not satisfied with any of the policy decisions of the Saadulla Governments and were continuously doubtful about the integrity and real intention of Government. On the other hand, Saadulla was not even able to fully satisfy the immigrants and also failed to meet the demands of the Muslim

League which wanted restriction-free immigration and settlement. Caught on the horn of a dilemma in his attempt at reconciling the diametrically opposite interests of the Assamese Hindus and the immigrant Muslims, Saadulla failed to work out any amicable settlement of the issue of the Line System and the Land settlement acceptable to the both the parties. Such a dilemma also led to the end of his last Coalition Ministry which was formed with the support of the Congress and on the basis of a Tripartite Agreement between Saadulla, Gopinath Bordoloi and Rohini Kumar Choudhury. Although the last and the fifth Saadulla Ministry was seen as a 'New Era' in Assam politics as it consisted of the Ministers from the Muslim League as well as five non-Muslim Ministers chosen and supported by the Congress. However, because of the reasons already discussed, both the League as well as the Congress subsequently refused to back the Ministry, which resulted in the collapse of the last Saadulla coalition Ministry although Saadulla continued as a head of a formal care-taker Government till the assembly elections of 1946.

The elections of 1946 brought a Congress Ministry into the reigns of power in the province, as a result of the party's success in the general constituencies. The election also proved the Muslim League's strength as it won all but three seats reserved for the Muslims. The success of the League in the reserved seats also confirmed the claim that the League was really the representative body of an overwhelming majority of the Muslims in the province. Anyway, the change of regime brought a drastic change in the outlook of the Government which went on to take a firm stand against illegal immigration and encroachments and decided to go for eviction of those immigrants who were not protected by the All Party agreement of 1944. The Government move at evicting the immigrants were strongly opposed by the Muslim League which resorted to a mass movement called Civil Disobedience Movement against Government's Eviction Policy. This has been dealt with in detail in the next chapter.