Chapter XXI

FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT

From the year 1874 upto the year 1927, the Hill areas which is now comprised within the State of Meghalaya, and also the other hill areas of North-Eastern India had no share in the provincial government. It was in 1927 that the Governor, Sir John Kerr appointed Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy as Minister for Medical Services. He was the first hillman to be appointed as a Minister. Rev. Nichols-Roy held office for a term. Rev. Nichols-Roy joined the Congress party in 1927 and aligned himself with the Responsivist group.

After the general elections held in 1937 under the Provincial Autonomy Scheme, Rev. Nichols-Roy became the leader of the Assam Nationalist Progressive Party within the Assam Legislative Assembly. The first Saadulla Ministry was sworn in on 1st April 1937. Saadulla included Rev. Nichols-Roy as a Minister for Co-operation. The second Saadulla Ministry was formed on 5th February, 1938. Again, Rev. Nichols-Roy was included as a Minister for Local Self-Government. But the Second Saadulla Ministry was voted out of office in the same year. On 20th September 1938, the first Bardoloi Ministry was sworn in. Since Rev. Nichols-Roy had earlier joined a Muslim Ministry, Shri C.N. Bardoloi refused to select Rev. Nichols-Roy
as one of his Ministers. In view of the fact that the Congress High Command had directed all Congress Ministries in the provinces to resign on the issue of war, the Bardoloi Ministry resigned on 7th November 1938. On the same day, the third Saadulla Ministry was formed. On 5th December 1939, a Khasi lady, Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh was inducted into the Ministry. But on 25th December 1941, the Saadulla Ministry was voted out of office. Thereupon, the administration of the province came under Governor's Rule under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. The Governor's Rule lasted till 25th August, 1942 when the fourth Saadulla Ministry was formed. This time also, Saadulla included Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh as a Minister. On the other hand, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy left for the United States in April 1943. Again, the Saadulla Ministry resigned on 23rd March 1945. But, as a result of an understanding between Saadulla and the opposition, the fifth Saadulla Ministry was sworn in on 24th March 1945. But this time, Saadulla did not include any hill tribal in the Ministry. The fifth Saadulla Ministry remained in office till 11th December 1946. The second Bardoloi Ministry was formed on 11th September 1946, because it was clearly understood that Sylhet would form part of Pakistan. This time, Gopinath Bardoloi included Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy in his Ministry. Thus, after being in political wilderness for 3 years, 10 months and 6 days, Rev. Nichols-Roy entered the Bardoloi Ministry. The Second Bardoloi Ministry submitted its resignation on the eve of the inauguration of the new Constitution of India.

The first Bardoloi Ministry under the constitution of India was sworn in on 26th January 1950. G.N. Bardoloi died on
6th August 1950. Since Rev. Nichols-Roy was the Secretary Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, there was a great expectation in the hill areas that he should succeed Bardoloi. But the Congress Parliamentary Party elected B.R. Medhi as its leader. Hence, B.R. Medhi formed the Care-taker Government on 30th August. Rev. Nichols-Roy was included in the Care-taker Ministry. When B.R. Medhi formed his first Ministry, he included Rev. Nichols-Roy in his cabinet.

Bishnu Ram Medhi formed his second Ministry on 25th February 1952, immediately after the first general election under the constitution of India. B.R. Medhi included not only Rev. Nichols-Roy as a Cabinet Minister but also Pu Caprawnga from the Mizo Hills as Parliamentary Secretary. But Pu Caprawnga was not satisfied with his position as a Parliamentary Secretary. Therefore, he resigned in 1954. From the outset, after the new constitution of India was inaugurated, Rev. Nichols-Roy had always expected that he should be allotted the portfolio of Tribal Areas Department. But, B.R. Medhi kept the portfolio for himself. Hence a gulf of difference was created between B.R. Medhi and Rev. Nichols-Roy. Again, when the State Reorganisation Commission, called for memoranda in 1954, the Government of Assam submitted a memorandum without the knowledge of Rev. Nichols-Roy. Therefore, Rev. Nichols-Roy associated himself with the leaders of the Eastern India Tribal Union and participated fully at the Tura Conference which demanded a Hill State for the hill areas of Assam. Further, Rev. Nichols-Roy submitted his own secret memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission urging for the creation of a separate hill state for all the hill areas of North-Eastern India. This memorandum was submitted without the knowledge of the Chief Minister. Hence the gulf of difference was widened. Eventually, Rev. Nichols-Roy resigned from the Ministry as well as
Medhi inducted Aaron Alley as a Cabinet minister. Earlier, Jay Bhadra Hagjer from the North Cachar Hills was appointed Deputy Minister. Hence, there were two tribals in the Ministry.

Bishnu Ram Medhi was once again elected as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party after the 1957 general election. Since the Congress failed to capture any seat from the Caro Hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the two districts were not represented in the Ministry. B.R. Medhi had to appoint Chetra Singh Teron, a Congress M.L.A. from the Likir Hills as a Minister for Tribal Affairs on 22nd April 1957. On 17th May, Khelhouse Sema, an independent M.L.A. from the Naga Hills was appointed as Deputy Minister. But, Khelhouse Sema had to resign on 1st December 1957, because from that date the Naga Hills ceased to be a part of Assam.

It may be recalled that there were acute differences within the Congress Legislature Party about the leadership of B.R. Medhi. Therefore, he was advised by the Union Home Minister, Pandit G.B. Pant and the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru to quit office honourably. Consequently, B.R. Medhi resigned for reasons of health. Later, he was appointed Governor of Madras (Tamil Nadu). The Congress Legislature Party was called upon to elect a new leader. Bimala Prasad Chaliha was elected leader, although he was not a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. On 28th December 1957, B.P. Chaliha was sworn in as Chief Minister of Assam. Chaliha dropped Chetrasing Teron on the ground that major tribes like the Khasis, the Caros and the Misos were not represented in the Ministry. In the meantime, the Eastern India Tribal Union was persuaded by Pandit Nehru and Pandit Pant to join the Chaliha Ministry. The Eastern India Tribal Union accepted this experiment. Thus, Capt. N.A. Sangma from the Garo Hills and Pu
Lalmawia from the Mizo Hills who were members of the Eastern India Tribal Union were appointed as a Cabinet Minister and a Minister of State respectively. Larsing Khymiem from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, who was also a member of the Eastern India Tribal Union was appointed Deputy Minister on 27th May 1958. Capt. V.A. Sangma was allotted the portfolio of Tribal Affairs, Transport etc. But, while selecting the members of his Ministry, Chaliha did not want to give undue importance to the Eastern Tribal Union alone. Therefore, he selected Pu. A. Thangluva from the Mizo Hills as Chief Parliamentary Secretary on 4th January 1959.

The association of the Eastern India Tribal Union and the Congress Legislature Party lasted only for two and a half years. It was the language policy of the Government of Assam which induced Capt. V.A. Sangma and Lalmawia to resign in the middle of 1960. In the place of Capt. V.A. Sangma, Maham Singh was appointed Minister for Tribal Affairs on 15th September 1961. But Maham Singh was miserably defeated in the 1962 general election and hence he resigned on 1st March 1962.

Chaliha formed his second Ministry on 16th March 1962, immediately after the third general election. Since one Congressman, Emonsing Sangma was elected from the Garo Hills, he was included as a Minister of State.

In the 1967 general elections, the APHLC swept all the seats available in the Garo Hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Ever since that year, these two districts were no longer represented in the Assam Ministry. These two districts were to constitute the future State of Meghalaya.

Formation of Government in Meghalaya: As early as the second week of January 1970, there was a strong speculation by certain section
of the Press that Capt. Sangma would be Chief Minister of the State.
It was also speculated that he would take S.D.P. Nichols-Roy, J.B.
Lyngdoh and E. Barak into the Cabinet. Further, it was stipulated
that either P. Ripple Kyndiah or Sandford K. Marak should be the
Speaker. In case one of them was elected Speaker, the other would
be included in the Cabinet. Capt. W.A. Sangma was very much perturbed
at such news-item. When one of the pressmen was asked the source of
his information, the concerned news-reporter replied that he got the
information from one of the members of the inner circle of the party.
He even disclosed the name of a particular leader. Many senior
members of the party felt that P. Ripple Kyndiah should not be given
preference to other senior party members like E.S. Lyngdoh, D.D. Pugh
and others. P. Ripple Kyndiah was not senior enough in the party.

The first Parliamentary Party meeting of the APHLC met at
Nendipathar, Garo Hills to elect a leader in the third week of
March 1970. As was expected, Capt. W.A. Sangma was unanimously elected
leader of the APHLC Parliamentary Party. Capt. Sangma was the natural
choice for obvious reasons. First, he was in the forefront of the
movement for the creation of Meghalaya. Secondly, he had the requisite
qualities of leadership. It was essentially he, who maintained the
APHLC as a well-knit party. Thirdly, Capt. Sangma was a moderate and
a constitutionalist. Lastly, Capt. Sangma had acquired vast adminis-
trative experience. It was he who laid the foundation for the success-
ful working of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council. He was
a successful Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills District
Council which has so far functioned more successfully. He was also
a Cabinet Minister in the Chaliha Ministry. He was given full charge
of the Tribal Areas Department. Therefore, his election as leader of
the APHLC Parliamentary Party was a mere formal affair.
While selecting his colleagues, Capt. Sangma had no difficulty because the party had some leaders who had rendered great service to it. The people expected Capt. Sangma to take them into his Cabinet. One of such leaders was Stanley D.D. Nichols-Roy who was the General Secretary of the Party continuously throughout the period of the struggle for the Hill State. Thus he was included into the Cabinet. The second leader was B.B. Lyngdoh who was a great organiser. Since, Stanley D.D. Nichols-Roy and B.B. Lyngdoh were from the Khasi Hills, the case of other leaders from this autonomous district could not be considered. In Jaintia Hills also there was a recognised leader in the person of Edwingson Bareh. Edwingson Bareh was the C.E.M. of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, and later he became the C.E.M. of the Jowai Autonomous District Council. Thus Edwingson Bareh was taken to the Cabinet. In order to maintain the balance between the districts, Sandford K. Marak was taken from the Garo Hills. Capt. Sangma himself hailed from the Garo Hills.

When Capt. W.A. Sangma was called upon to form the Cabinet, he submitted the list of these leaders as his colleagues to the Governor. On 2nd April 1970, after the Prime Minister had inaugurated the Autonomous State of Meghalaya at the Garrison Ground, Shillong, the Governor, B.K. Nehru administered the oath of office and of secrecy of Capt. W.A. Sangma and to his Cabinet colleagues in the presence of the Prime Minister and in the presence of thousands of people who came to witness the inauguration ceremony.

After the Cabinet had assumed office, there was a strong lobbying inside the party regarding the election of Speakership. It appears that B.B. Lyngdoh had taken it for granted that P. Ripple Kyndiah would be elected Speaker. He was ably supported by Rokendro
Ekhar, E. S. Lyngdoh and A.B. Liengdoh. These leaders could even enlist the support of Stanley D.D. Nichols-Roy. But other leaders like D.D. Pugh, J.J. Duncan, J. Swer, H.N. Swer, H. Nongram, S.P. Swer, G. Laloo and other leaders were strongly in favour of R.S. Lyngdoh. Besides, the whole group of APHLC leaders from the Garo Hills and the Jaintia Hills were in favour of R.S. Lyngdoh. When Capt. Sangma found that the position had become delicate, he preferred to remain silent.

The second meeting of the APHLC Parliamentary Party was held at Tura on 12th April 1970. With rare tact and understanding of the situation, Capt. Sangma pretended as if he did not know of what was going on. He suggested that a nomination committee might be constituted in order to find out a person who could be accepted by all. It was always the tradition of the APHLC that the finding of such Committee should be accepted by all without any reservation. His suggestion was accepted by the meeting. Hence on 13th April 1970 the nomination committee consulted the views of all party M.L.A.s. Capt. Sangma preferred not to make any commitment. S.D. D. Nichols-Roy was then at a loss. Eventually, he consulted D.D. Pugh thus: "Whom have you suggested?”. Quick came the reply "R.S. Lyngdoh". Then S.D.D. Nichols-Roy said: "I thought we would spare him for the University". Then D.D. Pugh replied "we will cross the bridge when the time comes". Thus S.D.D. Nichols-Roy had to change his views.

In the evening of the 13th, the nomination committee announced its finding that the consensus was in favour of R.S. Lyngdoh. Thus, R.S. Lyngdoh was unanimously elected Speaker of the provisional Legislative Assembly of the autonomous State of Meghalaya. Later on, Grohonsingh Harak was elected Deputy Speaker.

In order to balance the group interests of the APHLC in the
Ehasi Hills, Capt. Sangma took Darwin D. Pugh as a Minister of State later on.

When Meghalaya became a full-fledged State on the midnight of 20th-21st January 1972, Captain Sangma tendered the resignation of his Cabinet on 20th January at 11.50 P.M. Again Captain Sangma and the same Ministers were sworn in at 12 midnight, whereas R.S. Lyngdoh, the Speaker was administered oath of allegiance.

After the general election to the Legislative Assembly in 1972, Capt. W.A. Sangma was once again asked to form the Ministry. He retained the existing Ministry with one slight change. Grohonsing Marak who was the Deputy Speaker was taken as a Minister of State. R.S. Lyngdoh was retained in the Speaker's post. As a result of an electoral adjustment between the APHLC and the Congress, it was felt that the post of Deputy Speakership should be offered to a Congress leader. Hence, Singjan Sangma was unanimously elected Deputy Speaker.

Ever since 1972, C.G. Swell, the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha has been active in campaigning against the APHLC. For about two years, it appeared as if his followers were acting in complete concert with the Congress leaders and the HSPDE. During the Winter Session of the Assembly in 1974, the Opposition was about to be successful in getting some of the APHLC M.L.As. to its side. Hoover Hynniewta, M.N. Majaw and others were very active in trying to dislodge the Sangma Ministry. Again, there was a strong demand within the party to expand the Ministry. Eventually, Capt. Sangma had to yield to these pressure by agreeing to expand the Ministry. Thrice he offered the post of a Cabinet Minister to the Speaker; but on all the three occasions, R.S. Lyngdoh declined the offer on the ground that if the Speaker should accept Ministership in the middle of the term, it would not create a healthy convention. Thus in February 1975,
Capt. Sangma raised both D.D. Pugh and Grohonsing Marak to Cabinet rank. He also inducted P. Ripple Kyndiah as Cabinet Minister and three new entrants, P.G. Karbaniang, B.B. Shallam and Salseng Marak were taken as Ministers of State.

It must be said that all the Ministers were decently educated. They came to office with some amount of experience. All of them belong to the emerging middle class. All of them are moderates and constitutionalists.