THE DECLINE OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND THE ASCENDANCY
OF THE BUREAUCRACY IN EAST PAKISTAN
1947-54

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CHAPTER 4

DEARTH, POLITICS, AND POPULAR RESPONSE

In the previous chapter I have highlighted the politics of procurement by the government of food grains from the surplus producers in the context of a growing food crisis. In this chapter I propose to examine what may be termed 'the politics of dearth' i.e. the problems that attended the question of distribution of foodgrains and the politics that marked the response of the poorer sections to the situation of chronic food shortage.

In early 1949 the situation with regard to food supply was described as 'alarming' by an opposition MLA in an open letter to a Central Minister of Pakistan. Members of the Legislative Assembly frequently used phrases like 'great calamity', 'desperate', 'disaster', 'grave' in describing the food situation in the province. The food problem was named 'the problem of all problems' by the leader of the Opposition in the EBLA in 1949. In their own documents the government admitted to having a 'crisis' on their hands. Indeed, it was a crisis that not only tested social relations in the country but was also to influence the course of East Pakistan politics.

I will argue in this chapter that the authoritarian nature of the initiatives taken by the ruling group in the sphere of distribution of foodgrains did much to diminish the euphoria that many of the poor had earlier displayed over political independence. I shall further argue that the poor, by their response to the food crisis, contributed significantly to the erosion of the political power of the Muslim League in East Pakistan.
The dearth that existed in East Pakistan in the early years was due more to price factors than to, say, substantial loss of crop on account of natural calamities, which did affect some areas. In Arai and Bagmara police stations and in the lower regions of Rajshahi, for example, a chronic famine prevailed on account of continuous crop failures due to the flooding of the grain fields. But it is clear from the complaints made by the articulate sections of the society and from occasional admissions by the government that the human agency was the main factor in pushing prices beyond the reach of the ordinary buyers. Often, however, a different picture was painted in pro-government writings. The Azad editorial on 2 October 1947 blamed only natural disasters for food shortage and spared the government. The sentiment was echoed in Sobhan's observation that 'the problem is for some escape from the vagaries and ravages of nature... the perennial problem posed by too much and too little water at the wrong time. To this is added the intermittent catastrophes which come with a major flood, cyclone or tidal wave in the coastal regions.' The official explanation often made natural disasters look 'given and uncontrollable'. In official perception famine was one episode in a recurring cycle of natural disasters.

However, the role of natural disasters can be easily exaggerated. According to estimations made by Keith Griffin for a much later period, cyclical instability in food supplies owing to natural disasters was of the order of only 6.5 per cent for Bangladesh in the 1970s. A similar figure is most likely to have been applicable to East Pakistan also in its early years. One may not agree completely with the Krishak Sabha's description of the situation as one of 'famine in spite of abundance'; but it is difficult to overlook the large contribution that communal strife, administrative mismanagement, and the authoritarian approach of the government and the ruling party must have made to the price-induced famine that existed in East Pakistan during the rule of the Muslim League. To the people of Hajiganj in Comilla district, the famine appeared distinctly man-made,
'caused', they said, 'by the spreading corruption among a number of businessmen, government officials and the public'. During the run-up to the first general election held in March 1954, the Awami League blamed the Muslim League for creating an 'artificial famine' in the country. This was seen as one among the many misdeeds of the Muslim League government in East Pakistan.

But for a long time, the issue, to the official mind, was whether or not there was a famine in East Pakistan and it was never resolved even though a lot of heated debate was generated within and outside the Provincial Assembly. On 15 August 1947 the Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha maintained in an open letter to the government of East Pakistan that 'real famine has broken out' over large areas of East Bengal. Almost a year later on 15 July 1948 the leaders of Sylhet Muslim League admitted in a statement that a famine existed in the district. In March 1949, a Muslim League MLA reported serious scarcity of food in the district of Kushtia and in Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district. In these areas, according to him, only one family out of hundred could afford two meals a day, about half of them lived on only one meal a day and the rest survived on the charity of others. Another MLA reported that a famine prevailed in the police stations of Bagmara, Mohanpur, Manda, Atrai, Singra, and Baraigram in the district of Rajshahi. Abdus Shahid in his *Kara Smriti* mentions a severe food shortage leading to a famine affecting Khulna district between 1948 and 1949. The food situation in this period was the subject of a passionate speech by a Muslim League MLA who reminded the Assembly of the 'thousands of our country men [who] were starving and falling easy victims to death and pestilence'. The situation did not improve much after 1949. After a brief respite in 1950, Barisal and Khulna suffered a bad famine from 1951 to 1953 as a result of which twenty thousand people died in Khulna alone. On 27 April 1951, *Yugantar* reported severe food crisis also in Hatiya in Noakhali district.

In October 1952, Dhirendra Nath Datta, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the EBLA, informed the House that almost sixty per cent of the people were going without food in Chittagong and Dhaka divisions. Barisal was also reported to be in a state of severe
crisis with more than half of the population starving in Gournadi and Mehendiganj areas. In the latter half of 1952 Ananda Bazar Patrika reported that a famine prevailed in Beanibazar and Zakiganj police stations of Sylhet. By the turn of the year, in the words of Kamruddin Ahmed, the country was in a ‘terrible state’ in so far as the food situation was concerned. Reports of ‘famine sales’ and consumption of ‘famine food’ by affected people featured prominently in the media and in the speeches of the members of the Assembly.

But the government insisted that there was no famine in any part of the country. At times members of the Assembly belonging to both the parties demanded that the government declare the deficit areas as famine-affected, but to no avail. To the government, famine remained a ‘dangerous word’ as it always had been throughout the career of the Raj. Not only the word, even the publication of food prices in the media brought harsh reactions from the authorities. Press notes were issued frequently to warn the media and ‘anti-social’ people not to exaggerate price figures of food items. The government imputed ulterior motives to the authors of these reports. ‘Some of these reports appear to have been motivated by the desire to create panic and alarm’, said a typical press note issued by the government. To the authorities, any reporting of death by starvation only showed ‘a lack of care for public welfare’ on the part of the reporter.

As popular discussions tended to exaggerate anyway, the government had very few means with which to combat the situation. They blamed all exaggeration on the cunning efforts of the hoarders, smugglers, and black marketeers to profit from the situation. But shortage was a real problem and once price rose, the government, unable to control the latter, could only struggle with its image of inefficiency and corruption that was being created in the public mind by the circulation of anti-government rumours and criticism.

Members of the Assembly failed to understand why areas badly hit by dearth were not declared as ‘famine affected’. One of them thought this to be ‘a colonial legacy’: the government was avoiding responsibility by taking shelter under the definition of famine as
enshrined by the Raj in the Famine Code. One Muslim League member even asked if it was to avoid giving relief to the affected areas that the government avoided declaring deficit areas as famine affected. In reply the Minister said that ‘famine implied many things’. ‘There were different stages, the first stage was distress, the second stage was scarcity, and the third stage was famine’. In a country where the lives of the poor were threatened as much by the vagaries of nature as by the machinations of greedy profiteers and whims of officials, any action that depended on this elusive definition of ‘famine’ invariably turned out to be a cruel joke on them. In fact, we could agree with Arnold that ‘famine was inherent in the nature of peasant society’. For peasants as a rule did not possess any substantial reserve or resources... a flood, a drought or a blight or a war might explain the immediate cause of a famine but the underlying reason lay deep in the social, economic and political subordination of the peasantry. This aspect of peasant existence in East Bangal was expressed eloquently by Adhikary, a Congress Member of the EBLA:

Starvation with the whole family has become an everyday affair and they [the poor] slowly and silently die due to the effect of the starvation though not due to the starvation itself... Famine has become chronic in this province since 1943 and the people have become so much used to starvation that they accept the famine condition as normal.

Whether the people accepted the famine condition as normal or not, the fact remained that areas that suffered from scarcity of foodgrains were not declared ‘famine-affected’. This attitude of the government was not only dependent on caution but originated mainly from a sense of paranoia from which the national government suffered continually. On 8 September 1948 in a speech at Atrai in Rajshahi, Mafizuddin Ahmed, the Minister in charge of food was reported to have said that ‘those who propagated that the country was facing a crisis like that of 1943 were trying to dampen the morale of the Pakistanis and they were the enemies of the state’. Thus the new nationalist government found it difficult to acknowledge honestly their own unpreparedness in handling the first crisis they faced immediately after assuming power from the Raj.
As early as 1 October 1947 the Government decided to retain control and tighten to the maximum the cordons around the perimeter of East Pakistan in order to procure foodgrains from the surplus districts. The intention was to facilitate easy flow of foodgrains within the same district as well as from one district to another so that scarcity in the rural areas of deficit districts could be eased. The Government took this action in order to depress prices of foodgrains in deficit areas by regulating and controlling supply from the surplus districts. This measure by itself failed to achieve the goal of price control for various reasons. However, the Government experimented with the cordonning system without much success before it was finally withdrawn in October 1949.

But the Government's most important commitment was to keep the urban population supplied with cereals. At the time of partition the towns of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Comilla and Chittagong were under a rationing scheme. On 7 March 1949, the towns of Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Madaripur, Kushtia, and Sirajganj were brought under statutory rationing and again on 4 April of the same year Faridpur, Pabna, and Tangail towns were added to the rationing programme. Noakhali, Rajbari, and Saidpur towns were soon to follow, bringing the number to 15 towns in the province, and covering a population of 14 lakhs.

Besides the statutory rationed areas the Government had statutory commitments in regard to roughly six lakhs of labour to whom cereals were supplied through their employers. Non-statutory commitments, known as priorities, were gaols, hospitals, and the essential services including local bodies. A population of about five lakhs was to be catered for in the latter category. Altogether these 25 lakhs of people were the first beneficiaries of government food distribution scheme through controlled marketing. In April 1949 the government proposed to bring an additional 35 lakhs people under the
modified rationing in all deficit districts thus bringing the total to 60 lakhs for 'a reasonable supply of cereals' among the distressed.37

Under the rationing scheme A-class ration card holders, i.e. the poorest sections in the rural areas who did not pay any tax, were to get two seers of rice for an adult and one seer for a child for the whole week. The consumer's price for rice was Rs.20 per maund and for paddy it was Rs.12-8 annas till it was raised to Rs 21-4 annas for rice and Rs.13.2 annas for paddy in 1953.38

Rationing of foodgrains was a huge task for a government which was disorganized, panicky, and inexperienced in a country which miserably lacked all the necessary facilities to make such a commitment successful. East Bengal is a riverine country and the majority of movements were made by river. Not all routes, however, were navigable throughout the year. Stocks procured in the dry seasons had to be stored until the onset of the monsoon. There were again some points from which foodgrains were taken to a convenient head where trans-shipment was made into bigger boats fit for plying the big rivers like the Padma and the Meghna. For movement facility the government had only two flats, eleven barges, and several launches apart from an inadequate railway system.39

The difficulties thus were real but when these were put forward by the government as the reasons for not performing the task of food distribution, the critics of the government refused to listen. Among the articulate sections of the society, the government's prestige suffered on account of the food situation.

Rationing, however, could not have been an adequate measure, for the very poor could not afford to buy foodgrains even at a subsidized rate; many of them would not even qualify to have access to the Scheme. They were the vagrants, the footloose section of the poor, who had drifted away from all community support structures and resources. Some of them were placed in the Destitute Homes and in other institutions of relief.
Immediately after partition of the province there were as many as 28 Central Destitute Homes, 35 Isolated Work-cum-Poor Houses and 40 temporary Orphanages in East Bengal accommodating a total of 12,000 inmates only. Apart from these there were 22 Vagrant Centres with 4000 inmates. Indeed too meagre compared to the need. For a growing number of landless people - a product of famine and post-famine economic situation - the government had the 'East Bengal Land Colonisation Scheme' for rehabilitation. The Scheme when implemented was expected to relieve the strain on the revenue of the province for the purpose of relief. A satisfactory repercussion on the food situation was also expected from the scheme. Although the government refused to accept the situation in East Bengal as famine affected, it adopted a number of measures to ease the severity of conditions arising out of the scarcity of food. Money was annually sanctioned under the Relief and Rehabilitation Head in the Budgets. Agricultural Loans, Test Reliefs and Gratuitous Relief. The latter was given in the form of doles in cash or kind, sale of foodgrains at concessional rates of prices or their free distribution and free house-building grants, all these measures introduced and developed by the Raj were adopted by the national government to face the situation created by food shortage in the province. But these measures evoked a storm of criticism both on account of principle and practice which contributed in a large measure to the growing unpopularity of the government and the ruling party.

Even today in Bangladesh social statistics are not dependable; they were far less so in the late 40's and early 50's. Notwithstanding this difficulty the food policy of the government centered around a controversy over the degree of food shortage. A Congress MLA claimed that he had calculated it on the basis of Agricultural Statistics and as a result the story of deficit appeared to him quite strange. Monoranjan Dhar, another Congress member, exposed, through the contradictory statements made by responsible
members of the government, the whole myth of food shortage and refused to accept the justification of such 'a rigorous experiment' in the food sector by the government. He pointed out that the Civil Supply Secretary had said that the deficit was of one lakh ton, where as the government had announced a deficit of two lakh tons six months earlier, while in the recent past N M Khan, Director of Civil supplies, and the Prime Minister had given differing assessments of the food deficit. This erratic behaviour, according to him, was largely responsible for the lack of confidence in the government by the people. Monoranjan Dhar relied on the data produced by the different agencies of the Raj - the Land Revenue Commission, the Rent Enquiry Committee, the Famine Enquiry Committee, the Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee, Settlement Reports, Collectors' Reports, Crop Cutting Experts' Reports - to calculate actual annual produce of foodgrains in the province. Maulana Bhashani also blamed the government for retailing the story of East Bengal being chronically deficit in food production. This to him, was a myth the Raj had produced to avoid responsibility for the famine of 1943. He bitterly criticized the periodic statements made by responsible members of the government retailing anomalous statistics of food deficit in the province.

But two decades after political independence, Sobhan published a sceptical note on the official statistics for Rice Output in East Pakistan where he wrote 'Unfortunately their [Directorate of Agriculture of Government of East Bengal] method of gathering statistics remains decidedly primitive. They rely on visual estimates of the crop... This implies a visual estimate of the acreage which is multiplied by the officer's subjective estimate of the annual yield per acre, to give the production for the area under his jurisdiction'. He raised an important question: 'What is left undecided is how these figures came to be used at all and whether they were used for their political value' Figures do assume political value and they definitely did so in the early years of nation building in East Pakistan. The statistics of deficit helped the government justify a rigorous levy of foodgrains for distribution among the distressed affected by shortage.
In fact, even within the ruling circles, opinions were sharply divided on the question of food policy. On 30 March 1949, the Minister in charge of Civil Supplies asserted that ‘when there is shortage of food... there must be control. There must be rationing; otherwise the poor will die; none can save them’. But this solution was not uncritically accepted by the Chairman in the Muslim League Workers’ Conference held in Dhaka on 23 and 24 June 1949. He approved of the control in food marketing in the context of the rapacious behaviour of the hoarders and black marketeers but he compared the policy to that of putting the cart before the horse when procurement was carried out before land had been nationalised. Tajuddin Ahmed also disapproved of control and cordon within districts. Instead he emphasised the need to strictly police the frontier. The Muslim League leaders of Sylhet in a memorandum on 13 May 1949 urged the Central Minister for Food and Public Health to withdraw ‘all restrictions on free movement of rice and paddy within the district.

Some members of the Muslim League wanted withdrawal of that levy but were in favour of controlling supply of foodgrains for the sake of the poor. Some other members believed that that levy policy could not improve the lot of the people in the deficit areas. Congress members were generally opposed to the idea of controlling trade in foodgrains. However, control as ‘a necessary evil’ in terms of procurement and distribution of foodgrains had the support of most of the people responsible for decision making in the then East Pakistan government. Above all, control was justified on the basis of helping the dearth affected people of the province. In the perception of the ruling group anybody who was against control ‘did not represent the poor people’.

To prove the point, on 20 March 1953 the Minister for Civil supplies claimed that 64,00,000 maunds of foodgrains were distributed among the poor people of the province. He further claimed that it was meant for those who could not purchase rice from the market. Some members of the Assembly were quite critical about these measures of the government which was supposed to help the poor. In some cases, it was said that the condition of the distressed had worsened due to the shortsighted policy of the
Government. A Muslim League MLA complained about the situation in Kishoreganj where a constant scarcity of food prevailed due to the cordonning system. Cordonning not only aggravated the food situation in some areas, it also generated regional antagonism and bitterness. Sabur Khan, a Muslim League MLA from Khulna sounded 'a note of warning to the government' that if immediate steps were not taken to feed the deficit pockets of the surplus districts, the starving people of those places would not allow any foodgrains to be exported out of the district. A Congress Member complained that some deficit areas were making 'an extra profit' by growing jute and other crops. The District Magistrate of Pabna made similar observation to the touring Governor of the Province. According to the DM the jotedars were profiting in deficit areas due to the policy of the government.

Cordonning however failed to achieve the goal of keeping the price within the buying capacity of most of the purchasers. And apart from generating regional antagonism, cordonning introduced a 'most vicious system of smuggling of foodgrains from surplus areas to deficit areas'. As a Congress Member of the Assembly put it: 'with a little bit of money in one’s pocket one was allowed to pass into different areas with a large quantity of the stock.' Abdul Ahad, a member from Satkhira, reported on the on-going corruption in his area due to the system of cordonning. He alleged that an active collaboration existed between the smugglers and the cordonning officers. One MLA claimed that such corruptions led to the rise of price of foodgrains. According to him the payments the food dealers had to make to the Civil Supply officials were largely responsible for price rise. This allegation was substantiated by Abdus Salam, a Muslim League MLA. He told the Assembly that some traders while smuggling rice from the surplus areas paid only Rs 10-12 per maund and after bribing the police all along the route sold the same amount at Rs 26-28.

In fact, all the different measures the government took ran into problems. Within five miles of the border regions curfew, restricting movement of the people, was imposed to stop smuggling of foodgrains across the border. But it paralysed the movement of two
lakh people from sunset to dawn within 300 sq. miles in Satkhira a border region in Khulna district. A Muslim League MLA complained that the people as a result were practically locked up in a' narrow [suffocating] atmosphere' within the curfew area. The control shops where foodgrains were sold to ration card holders were not easily accessible. 'Thousands of people coming from a distance of about 10 miles from their homes had to wait before a control shop from morning till sunset for five seers of paddy', complained Mashiuddin Ahmed, a Muslim League MLA from Manikganj, a deficit area in Dhaka district. Sometimes rotten foodgrains were distributed through these control shops. Quite often, the government was blamed for allowing foodgrains to rot in warehouses. Given an opportunity poor people preferred to buy dearer rice from the open market. In addition, the poor and deserving often did not receive any information regarding the availability of goods from the control shops. The problems of administration were perhaps not all that different from those encountered by the Bangladesh government in the 1970s:

The dealers generally sell most of the allotted goods in blackmarket, distributing only a fraction of these among the 'deserving'... if they [the poor] do not avail themselves at the first opportunity, they are usually told that supplies are exhausted. In these activities, [of the dealers] connivance of the UP [Union Parishad] functionaries is quite explicit, and in return for this they receive a share.

Siddiqui, the author of the lines quoted above, concluded that the modified rationing system catered very little to those for whom it was introduced. A group of researchers who observed the rationing system in a number of villages in Khetlal Police Station of Bogra district, concluded:

In practice the procedures are not followed by the Union Parishad members. They use their power of recommendation as a lever for exploiting the competing poor people for a ration card. Moreover if a poor peasant does not have money to buy his ration, the dishonest traders of the village often buy rationed goods at a lower price and sell them at a higher price'.

As I have said, both these findings on the rationing system in the countryside pertain to Bangladesh in the 1970's. The situation that existed then in terms of access of the poor to governmental resources was perhaps no better or worse than in the early years after
political independence from the Raj. We can only guess in absence of any hard evidence. But the guess is not altogether without foundation. Popular spokesmen for the poor like the rural Kabial (poet) Ramesh Shil recorded the misdoings of the food dealers in one of his songs.73

Grave problems attended the distribution of relief goods to the affected people. Even the Minister complained against the apathy of his own administration. He admitted before the Assembly that he had some money for test relief which he offered to the District Magistrate, yet none of them had put forward any proposal.74 The callousness of some of the District Magistrates went so far as to cause the displeasure of the Minister. On the request of a Muslim League MLA the Minister sanctioned some money for the affected people of Khulna but the District Magistrate opposed it as he felt that there was no necessity for such relief in the area.75 This was not an exceptional case. The Secretary of Barisal District Muslim League in a letter to the District Magistrate made similar complaints. He blamed the latter for refusing to acknowledge the need for relief in Barisal.76 At times mere bureaucratic paraphernalia delayed relief operations. Help was seldom available when it was needed most. Under fire from a section of the EBLA members, the Minister, explaining procedural delay said:

> When the proposal came from the District Magistrate I at once sanctioned the money, ... under the rules it has to go to the Finance Department. Because, the Finance Department examines and scrutinises and then sanctions. So naturally some delay occurs but this is unavoidable.77

Coming at a time when such delay could mean loss of lives, it is not surprising that one Member sharply expressed the impatience and blamed the 'bureaucratic tradition of the British imperialism' for all the misdoings of the Civil Supplies Department.78

Towards the end of 1949 the Muslim League Government decided to form relief committees, which signalled a minor departure from the practice of the Raj. In the rural areas the committee usually included 'respectable people, such as Head Masters, Sub-Registrars, MLA's, Members of the District and Union Boards'.79 But these Committees
had no activities whatsoever in many areas of the province. Naobelal complained in an editorial about the inaction of the committee which was supposed to function in Sylhet. The Secretary of Barisal Muslim League had the same complaint against the District Magistrate who presided over the relief committee there. The Minister admitted that ‘the officials were doing everything according to their whims and they were led by impulse’. And in spite of his expectation of ‘fair and equitable’ distribution of relief goods, things continued as before.

In this process the officials succeeded in retaining the image of authority in matters of distribution of relief and effectively scotched the possibility, however faint, of any alternative system of authority emerging on the basis of participatory actions in the sphere of food distribution. Political leadership thus lost its initiative to the functionaries of the state; this reduced the standing of the leaders in the eyes of the people they represented. Ramesh Shil, the rural poet mentioned before, said in a poem written about this time, that he would trust the District Magistrate but not political leaders on questions to do with the availability of rice from the government appointed dealers. Arnold’s statement (in the context of the Madras famine of 1876-8) that dearth ‘brought out the ambiguity in peasant attitude to the state: the expectation of a sympathetic response conditioned by resentment at official harassment and restrictions and by a deep suspicion of the state’s motives’ applies equally well to East Bengal after 1950.

A Muslim League member of the EBLA summed up the situation of the affected thus in March 1949:

Year after year the people are facing scarcity of food, famine and starvation. We, as their representatives have been, time and again, telling them that this is an infant state and in this state of infancy it is not in a position to make adequate provision for food and clothing. So, they should stand the sufferings patiently and we told them that the next year would be a happy year... When they found that in spite of our promises for improvement, the situation was going from bad to worse, they now refuse to wait any more for better days... They want food and nothing short of food can satisfy them.

Rhetoric apart, this statement registered a change of mood among a large number of people who could no longer be described as ‘mute, dumb and distressed’. The Leader of
the Opposition told the Assembly that there had been deaths from starvation and disease in Khulna and other parts of the province. These were described as 'silent deaths'. Yet dissatisfaction was growing and was soon to result in loud and persistent protests by the poor.

V

Let us begin our analysis of peasant resistance to government policy by discussing a report of the Executive enquiry on police firing at Chanhkhoir at Rajshahi on 12 January, 1948:

On 12.1.48 at about 3.35pm the Cordonng Officer noticed a fleet of 25/30 boats approaching being conveyed by a mob of 100 men... armed mainly with lathis. They and boatman were shouting slogans, Allaho-Akbar [Allah is great] etc.. He asked them to show permit and stop boats. They did not listen. Then a battle started. Every time they tried to attack fire was opened... Altogether 102 rounds of ammunition were used... 4/5 persons died and about 20 got hurt due to firing... The mob was so excited that they did not rest by injuring those two officers, they chased the Cordonng Officer and the cordonng party stationed there in spite of firing by police.86

The report also mentioned that on 11 January of the same year about 500 boats were forcibly taken through Chanhkhoir. They were similarly 'convoyed by armed mobs on both sides of the bank of the river'. The people involved did not listen to the orders of the cordonng staff to stop. And on the same day the police resorted to firing, far away from Rajshahi, in Harighose's Khal (Canal) in Khulna as the 'smuggler's along with the villagers of the locality attacked the police force from two sides.87 These are instances of violations of cordon restrictions that the government imposed on the movements of food grain within the province. There are also instances of armed resistance by the peasants even immediately after independence. On 23 September, 1947, the Subdivisional Officer, Perojpur sub-division of Barisal district wrote the following to the Additional District Magistrate:

... in the morning of the 23rd September last (1947)... Regional Controller of Procurement, Barisal moved from Matibhang in Nazipur P.S. with his men and the
armed force in search of boats in which paddy and rice were used to be smuggled out from this area to Faridpur district in large quantities... They had sighted a large number of paddy boats... then these boats were chased. The smugglers cried for help and a large number of people arrived with various lethal weapons and threatened them (the police party). He then added that 'It is a common knowledge that Bashbaria Khal which runs along the border of Gopalganj sub-division in Faridpur district has been the main route for smuggling out paddy and rice in large quantities'.

Here is another report published by the Azad on 16 October 1947:

On 12 October the D.I.G. Enforcement branch and the Additional Superintendent of Police along with a batch of armed constables stopped 150 to 200 paddy-boats in Kalagachia near Madanganj, a little south of Narayangang. The Police authorities alleged that the boats had passed the cordoned areas illegally... Meanwhile the villagers gathered at the place and urged the police to allow the paddy-boats to go... According to the Police source the following day about three thousand people from the neighbouring villages surrounded the police force and set the boatmen free.

The boats were subsequently released and the Police did not dare open fire on the people. These instances of boats carrying foodgrains and violating cordon restrictions with the help of local villagers shocked the administration. But this was not the only form popular resistance took nor was such resistance confined only to the areas mentioned.

On 9 November 1948 the Patrol Officer of Procurement in Mathupur of Shariakandi PS in Bogra district was murdered by certain 'active smugglers', 'whose number', according to the District Magistrate, was 'very great'. The 'tragic' incident happened on the river Jamuna. The incidents of cordon breaking were anything but exceptional. Given the difficulties of communication, (i.e., absence of faster and adequate transport and lack of personnel) and the vast commitment of the cordonning programme, it seems highly likely that the sub-divisional officer of Perojpur in Barisal district, was correct in saying that 'they (the cordon breakers) usually moved in hundreds of boats together to break the cordon and did it successfully almost always'. Official reports raise more than one question. Why were such large numbers of people involved in breaking the cordon restrictions? Why did the villagers come to the help of the cordon breakers? And who were the cordon breakers anyway?

Even in normal years the peasants in East Bengal did not have a full year's employment. The number of months of unemployment and underemployment varied from region to
region. But in many areas agricultural labourers resorted to seasonal migration within the province. A large number of this migration ‘followed the crop’, searching for employment as harvesters. The general direction of this short distance migration was from west to east. There were a number of trajectories. An important stream moved north from Kushtia, Pabna, and Rajshahi to Rangpur another from Noakhali to Comilla and another from Faridpur via Dhaka to Mymensingh and Sylhet. There was yet another important route from north to south. Agricultural labourers from Kushtia, Jessore and Faridpur migrated to Barisal and Khulna. This was for a long time an established pattern of rural migration in East Bengal during and prior to our period of study. According to an 1876 report: ‘Some of the ryots from Dacca Fureedpore (Faridpur), and the northern part of Backergunje (Barisal) move into the neighbouring districts at harvest time... In Backergunje a number of men from different parts of the district find their way into the Sunderbuns in June for purpose of rice growing. They remain till December, and then return home, either taking their paddy with them, or after disposing of it locally’.92

A Congress member informed the Assembly that the Dawal, as the migrant labour during harvesting season were called, lived mostly on the banks of the rivers like the Padma and the Meghna in the district, of Dhaka, Faridpur, Comilla, Noakhali and other places. They were mostly landless labourers.93 Another member informed the Assembly that during the harvesting season the reapers from some areas of Dhaka, Barisal, Rajshahi and Mymensingh went out to other areas. Eight to ten people were grouped together around one boat and all shared the cost of the boat. A recent research from three Faridpur villages has shown that about 40% of the working male population of these villages migrate to other areas for employment. They travel in groups following a trajectory that appears to have been relatively stable for at least the last seventy years.94

Reaping normally concluded towards the end of April each year and the Dawals from Faridpur returned home about that time. This was when agricultural activities in Faridpur picked up momentum and many reapers found employment in the preparation of the fields for the local Aush and Aman crops. In the middle of the year, however, many of
them tried once more to find employment elsewhere. In the last two months of the year
the reapers migrated to rural areas of Khulna and Barisal districts to take part in Aman
harvest. In January they returned to Faridpur for the next round of migration to Sylhet
and Mymensingh. A Sainik report on 25 March 1949 mentioned that fifty percent
people of Gopalganj and Madaripur sub-divisions of Faridpur were reapers. They used to
procure about six-month's food grains from Barisal and Khulna.

According to Faraizi, Dawali was organised by a combination of Shordars, Noukawalas
(boat owners) and the Dawals numbering 30-35 persons altogether in a group coming
from the same village or neighbouring villages. The mode of payment, investment, and
sharing the harvest used to be decided in meetings held in the villages prior to forming
the group and migrating to Sylhet and Mymensingh. Although the dawals came from
divergent social and economic strata of the village ranging from small landowners to
landless peasants; they were all from deficit households.

All this evidence suggests that a lot of people in deficit districts depended for their survival
on the crop produced in the surplus districts. But the Government policy of cordonning
was adopted without any serious consideration being given to this simple and elementary
fact about the peasant economy of East Bengal.

At the East Pakistan Language Worker's Conference held on 23 June 1949 Ataur
Rahman Khan stated that the sufferings of the reapers had reached a climax. A
Congress Member complained that in the districts of Khulna and other places when the
reapers were about to leave the places of work after reaping the harvest they were
stopped by government officials and 'were denuded of their paddy'.

The officers of the government department asked the reapers to sell their paddy on the
spot and to purchase it again on return to their homes at higher rates despite the fact
that in the Levy Order there was a provision for the payment of wages in terms of paddy
to the reapers who usually carried away their earnings in kind outside the district. The
other groups of people who earned their living in kind in return for their labour and services included priests and maulavis, teachers, and dealers in betel-leaf, cane, earthen wares. No provision was made to allow these people to carry their earned paddy from one place to another - usually their place of residence. Even the reapers were not allowed to carry the paddy they earned but a draft system was introduced for the delivery of the paddy to them in their own districts. The draft system one may argue, showed some consideration towards the reapers, but it only added to their sufferings at both ends of the system: once, while depositing the paddy to receive a draft and again to get back the paddy against it in their own districts. The delay, irregularity and harassment entailed in the draft system only enhanced the difficulties of the reapers.

On 1 February 1948, in an editorial Azad highlighted the sufferings of the reapers after they had accepted the coupons and gone back to their villages to receive their quota of paddy from government warehouses. A member of the EBLA complained that the draft system was very complicated and as a result about 10 to 15 thousand reapers paraded in the streets of Khulna for three weeks demanding to be relieved of the system. Another member from Khulna informed the Minister that though movement of twenty maunds of paddy in a boat was permissible in the Order, the reapers were not allowed to carry back even that much paddy without permits. He further alleged that thousands of people had been unable to obtain permits on the ground that the application forms were out of print. Understandably, then, a number of reapers confronted a Minister in Khulna in early 1949, violated section 144 of CrPC that restricted movements in the streets of Khulna, and eventually violated cordon restrictions in an organised manner. The government officials tried to stop them by seizing the paddy boats that belonged to the reapers. The dawals were also arrested in large number. Abdus Shahid remembers meeting a number of peasants in Dacca Central Jail convicted for offences relating to cordon breaking. In the Sainik report it was claimed that about three lakh maunds of paddy were seized from reapers crossing the boundary of Barisal and Khulna districts. One MLA also informed the Assembly that three to four thousand paddy boats were seized by the government officials.
The Government’s efforts to keep track of these violations of cordon restrictions was simply inadequate to the task. The statistics provided by the government seriously understated the scale and frequency of violation that took place. However, one can get an idea of the magnitude of violation of cordon restrictions from the statement by a Minister who said that 4,300 reapers had gone to Khulna in the year 1949 while the amount of paddy deposited to government warehouses was only 5,623 maunds. It was then deposited by only eight hundred of them. The Minister admitted that the reapers either evaded or smuggled the paddy outside the cordoned area or sold it locally.\(^{108}\) Obviously, the reapers were defying the Government orders either by evasion or by organised violation.

For the reapers the situation was desperate. The paddy they used to earn by working through the harvesting period in the surplus districts not only provided food to them and their families; it also kept the local supply reasonably steady for some months. Abdus Salam, a Muslim League MLA, aptly stressed the logic of food supply from the surplus to the deficit areas thus:

Dacca, Faridpur, Tippera, and few other districts are deficit. The local production can not sustain the people for more than two to three months. They have to buy from outside sources. The people of these districts used to bring paddy and rice from the surplus districts.

He also claimed that some people used to smuggle food grains from the surplus areas and thus helped maintain the supply in the deficit areas.\(^{109}\) In fact, that is how the food economy worked in East Bengal. But the government intervened strongly. As a result the peasants did not accept the imposition of restrictions on their fruit of labour and on the traditional right to take their paddy to their own villages. In this struggle of the reapers, the peasants, all along the route of the transfer of foodgrains, extended their support and joined in defying the government order. They could also see that if the reapers were stopped from bringing the foodgrains to the local markets they would have to suffer. So
in spite of firing' by the Police, according to a MLA, 'nothing happened': violation of
cordon restrictions continued. And this explains the perplexity of the Sub-divisional
Officer of Peroipur who observed the response of the villagers along the route of
smuggling of foodgrains. In keeping with the tradition of his colonial training he described
the peasants as if they were by nature 'desperate' and 'dangerous'.

The cordon restriction was, however, withdrawn in October 1949 as a result of a
determined struggle of the reapers helped by the poorer section of the rural population
and also by the persistent criticism of a section of the elite.

VI

Cordon was only one aspect of the bureaucratic solution to the food problem that affected
the people of East Pakistan. Resistance and protests continued all through the period of
the Muslim League rule in the province against the activities of the government
functionaries and other agencies that added to the sufferings of the people caused by
food shortage.

According to an Azad report on 24 September 1947, just a little over a month after
independence, in Badalkot village in Noakhali district, about three thousand people
attended a public meeting where they declared Jehad against the corruption, black-
marketing and hoarding of foodgrain by the people who were associated with food
distribution. Similar meetings were held in different places of the province around that
time. Azad also reported a meeting held at Magura in Jessore district on 24
September 1947. The report highlighted the united demonstrations of the Hindus and the
Muslims against the 'smugglers, profiteers, and corrupt government officials'. In all
these meetings the tirade of criticism was directed against persons perceived to be
responsible for the deteriorating food situation in the country. Government officials were
criticised strongly for their alleged complicity in aggravating the food problem. In a
meeting held at Hajiganj in Comilla district, on 13 February 1949, which was attended by about eight thousand people—quite a large gathering for a place like Hajiganj—the food policy of the government was severely criticised. Cordonning was blamed for 'spreading' corruption among businessmen, members of the public and the government officials. The latter's activities were termed as 'anti-State' by the speakers in the meeting. Many of these meetings were organised by the disgruntled elements of the local level Muslim League organisation, sometimes joined by the frustrated representatives of the Assembly. On many occasions locally prominent social leaders also addressed these meetings. Prominent among the speakers at Hajiganj meeting was a religious pir, apart from a Muslim League MLA.113

The anger of the people was sometimes sparked off by the coercion of the police and the cordon enforcing agents of the government. The Observer reported an incident at Comilla where 17 peasants who came to sell rice in the town market from the neighbouring villages were arrested. The rice they brought was seized. To protest such atrocity there was a 'complete hartal at Comilla on 29 December 1949. The Observer reported on 31 December that 'such a successful hartal was never seen before'.114

Sometimes peaceful protests turned into a violent encounter between the people and the law-enforcing authority. The magnitude of popular violence in these cases reflected the angry mood of the people. On 27 March 1949 a clash took place at Chandpur police station in Comilla between the people and the police over the arrest of a Railway employee who was alleged to have carried a bag containing half a maund of rice into the rationed area. In the opinion of the enquiring Magistrate, the crowd became 'rowdy and riotous'. In his report the Magistrate stated that 'the mob' wanted to teach a good lesson to the Havildar and the constables for their alleged interference with food movement.115

Government reports on such conflicts are miserably inadequate records of popular feelings and attitudes. However, as we have seen, there is enough in these documents to
suggest a strong degree of popular resistance to measures the Government adopted in the countryside in response to the food crisis.

On 10 April 1948, the Presidents of some of the Union Boards under Satkhira police station in Khulna wrote to the Chief Minister detailing the nature of police *julum* (oppression) on the people of the area. The memorandum said:

The Police and the Civil Supply officers whose activities were ... interfered with by these loyal citizens of Pakistan got infuriated and took recourse to violence, maltreatment and molestation and unnecessary harassment of the innocent loyal Muslim citizens of Pakistan residing within the aforesaid thana...

What provoked the *julum*, according to the memorialists, were attempts made by the village people to stop smuggling of foodgrains across the border by dishonest traders.116 *Sainik* wrote on 28 November 1948 that 'the people were exasperated by control and blackmarketing and whenever the people were organised against the anti-social and corrupt activities, the government authorities with the help of people gave them trouble on any pretext'.117

The authorities were quite ruthless in suppressing attempts by the rural poor to procure food on their own initiative. Quite a few people were killed in police firing while engaged in desperate attempts to rob from trains carrying foodgrains. The railway wagons carrying foodstuff became a common target of the famine threatened poor. Risky and dangerous as these attempts were, they highlight the desperate situation of the in the countryside.

On 2 May 1948, a Police report mentioned, ‘one Abbas Ali got fatal injury as a result of a firing resorted to by the Railway Police, while he was carrying away a bag of sugar dropped from the goods train by his associates.’118 In another incident on 15 May of the same year a man was shot dead by the police when he started running after the Police challenged him leaving behind a bag of rice which he allegedly procured from an open wagon near Tejgaon Railway Station at Dhaka.119 Again on 3 December 1949, the
police opened fire on some people who were allegedly removing bags of atta from the wagons of a moving train near Chittagong Railway Station. On several occasions the famine stricken people organised themselves into groups and raided grain shops and wagons that belonged to the government. On the night of 24 July 1948 a grain shop was raided by about 40 people armed with deadly weapons. The Police opened fire to thwart the attempt. Again, at Parbatipur Station, in Dinajpur, on 9 August 1948, some people hurled stones at the police who were on duty on a goods train.

Most of the time the violence perpetrated by the authority was unequally matched by the poor who operated in small groups. In one incident on 16 August 1948 about 12 persons were seen 'looting' rice bags at Santahar Railway Station at Rajshahi. Two of the alleged looters overpowered the watchman and one Constable was hurt by thrown stones. The Constables on guard, however, managed to open fire and killed one of the attackers. The police had to open fire in a number of places and as a consequence killed a number of people. According to official reports the poor hurled stones and blows at the police which the latter answered with their bullets. In the year 1949 the police opened fire on 90 occasions in different districts of East Bengal, and according to the Inspector General of Police 'in majority of the cases the Police had to fire in the apprehension of criminals and in preventing dacoity...'

The incidents discussed here bring into focus certain characteristics of the young post-colonial State in East Pakistan and its relationship to the people. Noticeable is the preponderance of the bureaucracy in the decision making process and a corresponding absence of any institutionalised structures allowing for popular participation in the making of policy. The resulting insensitivity of the state to the everyday problems of the countryside could only produce a degree of alienation between the ordinary people and the government. The strictly 'law and order' view of popular response to dearth that the state took, also reveals an active element of colonial legacy in its behaviour.
There was yet another typical area of poor peasants’ struggle for survival at a time of scarcity which lacked legitimacy in the dominant ideology of the society. These were the acts that constituted ‘criminality’, especially the attempts to rob the better off. Such attempts not only continued to take place but became more frequent and desperate. On 9 September 1949 the weekly Sainik reported the increase in cattle theft and other kinds of thefts and robbery in the villages. The Hajiganj meeting of 14 February (see above) noted the sufferings of the people ‘due to excess of theft and robbery’. In a meeting held on 11 January 1952 the Hatiya Ramgati Islands’ Association observed that thefts and dacoities had increased beyond description during the preceding years. Satya Prachar, a popular tract, did not only mention increase in thefts in Atrai and Bagmara regions of Rajshahi district but also described in detail the various kinds of thefts the poor people had been driven to engage in by their circumstances:

Paddy, Jute, Fish, Mango, Jackfruit, and vegetables
All are stolen.
Thief is endless
And it takes place
In broad day light
In huts and bazaars.

A village poor sentenced to gaol terms for theft confessed to Abdus Shahid that it was because of poverty that he resorted to stealing. The Inspector-General of Police mentioned that ‘acute economic distress hovered over the province amongst common people owing to the abnormal fall in the prices of jute as well as exorbitant high prices for essential commodities, and other daily necessities of life, a state of affairs which caused a... deterioration in the crime position.

An immediate and popularly understood symptom of dearth in East Bengal society was the increase of petty theft, robbery and burglary. One reason for the increase was the reduced level of rural charity which was the traditional means of distribution of food grain to the poor afflicted by shortage. Durbhikkha, the Bengali word for famine, literally refers
to a situation characterised by want of alms (i.e. the spirit of charity). The popular tract we have quoted earlier described the situation in these very terms:

Being oppressed, the peasants
Take to begging;
It is difficult to give alms
There are too many beggars around.130

As a noticeable increase in the number was reported a Member of the Legislative Assembly expressed his despair at the sight of so many of them.131 The villages of East Bengal always witnessed a certain number of beggars. They were mostly poor widows, the disabled, the deserted, and the religious mendicants.

But for the poor peasant forced by scarcity or poverty to go abegging, the choice was not a very easy one. Not to speak of begging, even going out to a government organised charity was a matter of shame for many peasants. Bhowmick mentioned one hunchback old Muslim woman saying ‘Last time (1943 Famine) I stayed at home. But this time I had to go out to procure rice from a controlled shop.’132 The peasant notion of self-esteem stood as a barrier in their making this choice. Many peasants, of course, were pushed over that barrier by desperation. It was famine that turned them into beggars at the same time as it caused the usual flow of charity in the countryside to become a trickle. Barisal and Khulna, the two most affected districts considered, suffered from a lack of stock of foodgrains due to the ruthless plunder by the procurement machinery of the government and as a result the source of charity drained out for a large number of peasants.

However, the poor people’s response varied according to the degree of affliction. When the disaster was total, survival became the only concern. But the responses, thus evoked, were not always confined within the moral world of the peasantry. Since the dearth in post independence East Bengal was caused by a crisis in the sphere of distribution rather than a total deficit caused by a natural or man-made disaster; the response of the affected often took the form of appropriation of food items and resources from those who ostensibly had more. The new leadership in the Government failed to
direct the response of those affected by food shortage towards more acceptable channels of politics. Every act of the poor peasant bred of frustration, desperation and despair eroded the moral assumption of the sacredness of private property on which rested the government and its policies.

Peasant actions that were often labelled 'criminal' could be both collective and individual in nature. Stealing became a significant form of response of the poor during dearth which heightened the social tensions between the haves and have-nots. The resulting crisis was also a moral one, as indicated by the following piece from the pen of a rural poet who, while describing the plight of the peasants in Atrai and Bagmara in Rajshahi, lamented:

Poverty destroyed their character
And drove them to sinful acts;
Their good sense has deserted them,
They do not obey the law of dharma 133

But these acts of defiance were manifested through surreptitious, dispersed, and mostly, individualised actions. Though stealing lacked the moral approval of the community, it performed the economic function of redistribution of resources.

In East Bengal the number of theft cases rose from 11,544 in 1947 to 12,027 in 1948; an increase of 483 cases.134 The incidents of thefts and burglaries per 100,000 of population showed no appreciable change for the better, if not worse, after independence. The theft cases in 1947 was 33.8 against 33.2 in 1948 while reported incidents of burglaries rose from 63.7 in 1947 to 65.5 in 1948.135 Of the few things the well-to-do ryots of East Bengal possessed livestock (mostly cattle) was the most valuable. Hence cattle was the obvious target for theft. Theft of cattle rose to 390 in 1948 from 364 in the previous year. But it shot up to 550 in 1949 and 596 in 1950. In 1952 there were 703 cases as against 723 in 1951. A decrease of 20 cases but nearly double that of 1947 figure.136 Sometimes cattle poisoning was resorted to allegedly by the poor Hindu untouchable caste of Muchis (Cobbler) who required the hide for their trade.
Understandably, the general poverty had brought about a decline in their fortunes. In 1948 eighty-two cases of cattle poisoning were reported against sixty-six in 1947. The Police unhesitatingly blamed the Muchis for this crime. The figure shot up to one hundred and six cases in 1951. And gradually police suspicion fell upon the Muslims apart from their traditional suspects.

Another novel form of crime was swindling. The number of cases reported during 1948 was 656 against 471 in 1947. And in 1949 it was 716, the highest till 1954. The Police Reports do not specify the location of the crimes but by the nature of the crime it can be assumed that it took place mostly in rural and peri-urban market places, small townships, river stations, and obviously in the Railway Stations. People wandering in search of food, shelter, and employment were the easy targets of the swindlers. ‘The favourite method of swindling’, as the Police Report of 1949 mentions, ‘were the note-doubling, the bogus agency trick (fake commercial agencies) and false personifications’ - all of which promised sudden affluence and allured the eventual victims of these crimes. The prospect of easy money also made swindlers out of poverty-stricken people. The Police Reports mention that many of the swindlers were not professional. The highest number of professional swindlers in any one year between 1948 to 1954 was only six, in 1951.

The severity of shortage aggravated by the profit motive of the traders and hoarders provided immediate incentive to stealing and dacoity. The number of ‘true cases’ was 2,163 in 1948 against 1,965 in 1947, a 10% increase over the quinquennial average for the years 1943-1947 which was 1,926. The figures, disquieting as they are’, wrote the Inspector-General of Police, ‘indicate an increasing spirit of violence on the part of the dacoit.’ The poor people’s sense of collectivity was most evident in organising dacoities. The dacoits, according to a Police Reports, ‘overwhelmed the victims by numbers’. The normal targets of the dacoits were surplus peasants, traders, hoarders in rural areas and quite often the boats in the rivers carrying merchandise to rural markets. In a Memorandum to the Prime Minister of Pakistan a large number of
'aggrieved' inhabitants of Chandpur, Raipura, Bhederganj, and Hijla police stations of Comilla, Noakhali, Faridpur and Barisal districts sought redress against river criminals who were 'great terror to the life and properties' of the memorialists.146

During dearth the nature of dacoity assumed a form particular to the situation of food shortage. Of all the reported cases of dacoity in 1948, 62 cases involved only foodstuff, and in 240 cases the stolen property was valued less than RS.200. In 1949, 20 cases where foodstuff was taken were reported while property worth less than RS.200 was robbed in 260 cases.147 The following table shows a trend in foodstuff looting and robbing of property valued less than RS.200 till 1953.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Food Stuff</th>
<th>Property Less than Rs.200</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Report on the Police Administration of the Province of East Pakistan for the years 1950 to 1953: East Pakistan Government Press, Dacca.]

The looting of food stuff and small assets valued less than RS.200 was a sure sign of famine crimes in East Bengal. The Police Reports of 1950 and 1951 observed that 'high prices of essential commodities along with a spirit of lawlessness were among the main causes for the increase in dacoities.148

Let us look at the contemporary crime figures to get an overall picture of the situation.
Table 4.2

Crime figures in the Province of East Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Dacoity</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Theft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>2,643</td>
<td>1,470</td>
<td>26,548</td>
<td>14,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>2,404</td>
<td>1,608</td>
<td>25,897</td>
<td>14,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2,918</td>
<td>1,459</td>
<td>24,437</td>
<td>13,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,469</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>22,666</td>
<td>13,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>19,208</td>
<td>12,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>22,158</td>
<td>13,109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although these figures indicate a high incidence of crime, they show reported cases only. Many more went unreported. As the Police explained with regard to a particular kind of crime: 'The proportion of unreported river dacoities, is believed to be as large as ever. The victims of such heinous crimes find themselves in a situation which prevents them from undertaking long journey to the Police station to report such cases.'149. Sometimes 'better reporting' increased crime figures.

By 1951 the Police force had reportedly undergone a 'sudden and large' expansion.150 This expansion was a response to the increased 'criminal' activities that the food crisis caused in countryside. Even 'if there was a decrease in crime figures towards the end of the period', according to the Police Report of 1952 'it was mainly due to increased effectiveness of the method of control'151 and was no indication that the socio-economic factors causing a rise in criminal activities had disappeared. When strong measures were taken against dacoits and robbers, 'the criminals were found to have taken recourse 'to burglary and theft to earn a living'.152
The Police, however, could reach only to the Thana level, the vast countryside was left in the hands of the village watchmen, recruited mostly from the rural poor. Dearth affected them too. The statistics of involvement of rural police in crimes show how this arm of control by the State got infected by the malaise that it was supposed to eradicate.

Table 4.3

Complicity of rural police in crimes in East Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Rural Police</th>
<th>No. of Convicted</th>
<th>Suspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Report on the Police Administration of the Province of East Bengal for the years 1947-1953, EPGP, Dacca.]

The Inspector-General of Police reported in 1953:

the quality of work of Chowkidars [village watchmen] has deteriorated considerably. Owing to the constant rise in the prices of essential commodities their monetary wages have become very inadequate. Their monthly salaries range at present between RS.8 and RS.15. These small amounts do not help the Chowkidars much in getting their daily necessities of life. To worsen matters these small amounts are not generally paid to the Chowkidars regularly.
He concluded that the 'inevitable result of these is that only very poor type of people come up to accept the post of a Chowkidar. It is not, therefore, at all surprising that poverty drives some of these poor people to criminal activity'.

While poverty drove some of the Chowkidars to commit crime, the government also recruited its Special Police Officers from among the 'criminals' to keep vigil on the criminal activities of the poor. Thus the poor were on both sides of crime. The Police Report of 1950 mentioned that 'altogether 1607 persons were appointed Special Police Officers against 195 in 1949 and 21 in 1948 to guard against 'apprehended breaches of peace especially in connection with smuggling of food grains and other essential commodities'. Altogether 887 persons were appointed Special Police Officer in 1953 as against 2767 in 1952 and 1454 in 1951. Notwithstanding the complacency of the District Magistrate of Pabna who told the touring Governor of the province in August 1951 that 'they were trying to round up the dagis (persons having previous convictions) and made them Special Constables which had proved very useful'; this particular measure of the government failed to protect the rural well-to-do from the 'crimes' of the poor.

From time to time the rural rich asked the government for 'redress of this pitiable plight of the country without delay' and maintained that it was impossible to lead their 'simple lives and business and commerce due to excessive thefts and robberies.'

Finding the village police force inadequate, corrupt and inefficient, the rural rich organised Village Defence Parties to protect their wealth and property from the dearth stricken peasants. The total number of Village Defence Parties reported to be in existence in 1949 was 1613 against 1518 in 1948. As crime figures went up so did the number of Village Defence Parties. There were 8305 of them in 1951 while it was 5937 in 1950. In 1952 it numbered 9015 and in 1953 it rose to 10,115. The members of the organisation made arrests by themselves and sometimes with the help of the police. Their performance was commended by the Inspector-General of Police in 1949.
1951 they made 182 arrests by themselves and with the help of the police made 102 more.

The Village Defence Parties proved to be quite effective and increased in number every year. The representatives of the local government actively collaborated with the police in apprehending criminals and controlling crimes. A 1950 Police Report mentioned that the Presidents and Members of Union Boards took interest in the control of crimes and cooperated with the police. Apart from strengthening the Village Defence Parties to counteract 'criminal activities' of the poor, the rural rich meted out to the poor peasants their own form of justice. The surplus peasants, it was said, reacted with 'unmitigated ferocity' against any one they caught in the act of pilfering or stealing. Satya Prachar mentioned that 'persons who were caught while stealing were given a beating'. More often than not, such beating was merciless. As Arnold puts it, this form of punishment of the rural poor 'was a measure of the intensity of the conflict dearth created between those who grew and possessed grain and those who had to buy'.

VIII

The response of the poor to scarcity always had a tragic side to it. Taha reported regular cases of suicide in Paikgacha in Khulna. On 3 October 1948, Naya Duniya also reported that a poor woman from Madhupur village in Dinajpur district committed suicide by hanging 'as a last resort' after spending days without food. The Police reports, however, does not mention the reasons for suicide in rural East Bengal though it can be said without doubt that dearth remained the main cause. Among the rural poor more women committed suicide than the men.

In 1948 the total number of reported suicides was 2073 and it rose to 2489 in 1949, this particular year being the worst in terms of food shortage till 1954. In 1950, 1951 and 1952, the number of people who committed suicide were 2410, 2321 and 2331
respectively. The figure shot up to 2484 in 1953, during which the Province was again severely hit by food shortage. The poor who lived on the threshold of existence and suddenly found that that too was dwindling, realised that they had claim to nothing but their own lives.

Dearth thus introduced a great deal of dislocation in East Bengal society. This ‘famine’ however was localised in deficit areas and in deficit pockets of the surplus districts. The food situation was aggravated by lack of purchasing power of the poorer sections of the society and by depletion of resources since the 1943 famine and was worsened further by sudden change in the socio-political life in the province since August 1947. Many districts produced more than enough food to meet their requirements but due to the shortsighted policy of the government (made worse by the bureaucratic handling of the situation) the dearth-affected people were unable to avail themselves of that food. Many of the poor did not even protest or resist; they travelled far and wide in search of food, and sometimes went to far-off towns and cities where they expected to get food. Just as during the great famine thousands left for the cities; they did the same after August 1947. The Swadhinata correspondent reported that peasants were deserting villages in Dhaka district. Sainik also reported on 22 July and 8 August 1949 that hundreds of men, women and children flocked to Chandpur town due to food shortage in the rural areas surrounding Chandpur. The march of the poor to the town continued unabated. A Yugantar report on 9 July 1953 mentioned how famine affected people of Barisal, Khulna, Tippera, Noakhali and Dhaka districts were rushed to the towns from the villages.

According to an Azad report, from the second week of May 1949 onwards hundreds of Muslims from East Pakistan migrated to Assam in India. Before the Azad report was published, a Muslim League MLA informed the Assembly on 30 March 1949 that due to the scarcity of paddy and rice many people from Dhaka and Comilla were migrating to Hindustan. Even earlier on in 1948, a young poet full of Pakistani nationalism deplored this development in a poem: ‘with bags across the shoulders, they proceed to
Assam to seek fortunes.¹⁷¹ Disturbed by the migration of the rural poor, a MLA of the ruling party cautioned the government that Pakistan was being depopulated.¹⁷² He no doubt exaggerated the number of migrants going across to India but the actual number of death-affected people who migrated outside the country is not known. In response to a question in the Indian Parliament on 1 February 1950, Gopalswami Ayyanger, the Indian Home Minister, stated that nearly 450,000 Muslims from East Bengal had passed over into Assam between August 15, 1947 and November 1949.¹⁷³ Again in an answer to a question by a Muslim League MLA from Chittagong the government admitted that between March and end of May 1948 approximately 10,000 people from Cox's Bazar alone migrated to Burma. The 'Comparatively easier life in Akyab, where plenty of food at a cheap price and plenty of land are available', according to the government, 'prompted them to migrate'.¹⁷⁴ The total number of migrants compared to the population may not be very high but the absolute number was quite significant.

This phenomenon, of people 'voting with their feet' indicated a breakdown of the traditional institution of rural charity. East Bengal's 'destined providers of subsistence' failed to fulfil their obligation of the *annadata*.¹⁷⁵ Social arrangements 'around those particular families whose members were able to provide both financial and physical facilities to the needy' proved inadequate for the situation.¹⁷⁶ All the forms of altruistic cooperation as laid down by *shariat* that existed in the predominantly Muslim society of rural East Pakistan presupposed a familiarity and agreement with the way the community was organised. Hara observed in rural East Bengal of later time that a rich man was always expected to help the poor according to the principles of *zakat*.¹⁷⁷ In fact, assistance in time of famine and disaster was perceived to be a right of the poorer sections in the society. Ellickson confirmed the continuation of this expectation in post-1971 Bangladesh villages. One reason offered by the villagers to explain the 'ruin of society' according to Ellickson, was due to the failure of the wealthy to give a fair share to the poor.¹⁷⁸ In spite of this expectation rooted in their perceived bond the poor of East Bengal failed to get sustenance from the well-to-do at a time of actual scarcity.
IX

The spectacle of hunger-stricken emaciated human bodies marching out of rural hamlets towards alien countries was not a very happy sight to the Muslim nationalists. The memory of the great famine, for which the colonial administration and domination was blamed, was too vivid. National independence and national leadership had been posed as an alternative to the Raj, especially in mitigating the hardship of the common people. Now was to be the test of leadership, organisation and perhaps of nationalism itself. For many Muslim League activists adequate food supply was not only important to maintain the community but also politically necessary. To hold the loyalty of the people it was necessary to provide them with the foodgrains they required. An Azad editorial resented that the hizrat (migration) by Pakistani Muslims due to financial crisis could not be acceptable to any self-respecting Pakistani.\textsuperscript{179} The Dhaka District Muslim League in a Meeting on June 1949 expressed their concern at the news of migration from many areas of the country to India.\textsuperscript{180} Umar wondered under what circumstances the Muslims of East Bengal could migrate to India in search of food in less than two years of the achievement of Pakistan?\textsuperscript{181}

The prevalence of chronic food shortage hurt the self-respect of the Muslim League leaders and gave rise to a fear of Bolshevism. One Muslim League member almost panicked at the thought of an impending revolution. 'The poor will be angered', he told the Assembly, 'they will attack and stage a revolution'.\textsuperscript{182} On 26 April 1949, the Pakistan Observer editorialised the Communist menace to the country. It linked Communism with poverty.\textsuperscript{183} In March 1952, a Muslim League MLA warned the Assembly that 'the Communists we are afraid of; won't come from Moscow, they will emerge from the ranks of the unfed and unclothed'. He advocated adequate food relief to the famished.\textsuperscript{184}

Indeed by 1952 the confidence of the ruling group had been badly shaken. About three years earlier on 30 March 1949, a Muslim League MLA had claimed that 'in spite of the
fact that the people buy rice at such exorbitant prices in East Pakistan and remain half-fed and unfed, they do not stir up a revolution, it is because of their love for Pakistan. The desire to help the poor came from two sources; one religious, fed by the sentiments of charity and the other was the fear of class war. Maulana Abdul Hai, a Muslim League member of the Assembly referred to the instances of benevolence of the first Caliph of Islam towards the poor while imploring the government to take care of the latter. But at the same time he did not want to alter the status quo that prevailed in the social order of the then East Pakistan. He feared, like most of his class members, that people might not accept the situation of dearth and oppression for a long time and before it was too late the equilibrium should be restored. To them the social order which maintained inequality without restraining it too much was ideal.

The chronic scarcity which was largely man-made generated criticism from among the ranks of the ruling party. Persistent food crisis was seen by the latter to have dampened the very spirit of political independence. The disillusionment of the people was sufficiently represented by the articulate critics of the system. In his Presidential speech before launching the Awami Muslim League, Ataur Rahman Khan asked 'What is the meaning of independence to the poor who are smarting under oppression? To them, independence was meaningless.' To many Muslim League activists political independence was no longer a Utopian dream but a reality to implement all their projects.

Often the situation that prevailed in East Bengal after political independence was compared with that of pre-independence period. The irony for nationalism was that colonialism fared better in that comparison. The leaders of the ruling group were squarely blamed for this misery. The youth activists in a conference unanimously resolved that the activities of the leaders had destroyed all the rosy dreams of political independence. Records of written criticism of the ruling group by the non-literate rural poor are naturally very few in number. However, a telling piece of evidence comes from a letter, claimed to have been written by a member of the rural poor from Baithakhali, in
Sylhet district, to an editor of a weekly ‘for whom and for what did we achieve Pakistan Was it to die of starvation?’188 The rural bard wrote:

We have not yet got
The taste of independence;
How to console ourselves?
A numbness invades all our spirits.189

To a radical critic Pakistan thus turned into a Fankistan (a land of empty promises).190 The hopes that political independence held out to the people and the way they constructed it, all vanished into the thin air for many and was proved to be a hoax for a vast number of people in the class-divided society of East Pakistan. As a result a large number of them lost their enthusiasm and it was increasingly manifested in their abstention from participating in the annual nationalist ritual, the Independence Day of 14th August. ‘Zeal of the people appeared to be meagre on the occasion of Independence Day’, Tajuddin Ahmed thus recorded the frustration of the people in his diary on 14 August 1950. He vainly looked for any ‘thrill among the people’.191 In fact, people’s distance from the celebration continued. A Yugantar report on 19 August 1952 mentioned that ‘Independence day was lifeless in Dacca’. Both Tajuddin Ahmed and the Yugantar report noted the suffering of the people as a reason for non-participation in Independence day celebration. With a sad note Vorys remarked that ‘The magic day of Independence arrived, passed and receded into history’.192 Though the masses were ‘aloof’ - as Tajuddin put it - from the celebrations, they were not passive in casting their ballots in the first general election in the province. The threatened collapse of the society by a class war did not happen; what happened instead was the wholesale rejection of the ruling party from power through a peaceful ‘ballot revolution’.193
NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2 See discussion on food situation in EBLA progs, Vol. 3, No. 3.
3 ibid, p.348.
4 Eastern Pakistan, GOEB. 1948, p.15.
5 Sarkar, Satya Prachar, p.2.
7 Rehman Sobhan, Basic Democracies Works Programme and Rural Development in East Pakistan, Dacca, n.d., p.43.
9 K. Griffin, ‘Growth and Impoverishment in Rural Areas of Asia’, World Development, Vol. 7, Nos. 4 and 5. This point has also been emphasised by Kamal Siddiqui, ibid, p.56.
13 Umar, Bhasha Andolon, p.9.
14 Naobelal, 15 July 1948, as quoted in Umar, Bhasha Andolon, p.27.
16 Ibid, p.194.
17 Abdus Shahid, Smruti, p.47.
19 Judhya Dalipatra, Vol. I, p.381. This figure of death is also not unanimous. Numbers vary on both extremes.
20 Sen, Chithi, Calcutta, 1971, p.70.
21 Ibid, p.208.
23 Ananda Bazar Patrika, 22, December 1952, Calcutta.
See S D Khan, Note, p.39. In the countryside the government as a matter of policy preferred relief through Union Poor Funds to help the distressed in the shape of general gratuitous doles, whenever and wherever possible under the provision of the Bengal Rural Poor and Unemployment Act, 1939. This meant the Government had to make contributions to the Union Poor Funds from the budget provision under Gratuitous Relief usually equivalent to the amounts the Union Poor Fund Committee could collect from local subscriptions for purposes of relief to the destitute. But much later it was pointed out by Khan that the system of crediting receipts of local bodies and their merging in the provincial revenue was 'morally improper'.

EBLA, progs., Vol. 10, No. 1, pp.264-5 and see also the Budget Speech of Mr Nural Amin in 1951.
47  *Ittehad*, 26 June 1949, Calcutta.
50  Umar (ed.), *Dalil*, p.85.
51  ibid, Diary on 20 December 1947. in Umar (ed.), *Dalil*.
52  *Pakistan Observer*, 14 May 1949, Dhaka.
54  ibid, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.236.
55  Umar has interestingly argued the class interest of the Congress members in opposing control in *Bhasha Andolon*, Vol. II. Section on Food Situation.
58  ibid.
60  ibid, p.347.
61  ibid, p.231.
62  Tour Note of H E Feroz Khan Noon, the Governor of East Pakistan, Pabna, Home Political Bundle, BSRR. From now on, Tour Note.
64  ibid, Vol. 10, No. 1, p.135.
66  ibid, p.221.
70  Tour Note.
75 Ibid, p.272.
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130 Sarkar, *Satya Prachar*.
131 EBLA, progs., Vol.10, No.1, p.141.
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141 ibid, 1949.
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149 ibid, 1952, p.8.
150 ibid, 1951.
151 ibid, 1952, p.53.
152 ibid, 1953, p.42.
153 ibid, 1953, p.41.
154 ibid, 1950, p.39.
155 ibid, 1951-53.
156 Tour Note for the District of Pabna from 22nd to 24th August 1951.


159 ibid, 1949, p.11

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161 Sarkar, *Satya Prachar*.

162 David Arnold; *Famine* in Ranjit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. II, Delhi, p.92.


164 *Naya Duniya*, 3 October 1948, Calcutta.

165 Police Reports, 1948-53.


167 ibid, p.59.

168 Sen, *Chithi*, p.316.


170 EBLA, progs., 30 March, No.41, p.221.


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181 ibid, p.56.
182  EBLA, progs., Vol.4, No.5, p.61.
183  Pakistan Observer, 26 April 1949, Dacca.
184  EBLA, progs., Vol.10, No.1, p.488.
185  ibid, Vol.9, No.3, p.221.
186  Umar, Dalil, p.77.
188  ibid, p.106.
189  Sarkar, Satya Prachar.
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192  Von Vorys, Political Development, p.86.
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CHAPTER 5

PEASANT REBELLIONS AND THE MUSLIM LEAGUE GOVERNMENT

I

We have noted, in chapter 2, the hectic and nervous attempts of the ruling elite to steer out of 'crises' that bedevilled the state in the eastern part of Pakistan immediately after political independence. At the same time there was a considerable range and variety of euphoric expectations, as well as the apprehensions that gripped different sections of the people in East Pakistan. The euphoria was short-lived however, and in fact turned sour for many of the tribals and poor Muslim peasants; some of their fears became a reality as well for a large section of the poor Hindu schedule caste peasants long before the year of independence ran out. The expectations and efforts for self-improvement of the people who lived mainly on the social and geographical margins of the new nation, clashed with the nation-building efforts of the Muslim League in power. These clashes followed peasant actions ranging from petitioning to armed resistance. In fact, the initial efforts of the Muslim League government in East Pakistan met with challenges from organized peasants which continued well beyond 1950, almost up to the middle of 1951.

These actions have been generally labelled the Hajong, nankar and Nachol bidroho, or rebellions, by communist activists and historians. The Hajongs were a section of the tribal population who lived on the northern fringe of Mymensingh district while the nankars were service-tenure holders in Sylhet district. And Nachol rebellion was named after a police station in the Rajshahi district where Santhals and poor Muslim peasants had clashed with the police in January 1950. All these areas bordered on the Indian dominion. Thus, while ethnicity, the social form of existence of the peasants and place-names were made use of by the radicals in naming these rebellions, authorities uniformly termed those rebellions 'communist disturbances'. In fact, very recent writings in the
pages of an English weekly bear witness to the continuing influence of the official
description of the rebellion.¹

Radical historiography has committed two errors regarding these rebellions. Firstly, it has
contented itself by concluding that these actions by the peasants, influenced by the left
adventurism of the Communist Party leadership of those days, were ‘peripheral and
marginal’, having little to do with the body politic of East Pakistan.² Secondly, that the
counter-insurgency side of events from 1947 to 1951 has been relegated to a position of
a minor theoretical problem. In strong contrast to this, the Bengali Nationalist discourse
has relegated these rebellions to a place almost as negligible as that assigned to
peasants in the social order.³

It is true that there was a considerable degree of intervention in these rebellions by
‘outside agents’¹ i.e. political parties, news papers, intelligentsia. One could however
argue that outside activists and ideological intervention in these rebellions were
meaningful only in providing to the oppressed symbols like lal jhanda, party, slogans, and
judicial and political information. This chapter focuses on the activities the peasants
undertook - aided no doubt by the communist leaders and to a certain extent by the
radical section of the Muslim League - to redefine their own place within the new nation.
These activities were part of an essentially democratic struggle, spearheaded against the
zamindari order of the society that continued to oppress a sizable section of the
peasantry even after political independence. Significant sections of the peasantry
drew inspiration from the fact of political ‘independence’ to stand up to the landlord and
challenge his rule. As a result, however, these peasants were embroiled in a deadly
battle with the fledgling state.

An important aim of this chapter is to analyse the strategies that the Muslim League
government adopted to marginalise these peasant actions, while carrying out repressive
measures no different from those employed by the colonial state and at the same time
trying to give itself a legitimacy different from the one that the Raj claimed for itself. The
difference however was in the ‘marginalising’ rhetoric used by the League government, which marked a significant departure from the colonial practice. By strongly using a religious idiom, this rhetoric pitted the new state against the potential ‘nation’. Thus the history of these peasant rebellions helps to bring out a paradoxical characteristic of the post-colonial Muslim League government in East Pakistan: the same ideology of religion that lay at the origin of the state reduced its ability to unify the ‘people’ and the ‘nation’.

II

On 18 November 1949, Jatindra Nath Bhadra, a Congress Member of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, moved the following adjournment motion to discuss a ‘definite matter of urgent public importance and of recent occurrence’.

The inhuman and most barbarous oppression by armed police and soldiers committed upon the Hindu population of village Saneswar, Ahirkinchi, Mehari, Ujjipur, Uluri, Nayagram, Panisail, Jogikona, etc., within the jurisdiction of Beanibazar and Barlekh police stations in the district of Sylhet, in the shape of molestation of women, looting, destruction of properties and desecration of deities from 18 to 24 August 1949. On 18 August 1949 the armed police fired upon the villagers at Saneswar which resulted in the death of five persons. Subsequently though there was absolute peace in the locality the armed police were reinforced by East Pakistan Rifles on 21 August. They were let loose upon the innocent Hindu villagers ... the Muslim mob also joined the EPR and armed police. Women were molested, the properties including cattle, paddy, cash and other valuables were looted. The ornaments from the persons of women were snatched away. Houses were broken, deities were desecrated. The atrocities continued for about a week.4

A discussion followed in the Assembly in which a number of members of the Opposition and one from the ruling Muslim League Party took part. In response to the motion and the subsequent discussion, Nurul Amin, Prime Minister of East Pakistan, made a statement. He asked for forty five minutes to make the statement for he had ‘so many facts’ to counter the contentions of the members of the Opposition. In the statement, he summed up the ‘history’ and nature of the incident that had taken place in some areas of
Sylhet since independence. To facilitate analysis, I shall quote the statement at some length:

I will not base my speech on the report of those who are directly concerned with the incident and of those sent along with the police, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, the Magistrate or officers who were deputed along with the police but I base my speech on the report made by the Commissioner of the Division... I sympathise with the Schedule Castes people for they are involved in this matter, but, at the same time, I would request the leader of the Schedule Castes to try to dissuade their ignorant, illiterate, unsophisticated people from the association of the communists and their sympathisers ... Under the cloak of working for the abolition of Zamindars and Nankar systems these Communist workers gained support of some of Muslim Nankar tenants as well, but actually their main activities were devoted to preaching disruption and inciting people to acts subversive of law and order... In the beginning of August, 1948, some police constables while trying to arrest some person accused of rioting and wrongful confinement were attacked and injured by an armed mob and fire had to be opened in which one person (a Muslim) was killed. This firing, in which mostly Muslims were involved, had a wholesome effect on them; but the Communist-inspired anti-Pakistan activities of non-Muslims which were designed to bring the Government and the Pakistan State into disrepute, continued ... The police under the command of responsible officers moved through the entire area to instil a sense of security among the law-abiding section of the people who encouraged them by harbouring and actively supporting the subversive workers of this area as well as those coming from the neighbouring areas in the Indian Dominion. ... So far as the general allegations are concerned, I have already stated that no case of molestation of women, desecration and defilement of any deity or temple or looting by the police or the East Pakistan Rifle People took place.5

The Prime Minister would not recognise the actions of the nankar peasants as having the aim of redefining their relations with the landholders. On the contrary, he repeatedly used the theme of lawlessness and chaos to denigrate these actions of the peasants. On the floor of the Legislative Assembly, members of the Muslim League often ascribed peasant actions to the ‘enemies of the state’. As the speeches of the Ministers show, the other shorthand description for these ‘enemies’ was ‘Communists’ who were often made solely responsible for stirring up ‘trouble’ in the countryside.6

The Prime Minister in his statement justified police actions which were meted out against the ‘communists’ who were conspiring to destroy Pakistan. He recalled the ‘history’ of Beanibazar and Borolekha police stations of Sylhet since 1937, the alleged beginning of the communist movement in the area. He stated in the Assembly that the communists played with the ‘poor, illiterate and backward people who do not understand their own
interests'. And he further suggested that they 'utilized them, suppressed and oppressed them, but, at the same time, took advantage of them'. This, for the Prime Minister, was sufficient reason to call the history of this area a 'bad history'. The tendency to judge peasant history in ethical terms - good or bad - not only reflected how the Muslim League leaders in the government saw this history in terms of their own interests. The rhetoric is also important in showing us how certain moral codes came to be used by the leaders in either appropriating or marginalising, from their point of view, aspects of the peasant's past.

This discussion took place within the limits of a liberal institution, in this case the Legislative Assembly, a legacy of the Act of 1919. The motion was given two hours' time for discussion and it was talked out. In the ensuing discussion, the integrity of the discussants who spoke for the motion was questioned by the Prime Minister. He said that they were delivering speeches on the floor of the Assembly just to get prominence in the press'. On the other hand, the report on which the Prime Minister based his statement was questioned by the leader of the Opposition. The latter questioned the authenticity of the report by officers against whom allegations were made. However, this adjournment motion was accepted for discussion 'without taking any shelter under any technicalities'. But the 'incidents' at Nachol were not allowed by the Prime Minister to be discussed in the House. A motion tabled on 6 February 1950 by some prominent members of the Opposition to discuss 'police and military oppression' was rejected on 'technical grounds'.

III

The partition of Bengal and the slicing of Assam affected the course of the peasant struggles, specially for the Hajongs and the nankars. Some Communist activists of the peasant movements of those days still hold the view that it was a well-conceived conspiracy of the Raj - before handing over political power to their 'lackeys' - to prevent a
healthy peasant movement from turning into a new democratic struggle to radically transform relations between classes. The expectations built around political independence by nationalists of both kinds - the Communists and the religious fundamentalists - and by the peasants themselves made the ongoing struggle seem unnecessary at that point in time.

Among peasants, however the new nation-state raised expectations about their demands and aspiration which were unresolved during the last days of the Raj. Not only that, the ruling elite introduced new tensions to the already sensitized peasantry after their actions against the landlords and the state functionaries in the last days of the Raj. We would disagree with Bhattacharyya who maintained that the peasant revolts that flared up again in 1949 were in many respects discontinuous with the earlier ones, and that these revolts were aimed at the seizure of state power, in accordance with the new line adopted by the Communist party in the second congress in Calcutta in 1948.

Of course, Communists were largely responsible for organising the movement. On 15 August the tribal Hajongs while celebrating political independence hoisted Pakistan flags along with the Red flags which symbolized the presence of the Communist movement among the former. By September and October, 1947, however, the nankar rebellion was caught within the legal framework and lost much of its radical political potentiality. Ajoy Bhattacharya, a leading Communist activist of the nankar rebellion in post-independent East Pakistan, wrote, 'nothing more could be expected from the rebellion excepting economic and social reform.' The changed political circumstances and the public commitment of the Muslim League leadership to agrarian reforms, the confused state of the Hindu and tribal peasantry complicated by the Muslim peasants' optimism compelled the Communist leadership to halt the movements. In a statement they said:

This year the national Government is in power and before resorting to direct resistance against the national government we should offer them another opportunity to fulfill their pledges through legislation ... hence this year the share of the crop should be ascertained through mutual understanding.
But on 15 August 1947 meetings and processions were organized in Durgapur, Haluaghat, Nalitabari, and in Bhatpur in Mymensingh district by tribal leaders. Apart from expressing their solidarity with the new state they demanded immediate withdrawal of warrants issued by the colonial government for the arrests of activists and supporters of the Hajong rebellion, and also demanded the abolition of zamindari without compensation. The Hajong leaders met the District Magistrate and later the Governor of the province in January 1948 to demand the abolition of the tanka system of rent and the system of partial exclusion. Meetings were held in Mymensingh demanding tebhaga Ordinance also. And in Sylhet, according to Ajoy Bhattacharya, the rebellion continued despite the Communist party's call for suspension. In spite of all the setbacks the nankars, after political independence, refused to go back to the landlord's household to render service. Some nankar leaders made contacts with the Muslim League leadership to settle the problem.

Initially peaceful agitations were quite successful, especially in Chatal in Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh. The Circle Officer intervened there to work out a negotiated settlement between sharecroppers and landlords. In Narail, a sub-division of Jessore district, some landlords accepted tebhaga on the produce and gave receipts for the same to the sharecroppers. In Khulna large meetings were held when landlords demonstrated their unwillingness to accept the system of distribution and as a result a compromise was reached between the two conflicting groups. In Rangpur rallies and meetings were organised; and in Nilphamari the krisak sabha demanded in a memorandum the abolition of zamindari, withdrawal of tebhaga cases, reinstatement of evicted tenants, and the right to stack paddy at sharecroppers' homes. Attempts were also made to organise similar meetings in Dinajpur. In different areas of Dhaka district in the middle of 1948, mobilizations and rallies of peasants took place.

The struggling peasants and workers resorted to methods developed during the latter days of the Raj: petitioning, sending memoranda, holding public meetings, processions, and sending deputations to high government officials were the means through which they
expressed their demands. The organised means of articulating grievances and demands were most of the time the political parties. In other words, the quasi-liberal practices of the British colonial government had left their mark on the culture of 'popular movements' as well, and these movements in turn, now expected the new post-colonial state to respond favourably to demands couched in liberal terms. In adopting the liberal democratic approach, peasant leaders lost to the elites, and were forced to engage in more organised struggle: the story of Ismail Ali, and the struggle of _nankars_ is a good illustration of this.

IV

As a way of solving the _nankar_ problem peacefully some activists, especially Ismail Ali, who became disillusioned with the _krishak sabha_ for its policy towards the referendum on Sylhet, made contact with the local Muslim League leadership after independence. About the same time Abdur Rob, a Muslim League member of the Legislative Assembly, himself a zamindar, took initiative to resolve the conflict between the tenants and the zamindars. He proposed to the _nankars_ to go back to the earlier position of accepting the authority and the exactions of the _zamindars_. In fact, he suggested to the _nankars_ that they give up some of the hard-earned gains of their struggles during the last days of the Raj.17

The participants in the discussion disagreed and as a consequence, on 16 September 1947 night, the police raided the _krishak sabha_ office and arrested two Communist leaders. And around this time they also arrested Ismail Ali who was attempting to enlist political support for the _nankars_ from the Muslim League.18 The weekly _Sanghati_ published on 11 and 17 September 1947, hardly a month after independence, two reports on the plight of _nankar_ peasants in Sylhet district. The weekly accused the
zamindars of lodging false cases against the tenants, and the police of collaborating with the former against the peasant movement.19

The limits of liberal peaceful protest against police oppression at Lautabahadurpur on 16 September were reached when the peasants of Beanibazar, Golapganj and Borolekha police stations organized a general strike and stopped working. The peasants also decided to enforce social boycott on the oppressive zamindars. Following this the krishak sabha organized a mass demonstration in Sylhet town. The peasants came from far off places, in some cases 20 to 25 miles from Sylhet town to join the mass protest. After the demonstration, which was peaceful, a meeting was held to emphasise the demands of the peasants.20 The peasants were familiar with all these forms of protest and articulation of their demands, and had used these means quite often, ever since they came into contact with outside politics and organisations.

The nankar peasants continued their struggle despite the fact that the krishak sabha failed to give any clear direction to the movement due to the confusion created by political independence and its offer of collaboration to the national government. Without waiting for any decision from the party the peasants enforced a social boycott on the zamindars, a traditional form of resistance often used in the nationalist movement.21

As a result police oppression was unleashed by the end of October and met with its opposite in the resistance of the peasants on 23 November. On that day, the movement turned into a rebellion in the Beanibazar police station in Sylhet. At the beginning of the harvest the peasants began to reap paddy from the land against which the zamindars lodged theft cases with the police. Four people were arrested in such cases of ‘paddy theft’. Then ‘a mob (armed with deadly weapons) attacked the police party in whose custody the accused were kept at Bahadurpur and attempted to rescue them by use of force’.22 About 500 people participated in the raid, of whom 54 were charged and 30 were arrested, the rest absconded.23
On 25 November the Lautabahadurpur branch of the krishak sabha sent the following telegram to the Prime Minister of East Bengal:

Zamindars with police help unlawfully seizing paddy of Nankar Kishans. Daroga indiscriminately arresting peasants. Yesterday Daroga arrested nine. Arrested persons mercilessly beaten with lathis ... Life and paddy insecure at Darogas unlawful acts. Your immediate intervention necessary without delay.24

The Provincial krishak shabha corroborated the facts on 27 November in another telegram to the Premier of East Bengal seeking intervention and added that armed police had been posted again in Lautabahadurpur and accused the police of collaboration with the zamindars. This turn of events after the end of the Raj perplexed many activists and sympathisers of the nankar cause. The Sanghati, in fact, asked in bewilderment ‘Would there be no cessation of police oppression on the peasantry in Pakistan’.25

Meanwhile following a resolution of the provincial Muslim League to settle nankar disputes, a Committee was formed, which reached an agreement with the zamindars and the nankars on 2 January 1948. The nankars were represented by leaders who were acceptable to the Committee. The Communist activists involved in the struggle were not allowed to take part.26 The salient features of the agreed terms of settlement were:

1. Landlords should agree to convert half of the total Nankar holdings into rent paying holdings with occupancy right on payment of a nominal conversion fee of one year’s rent. The rent will be settled at an equitable and fair rate by a Gazetted Officer with settlement experience. The landlord will resume possession of the other half as khas land.

2. Lands held at concession rates of rent by a nankar shall be assessed at the full prevailing rate of rent of the current time and the nanker shall be relieved of the obligation of rendering any service.

3. All disputes regarding land as to whether it is nanker, “Bhagi” or rent paying shall be decided by Revenue Officers of Gazetted Rank with settlement experience against whose decision an appeal will be before an officer not below the rank of Subordinate Judge whose decision shall be final.

4. No-rent campaign must be immediately called off, including economic and social boycott, and the tenants should from now pay their rent, rent in kind and “Bhagi” produce regularly. One year’s arrear rent and paddy rent must be paid up by all tenants within a period of two months from the date of joining of the Gazetted
Officer. The remaining arrear should be paid up in instalments within a period of three years. Current rent and paddy must be paid up regularly.

5. All ejectment decrees with execution proceedings suits and all criminal cases and proceedings arising out of Nankar disputes should be held up until the settlement is given effect.

The Committee further suggested the withdrawal of all criminal cases arising out of Nankar disputes. On 15 January 1948 the Prime Minister expressed in writing his desire to take action according to the terms of the compromise.

But, despite official settlement, the agitation continued in the Nankar regions, due to the eviction of peasants. The officials involved in carrying out the terms of the settlement were accused of taking the sides of the zamindars. On 1 March, 1948, one employee of a zamindar was attacked by the peasants in Bahadurpur and on 27 March 1948 Sub-Inspector Karam Ali was assaulted, mostly by village women, during one of his nocturnal visits to the village. He had allegedly gone to satisfy his carnal desires. At the same time resistance to levy, procurement and illegal exactions increased in an 'unorganized and spontaneous' fashion as was noticed by some political activists.

The police camp in Lautabahadurpur continued to serve as a base for looting, burning peasant houses, raping and assaulting women, and for arresting and torturing rebellious peasants. The 'land of eternal id' was visited by occasional 'choto keyamat' or 'little doomsday' - as was remarked by a peasant woman whose house had been plundered and destroyed by police. On 18 August 1949 a huge assembly of peasants demanding the 'Poor man's Pakistan' was attacked and fired upon by the police. Five persons were killed. East Pakistan Rifles were sent to Beanibazar police station and subsequently all of the 15 'affected' villages, were 'cowed down'. Sporadic struggle continued to take place in areas where peasant movement had developed before independence.
By March 1948, after the Second Congress of the CPI held in Calcutta, Communists embraced the Ranadive line, so called after the new Secretary V.T. Ranadive. Official policy on tebhaga during this period summed up the experience and aspiration of the struggling peasants in the following manner:

... the Kishans this year want to fight on tebhaga, but this year, not tebagha but the whole crop has to be brought to their houses as in either case they apprehend the greatest blow from the government or the jotedars. Their doubts are whether we can lead them successfully or not. But they say they have no other way but to fight. This is based on their experience of the constitutional hoax and on the confidence in their own fighting capacity revealed through tebhaga.34

It is true that the new line of the CPI gave fresh impetus to the resistance movement of the Hajongs, nankars, Santhals, schedule caste Hindus and the poor Muslim peasants of East Pakistan that they were already carrying out against the policy of levy and procurement of food grain by the government. Added to it was the dissatisfaction of these sections of the peasantry over the procrastination of the government in dealing with the tebhaga and the abolition of zamindari, tanka and nankar forms of rent and tenure. The restlessness of the peasantry expressed itself in several incidents of that period. Landlord property was attacked, granaries were looted in the tribal belts of Mymensingh by the Hajong, Dalus and the poor Muslim peasants. The latter sometimes used their own organisational form, labelled 'criminal gangs' by the authorities.35

The insurgents established control over 400 villages. Large tracts of lands were seized and distributed among the poor peasants. Grains seized from the government agencies were distributed among the people. 'People's courts' were established in a gesture of replacing the colonial legal apparatus. The peasants stopped paying the landlords anything extra, and they also stopped paying the government any tax.36

In Nachol and Nawabganj area of Rajshahi, where santals formed the predominant section of the sharecroppers, peasants were led by Matla Sardar in conjunction with small groups of Communists led by Ila Mitra and her husband Roman Mitra. They
campaigned for *tebhaga* and the demand became popular. Ramu Sarkar, a participant in 1932 uprisings of the Santhals under Jitu Sardar took an active part in this rebellion. An area of about twenty square miles was set up with village warning systems every two miles and armed peasant guards.

In an ambush the Santhals killed five policemen and an officer. As a result hundreds of police were sent to the area. Peasants were arrested and fired upon. Twenty two people were beaten to death, many tortured, hundreds of Santhals and Hindu peasants fled to India. Ila Mitra along with few other Santhals were arrested. Ila Mitra made a statement in the court in which she accused the police of physically torturing and raping her.

In Boitaghata, Dumuria, and Bagerhat police stations of Khulna, Struggle Committees were formed amongst the Hindu Schedule caste peasants to realize the demand of ‘land to the tiller’, abolition of the *zamindari* system, return of *khas* land to peasants and *tebhaga*. A police party, while entering a village called Kalsira in Bagerhat police station to arrest a Communist activist, tried to rape a woman. As a consequence a big crowd of schedule caste peasants organized themselves and attacked the police party to protect the honour of their women. One armed constable was killed and two other constables and the Sub-Inspector were injured. In retaliation the local *ansars* provoked a number of Muslim villagers inciting communal feelings and joined by police enforcements, committed inhuman atrocities against the villagers. Peasant houses were looted and demolished. Twenty people were arrested. Large number of schedule caste peasants fled to India.

Accusations and counter accusations were hurled by the media of both East Pakistan and India and the political leaders of both the countries started blaming the other for creating communal tension. As a result on 10 February 1950 communal riots started in Dhaka and other parts of the country. Taya Zinkin in her *Reporting India* quoted Pierra Dilan, a French-born *zamindar* of Comilla, who allegedly blamed the ‘stupid District Magistrate’ of Khulna who failed to understand the magnitude of the incidence of police
oppression in Kalsira and other surrounding villages. The Magistrate may not have been as innocent and naive as the word 'stupidity' suggests. The mentality of the functionaries of the new government and their experience in dealing with peasant rebellions in pre-partition days, I would argue, was largely to blame for the rise in communal tension. Hindu political leaders often complained against the inaction of the officials in protecting the lives and property of the Hindus. J N Mondol, a Central Minister in Liquat Ali Khan's cabinet, complained in his letter of resignation to Prime Minister on 9 October 1950, about police atrocities in some villages of Gournadi police station in Barisal district:

I wrote to the District Magistrate and the S.P. for an enquiry. A section of the local people also prayed for an enquiry by the S.D.O. But no enquiry was held. Even my letters to the District authorities were not acknowledged.40

What appeared to be 'stupidity' to a French-born zamindar was, in the opinion of the Members of the Opposition party in East Bengal Legislative Assembly,41 'seemingly studied indifference of the Government in tackling the growing lawlessness [which] was bound to encourage the outbreak of lawlessness in the country'. Religious distinctions and prejudices were used by the government and the landlords to crush the rebel centres in East Pakistan. Agents of government and the Muslim League told the Muslim peasants that it was 'well and good to refuse to pay levy and tanko, but Pakistan may be torn apart by this movement'.42

Many Muslim peasants joined in the attack on and plunder of property belonging to tribal, schedule caste and even poor Muslim peasants in different places.43 As a result far greater migration of Hindus from East Bengal to India took place in 1950 than after the partition in 1947.
However, on 16 December 1950, after about two and half years of deliberation and amendments, the East Bengal Estate Acquisition and Tenancy Bill became an act. But the act could not come into operation for another six months during which time it had to be examined by a Central Government Commission and receive the assent of the Governor General of Pakistan. The bill was processed since its presentation on 7 April 1948 in the Legislature in a ‘Select Committee’ more than half of whose members were landlords and 
jotedars.44 All sorts of argument were placed in the Assembly to obstruct and oppose proposals that threatened the power and the interest of the land holders. However, this was seen as a victory of the more progressive elements in the League over the pro-zamindari lobby.

The Bill provided for the acquisition of rent-receiving interests by the State, envisaged the purchase of all landlord estates (excluding Khas) by the State and the abolition of all intermediary privileges, the abolition of intermediary tenures and conversion of former ryots (hereditary tenants) into proprietors paying taxes to the government. The limit for private holding was set at 33 acres. The burden of compensating the landowners was fixed on the peasants. The agrarian legislation passed in 1950 officially prohibited 

\textit{abwabs} (illegal exaction) and free personal services in addition to the rent payable by tenants. Share cropping was allowed to exist within the definitional maze of the changed agrarian relations.45

The bureaucracy on whom the implementation of land reform depended, finally ensured that nothing tangible happened. On 14 November 1952 the memorialists of Hatiya - Ramgati Island’s Association (See chapter 3, page 64) complained that the poor landless people belonging to the islands did not get lands although they had the ‘real right to get them’. They drew the attention of the government to ‘the most lamentable corruption’ prevalent in the 

\textit{khasmahal} offices.46 On 10 July 1953 \textit{Chasi} commented that there had
only been ‘a change of masters in the name of the abolition of zamindari’. ‘As a result,’ it said, ‘the agriculturists have fallen into the hands of heartless and cruel people’.\textsuperscript{47} The complaint was popular enough to be repeated by the poet we have quoted earlier. He wrote about the government officials ‘hardening attitude’ towards the peasantry.\textsuperscript{48} As Kamal Siddiqui has written, the ways of the \textit{tahsildar} (revenue official) were a reminder to the peasantry that zamindari system, after all, was not yet over.\textsuperscript{49} As the peasantry was not involved in the implementation of the land reform laws the traditionally superior status of the \textit{zamindars} and their agents persisted, as did the social and political inferiority of the peasantry. This reforms were scarcely significant. The Muslim \textit{zamindars} succeeded in thwarting the intent of the reforms by evasion, or by simply disregarding them, whereas the Hindu \textit{zamindars} largely succeeded in transferring resources to India. Besides, landlords were all entitled to compensation for the loss of their zamindari the burden of which the peasantry continued to bear for many more years.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{The Tanka} system was abolished but by that time most of the Hajong peasants had been forcibly evicted and their lands resettled with Muslim immigrants from India. In fact, very few Hajongs were left to celebrate the victory of their struggle.\textsuperscript{51} But the fact that tenants had won the right to appeal to courts of law for protection was indeed a certain improvement in their legal position since the colonial period, though it was unlikely that the poor peasants would initiate the process even if the law accorded them the right. However, the tenants were obliged to settle for much less than their demands. ‘Land to the tiller’ remained a distant hope for most of them in spite of the struggles and the sacrifices of both Hindu and Muslim peasants of East Bengal.

It is true, as Bhattacharyya says, that in terms of the goals of the Communist movement these revolts marked a departure from the past traditions of peasant movements in many respects. The overwhelming bulk of the rebel peasants in \textit{tebhaga} and \textit{tanka} struggles came from backward communities of scheduled caste tribes. In the areas affected by the revolt, these communities were in the process of becoming Hindus;\textsuperscript{52} they had, in varying measures, adopted Hindu codes of conduct, and they had aspirations for a
'proper rank in the Hindu social order'. These aspirations ranged from claims to higher ritual rank to simple acknowledgement of communal dignity without a claim to specific ritual status. The movement for higher rank and ritual of the marginal Hindus also had its analogue among the Muslims. The major impediment to the realisation of these aspirations was the bureaucracy.

VI

It was only since the 1935 constitutional change in Bengal that the Muslim political elite of Bengal had any experience of running the government. The structure of the government was such that as ministers they were guided by and were dependent on the executive. This was specially true of times of crises. The executive had the authority and seemingly the training to do so. In colonial India the executive had the pretense of administrative neutrality vis-a-vis the ruled. The latter's perception and actions were recorded in regular reports which, through a process of bureaucratic filtration, eventually formed the basis of the advice that the secretaries gave to the ministers. The ministers' observation and understanding of political and social trends and tensions in the country were strongly influenced by the perceptions of the civil servants. In the absence of mass-based political organisation like that of the Indian National Congress, the dependence of Muslim politicians on the civil service machinery for information regarding popular movements and problems was almost total.

As early as December 1947, the Chief Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan, in a secret memorandum, drew the attention of all relevant government officials to the revival of agrarian agitation. He blamed the members of the Communist Party for doing so. He reminded the concerned officials to follow the Home Department Memorandum dated 18 January, 1947. He saw no change between January and December of the same year. 14 August had no place in his memorandum. He urged the officials to use
their influence privately to settle such disputes amicably and where trouble was acute and widespread, to persuade the jotedars to accept a 60:40 basis of division. While doing so, however, they were told not to allow Communists and other agitators to create trouble.54 Thus a significant policy decision was taken at the highest provincial Civil Service level while the elected Government was supposedly administering the country. A 60:40 basis was offered against the practice of equal share of the produce by the landlord and tenants while the tenants demanded two-thirds of the produce. The offer was made secretly down the line of administration on the expectation that the jotedars could be persuaded to accept the offer—an offer, if had been made publicly by the ruling party, might have given a new direction to the movement and spared some valuable lives.

But as in the pre-independence days, as Bhattacharyya has observed: 'the Government strategy' was to have government officials to arbitrate landlord-tenant disputes ... rather than to let the Communists have the credit'.55 In the Fortnightly Report of Chittagong Division in the first half of June, 1940, the policy was stated in the following manner, 'Landlords should be confidentially warned against entertaining requests from tenants through the medium of political agents'. We should note that important word 'warning' which was replaced by the policy of 'persuasion' advocated in the earlier directive. But it was added in the same paragraph of the memorandum that if the jotedars did not agree to the 60:40 basis then 'warn them that otherwise Government might be compelled to legislate for a basis less favourable to them'. The bureaucratic aspiration to some kind of a bonapartist role is clear in that passage from 'persuasion' to 'warning'.

The civil servants were hostile to the idea of class organisation of the peasants. Used to operating in a ma-baap relationship with the peasantry during the Raj, they found the intrusion of politics and political organisations to represent the interests of the latter always unpalatable. They also believed that they were the only protector of the peasants from the oppression of the zamindars. The Chief Secretary while submitting a summary of the 'Hajong Disturbances' to the Prime Minister, observed that a Stipendary Magistrate with first class powers was posted with 'a view to give (sic) protection to the aboriginal
tenants of the area against the oppression of the landlord. As well, any initiative by the peasants that conflicted with the interests of the ruling elite was seen as mindless reflex action devoid of any consciousness on the part of the peasants. There was always a manipulation theory to explain every gesture the poor made towards the realization of their collective interests. Hence every kind of mobilization which was not initiated by the ruling elite was suspect. Paternalism was not shaken at all by the change of August 1947.

From the Memorandum cited earlier, there emerges a concern for the peasants but that too originated from the fear of class politics and the organisational weakness of the new state. On behalf of the Muslim nationalist elites the executives were containing the crisis which the former faced from the struggling peasants in the early days after independence. In the process the executives were marginalising the vibrant demand of the peasantry for self-respect through land and tenancy reforms.

Like their predecessors, the functionaries failed to see the protagonists of the threat to law and order. The peasant's problem was seen as an administrative problem demanding administrative solution. Thus the demands of the peasantry were shorn of all political content by the leader of the ruling party and the head of the government in East Pakistan. In his first address to the Commissioners of Divisions and Heads of Departments, the Prime Minister suggested that the government, with the communist-led peasant movements around the corner, was 'faced with an essentially administrative problem'. The ruling elite could only find 'outsiders', 'conspirators' and manipulators in the peasant movement for without them the latter did not move. The official reports on the agrarian struggles were not only full of metaphoric abuses; there was a perception of a clear conspiracy against the state. Thus the Hajong rebellion was described by the District Magistrate in a manner that echoed the tone of his colonial predecessor: 'The Hajongs are at the mercy of the Communists and their main leaders are caste Hindu Communists'. And on 28 January the Parliamentary Secretary in his letter to the Chief Secretary cautioned the latter about 'the subversive movement for establishing adibasistan' [A Homeland for the Tribals].
The same was true for the *nankar* peasants: 'ignorant, illiterate, unsophisticated people who do not understand their own interests.' The officials did not mention, excepting in one or two stray reports, the conflict between the *zamindars* and the *nankars*. In case of the tribal Hajongs one officer did recognize the fact that the 'tribal people were exploited by more advanced people of the plains', but no action followed from this perception. Even when a field executive mentioned in his report (to the Deputy Commissioner) the 'bitter disputes between the zamindars on one side and the Nankar tenants on the other', the observation came not as a recognition of the tenant's cause but as a justification for police help for the *zamindars*. The conclusion was that the *zamindars* had been compelled to pray for police help. One Intelligence Branch report reduced the *nankar* movement to the whims and personal vendetta of a particular Communist leader. In the opinion of the Intelligence Officer:

> In the beginning of 1947 the Communist leader Ajoy Kumar Bhattacharjee renewed the activities in the shape of Nankar agitation after a nasty case over the conversion of his sister to Islam at the instance of a man of the local Muslim Zamindar.

If this was the perceived cause of the *nankar* rebellion by the officials, the conclusion about the direction of the movement could only be obvious. Almost with an air of discovery one report mentioned that 'it was interesting to note that the *nankar* agitation of the Communists was solely directed against the Muslim *zamindars* of the area'. On the other hand the *Hajongs* were described as 'enemies'. In the view of one official 'the Hajongs have never been credited for their extraordinary loyalty to the Government'. In fact, the closest the Hajongs ever got to being recognized as a people belonging to an independent country was when, after a police firing, one of them was described by an enquiring magistrate, 'as 'an apparently free citizen' of the state. Why apparently? Because the officials could not bring themselves to see other ethnic and religious groups as equal citizens of the state. Religious nationalism had not yet loosened its grips on the intellectual frame of the state and its officials, though some members of the ruling party
were pledging themselves from time to time to the idea of a secular state as the goal for the nation.

Indeed, the field official's confidence in dealing with the tenants was shaken by the presence of the Hindus and Communists. A report from the Superintendent of Police of the District Intelligence Branch betrayed this outlook. He felt that 'the tenants could be brought to a frame of mind amenable to reason and agreeable to an amicable settlement' but for the Hindus and Communists. The principal task of the state functionaries, to turn antagonistic contradictions into non-antagonistic ones and thereby to maintain class rule found its place in this expectation but the method of doing so preferred the use of force over persuasion as when the SP recommended 'action' against 'active agitators'. The executives also contributed to the creation of a social fear. The manner in which the incidents in the areas of the peasant movement were reported provides an important insight into the ideology of counter-insurgency practices. In a Confidential Report dated 11 September 1949 the SP Sylhet mentioned that in June of the same year at Mehari in Borolekha police station elaka, adjoining villages of Saneswar, a big procession was taken out with anti-state slogans which the SP said caused fear and alarm.

The official perception of the Communists and their activities were at times products of over-blown reports which themselves contributed to alarmist tendencies. By the middle of 1948, the officials felt that the nankar dispute in the district could not be put down unless drastic action was taken against the Communists. While it was necessary to get a government order to do so, the process of 'putting down' the peasants did not wait for government orders anyway. The field officials especially the police acted on their own and sometimes under the guidance of magistrates, which was a practice developed by the Raj and enshrined in the Police Regulation Book.

The civil servants and other officials of the state, however, did not speak with a single, orchestrated voice. At times emphases shifted in the language of the reports that spoke of the threat to law and order posed by the struggling peasants. For example, the first
information sent by the police through telegrams to higher officials at Dhaka after the police action at Saneswar clearly mentioned the 'fact' that the police were attacked with deadly weapons by the villagers before they opened fire. But in a subsequent report by the Commissioner of the Division it turned out to have been only an apprehension!

The actions the officials took against peasant movements were intimately bound up with their perception of themselves as 'protectors' of the people. As early as January 1948, an official suggested that the aboriginals might be told that the Government would always view the former's special needs with great sympathy. Even the inclusion of a tribal representative to the newly formed Constituent Assembly was also suggested for consideration by the District Magistrate. That was in the very early days of victorious nationalism when the demands of the unassimilated social groups were still viewed with sympathy. With the development of tribal and peasant movements the bureaucratic remedies started to imitate colonial measures taken in similar situations. The Commissioner's Report on the tanka movement of 19 April 1949 runs thus:

We should declare the area to be in a disturbed state and to post punitive police. Another important reform that may be effected is the improvement of the means of communication.

A flag march, as suggested by his colonial predecessor Bastin, was also suggested. Speed boats, a Minister's visit, a 'talking machine with batteries' were all considered important in dealing with the agitation but the question of speedy tenancy reforms found no place in this report. Sometimes even individual officers who had had experience of handling peasant movements prior to political independence were brought to the scene. Important field officials, who, according to a Communist activist, had earned notoriety during the pre-independence nankar movement, were transferred on promotion to Sylhet district.

The field executives were quick to shed any stance of neutrality and objectivity that might be professed by senior civilians. The Deputy Commissioner, while providing one of the higher government officials with materials so that the Prime Minister could give an answer
to the Notice of Adjournment motion brought about by Jatindra Nath Bhadra wrote, 'I hope Government will not stand this nonsense and the threats of the enemies of the state and will give a crushing reply and defeat to them.' This was not a case of an officer expressing his loyalty to the party in power, rather it was an act of affirmation of the civil-service ideology. The civil servants were not following any directive or policy guidelines given out by the party in power. They were in fact guiding the latter instead, and were taking initiative in handling the problems they faced.

When suggested by the Governor that the cases against the Hajong rebels which were lodged during the last days of the Raj be dropped, preferably at an early date if the Government so wished, the District Magistrate of Mymensingh took a very different view. From the Governor's note it is clear that the ruling party was considering the withdrawal of the cases. According to the Governor the Hajongs' principal preoccupation was with the criminal cases arising out of preindependence 'disturbances'. But the District Magistrate opined to the Assistant Secretary to the Government that the question of 'withdrawal of the cases might be dropped as the prosecution had already brought before the court whatever evidence was possible to secure'. Thus a step towards a political settlement of the Hajong demand by the ruling party was trapped within the narrow legal outlook of the bureaucracy who survived the Raj into the days of the national government.

In their attempt to destroy the peasant movement, not only did the bureaucracy distort the process of political solution, they also defied the authority of the political leaders in government. In response to a complaint against the police atrocities by a peasant activist the former Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin ordered an immediate enquiry. These atrocities were committed on 1 April, 1948, after settlement of the nankar problem by the Muslim League. In fact, the Prime Minister was quite outraged by the nature of the police brutality that was unleashed on the nankars. In a note he wrote to the Chief Secretary on 1 April 1948 Nazimuddin expressed his anger in no uncertain manner: 'If the facts are found to be correct, even twenty five percent, the most drastic action has to be taken against the police personnel involved.'
The SDC on 4 August 1948 and the ADC on 31 August 1948 in two separate reports concluded that the petition indulged in exaggeration. Although the SDC confirmed the excesses perpetrated by the police, the ADC suggested that 'no action on the allegation was necessary'. One important reason for not taking any action was the alleged fact that the complainant was a Communist. As a matter of fact this was not true. Ismail Ali, the person in question, was a member of the Communist Party before independence. But during the Sylhet Referendum he dissociated himself with the Party because of the latter's policy on the Referendum. When he made this complaint he was an active member of the local Muslim League. For almost a year after the incident had taken place no reports were prepared on the matter, not to speak of taking any action as demanded by the Prime Minister. In the eyes of the bureaucracy this case lost its urgency after this lapse of time. The petition of Ismail Ali could not be traced either, and by that time Nazimuddin had been replaced by Nurul Amin as the Prime Minister.

In reports from the lower level of the judiciary critical remarks were sometimes made about the nature of police actions carried out in villages witnessing peasant unrest but actions were seldom taken for these lapses. Instead, as the official story moved up the bureaucratic hierarchy, there was a deliberate scaling down of the magnitude of police atrocities and a blowing up of the size of the threat that the struggling peasants posed to law and order. For example, the police radiogram immediately after the firing at Saneswar reported 'a mob of about six hundred' who attacked them; but the number of people swelled as the narrative developed. The number now included all the villagers (about two thousand people) with deadly weapons. In fact the villagers held jathas (spear), sulfi (forked spear), and lathis (bamboo staff)- all implements of labour and means of self defence that the peasants used in their everyday life. Against the organized force of the state armed with modern weapons those implements could hardly appear to be threatening or overwhelming to the lawful authority of the state, as was claimed by the officials in their reports. By contrast the reports maintained a conspicuous silence over the nature of police action and the magnitude of oppression of the villagers.
by the police. Although excesses committed by the police were occasionally recognized by higher officials they were not mentioned in the reports of the district administration. Most of the time these reports were meant to justify police firing, something required by the Police Regulation Book as 'a routine'. Some occasionally sympathetic reports however contained pictures of police atrocities: the Police, in fact, raided the villages, looted the peasants' homes and hearths, broke their utensils, took away their cattle and wealth, beat them and at times raped the peasant women. But this old form of oppression was now given a new name. Ila Mitra, a woman Communist leader of Nachol rebellion, mentioned to the Court the expression 'Pakistani Injection' that had been used by members of the Police force who raped her while she was being held in police custody.80

In fact, the purpose of official coercion appeared to have shifted from punishment to repression. Torture was increasingly administered not always to obtain information or punish an activist in the movement, but to discourage people from forming political and social ties with the other. At least, that is how the SP, DIB, Sylhet measured the success of the police action in Beanibazar Police Station on 21 August 1949. He reported that 'The injured persons who could not be arrested and who fled away are not getting support or help from the villagers.81

The officials were also engaged in exacerbating religious conflicts as a way of containing peasant and popular movements. The state found it convenient to appeal to the 'primordial' sentiments rather than to the civil sentiments of the people. So we find a Police Superintendent forming mujahid parties in Mymensingh in 1950 to 'arouse the feelings and enthusiasm of the Muslim population.'82 This was not a case of the eccentricity of a particular police officer, rather it was the stated policy at least in some circles of the government. On 27 October 1949, the Director of Ansars issued a circular titled 'Points for Publicity' in which the Ansars were urged in the interest of national reconstruction to 'work the audience up to a state of enthusiasm based on religious appeal where necessary and then utilise[d] that enthusiasm to the best advantage of [the]
To some executives religion thus became a powerful means of reinforcing patriotic loyalty. Even though there was a large number of Muslim participants and leaders in these rebellions, they were assimilated into the categories of ‘Hindus’ and ‘Communist’ and at times perceived as temporarily ‘misguided section of the movement’.

In the reports of field officials there was no equivocation about the communal composition of the struggling peasants. On 18 August, 1948 the Deputy Superintendent of Police and a Magistrate jointly sent a report to the Superintendent of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet. They stated in the report that the Communist activities had spread over an area of some 15 villages inhabited purely by the Hindus in an inaccessible locality and situated in Beanibazar and Borolekha police stations. But initially the people who lived in the area of the struggle were divided conceptually into two categories: one local Muslim and law abiding Hindus and the other enemies of the state. Law abiding Hindus in this case were the Hindu zamindars who were cooperating with the functionaries in quelling the movements of the peasants; some of them were even ‘respectable’ in the perception of the officials. Some of the Hindu landlords in fact did render some positive cooperation to the functionaries in putting down the rebellion.85 From time to time, the Muslim League leaders appealed to the Hindu elites, and some of the latter joined in the efforts to resist any organized initiative of the peasants for land reform and self improvement.86

But the perceived unity between the Hindu and the Muslim elites was tenuous. The peasant demand was viewed by the ruling elite from the position of Muslim nationalism, while it was defended by the Hindu elite from a similar communal standpoint which now became obvious in the discussion that took place in the EBLA following police action in the areas of peasant movement.87 The appeal of unity towards the Hindu elite by the Muslim ruling elite was weakened by mistrust. The executive thought that in a time of difficulty the Hindus would surely desert and hence considered it eminently desirable to plant some Muslims among the exclusively Hindu population. The Commissioner of Chittagong Division suggested an easy way of doing this: by giving away to Muslims any

state’.83
lands that might come into the possession of the *khas mahal* (government land). He even suggested that the Government should adopt as a policy that ‘all future settlements of Khas Mahal lands in the affected villages would be concluded with Muslim tenants’ in Sylhet. The same measure was suggested in *Hajong* areas of Mymensingh. As a result according to a printed Bengali leaflet by the Communist party ‘one hundred and fifty thousand bighas of land in Mymensingh was seized by the State.' On 13 July 1951, the Governor of the Province in his Tour Note for the district of Mymensingh recorded that ‘11,500 souls had been settled in the border areas along Assam;’ some of the refugee families had been given ‘vacated Hajong houses’. One important outcome of this approach was the nearly-forced emigration of a large number of non-Muslims to neighbouring India, resulting in a deep scar in the body politic of East Bengal. What started as a tactic on the part of the government - no doubt a lesson learned from the Raj - to deal with agrarian agitation ended as a downright and flagrant violation of all legality and human rights.

This kind of approach to agrarian agitations betrayed all the insecurity of the ruling elite. Firstly, there was the fear of a rival nationalism, that of Indian ruling elite, which was physically more powerful and organized. This sense of insecurity influenced the perspective of the officials to quite an extraordinary degree. The local officials often mentioned that ‘the Communists hailed from the Indian Dominion’ and a neat equation emerged about the social composition of the rebellious peasants. In a report dated the 21 August 1949 the Superintendent of Police, Sylhet described the procession of about a thousand (armed) peasants as ‘Communists who were one and all Hindus’. An equation was thus being clearly suggested: the terms ‘insurgent peasants’, ‘Hindus’ and ‘Communists’ had become interchangeable. This perspective dominated the outlook of both the bureaucracy as well as the Muslim League politicians.

Thus a process began by which the meaning of ‘Pakistan’ moved closer towards the conception of a ‘Islamic State’ that implicitly defined the non-Muslims out of the nation. And that was why, as early as December 1947, the District Magistrate of Mymensingh
could detect among a section of the ethnic population a 'fear of Pakistan'. That initial fear of a nationalism based on religious solidarity made the religious and ethnic minorities anxious to define their place in the new nation. On the other hand the euphoria for Pakistan, as detailed in chapter 2, gave some sections of the Muslim peasants the sense of having a clearly defined place in their 'Holy land'. One can argue that both the fear and euphoria of the concerned social groups were addressed by the Communist activists of East Bengal who tried to dispel the former and build on the latter.

Referring to the statement of the Prime Minister which spelled out the official view and actions of one such movement, we noticed that the narrative therein had actually evolved through a process of bureaucratic reporting, originating at the level of the field officer, and finally finding expression in the form of a public statement made by the Prime Minister in the Legislative Assembly. The PM however had only lent his office and name to a narrative he did not create. The narrative owed its origin in the office of the Deputy Commissioner who constructed it from the reports of the Intelligence Branch, a very specialized department created by the Raj to gather intelligence in order to help formulate actions by the administration against any organisation and/or individuals and movements engaged in any anti-State or anti government activities. This became the core branch of the counter insurgency establishment which always remained invisible before the eyes of the people but always extended its piercing gaze at any gesture of self assertion by any section of the people deemed hostile by the ruling elite. This department was in fact the dark room of the state apparatus where images of popular movements were developed, coloured and perhaps most of the time distorted. Indeed the DC depended mostly on the IB's reports. He wrote to the Chief Secretary that as directed by him he had looked into the District Intelligence Branch report of the last 8 months as he put the final touches to the government's version of the story of the nankar rebellion.

Thus the Prime Minister's statement stood out as a testimony to a process through which the political elite started losing their initiative to the functionaries of the Muslim League Government in dealing with the struggling sections of the peasantry of East Pakistan.
The officials in their dealings with the peasant movement were engaged in a process of fabricating the theory of the nation. They were appealing to the religious solidarity of the majority community and thereby dividing the nation, while the ostensible goal of post-colonial nationalism was to unify it. Thus this new nation failed to set itself up as a transcendent reality to all the differences anterior to it.

VII

To sum up, the Prime Minister's statement in the Assembly could be seen as a part of the liberal democratic project of the state in which the Government was required to be answerable to the representatives of the people for its actions, especially police 'excesses'. It also shares another trait of the official mind that the Raj developed in the subcontinent: comforting generalisations, in which any action of the people must be construed as manipulation by outsiders. The theme of external manipulation of the masses - to borrow from Sarkar, one so dear to the colonialists,94 - was adopted by the Muslim League leaders with regard to the peasant movements immediately after independence in East Pakistan. It thus entered into the discourse of the post-colonial official nationalism almost from the very beginning of Pakistan. This blinkered vision not only led to a particular kind of action by the ruling elite which in so many ways continued the perceptions of colonial state functionaries and seriously disrupted the process of nation-building.

The Muslim League government in East Pakistan, immediately after independence, was faced with problems not dissimilar to those seen in parts of neighbouring India. The euphoria over 'independence' often led to a revitalisation of peasant/tribal movements based on radical demands and organised under radical leadership. The task of nation-building meant containing these movements and their radical potential without in any way jeopardising the 'unity' of the 'people', which the young state was supposed to represent.
In other words, the task was not simply one of repression but also one of ideology: what vocabulary and rhetoric would the ruling elite employ in order to marginalise any opposition while reinforcing its own legitimacy? The rhetoric that the Pakistan state developed was one that ultimately divided the ‘people’ or ‘the nation’. Unlike the Indian state, it couldn’t neutralise opposition simply by branding its ‘enemies of the nation’ (that is, Communists). The Muslim League government went a step further and identified ‘Communists’ with the ‘Hindus’. The ploy did not work as much of the opposition to the government arose among the Muslims themselves. The marginalising rhetoric therefore sounded more and more empty as grievances against the government mounted and spread among the population.
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On 29 September 1948 the police opened fire on thousands of people who, defying a prohibition order under section 144 Cr PC, had assembled to cut a canal at Ramdas tek (Loop) of the Halda river at Madarsha in southern Chittagong. According to the executive enquiry held the day after ten people were killed, and twenty-two people were hospitalized with bullet injuries of various nature. Altogether 44 rounds of bullets were fired upon the people. This event highlighted an issue that was acquiring urgency in the countryside: the question of control of water resources. It also gave an indication the kind of popular politics that could evolve around that question.

The state violence through which a process of popular mobilization was crushed no doubt achieved its immediate goal of establishing 'law and order'. The terrified villagers deserted the villages after the incident. But political mobilization continued to take place. Thousands of people rushed to the hospital in the district Headquarters in Chittagong to see the dead. A procession and a meeting to condemn the police firing was scheduled but could not be organised due to the imposition of section 144 of the Cr PC for one month in the district town.

In the meeting of the Muslim League workers which was held at Dhaka on 23 June 1949 Maulana Bhashani referred to the incident and condemned the government. The bitterness this incident generated among the people was reflected years latter in an election tract titled 'Six Years of Zalimshahi' published by the United Front in which the
shooting at Madarsha was mentioned as an important instance of the oppressive acts of the Muslim League government.\(^5\)

The mobilization at Madarsha essentially addressed the question of water control - a very important issue, that affected directly the lives of millions in the countryside in East Bengal. The problem of untimely abundance and scarcity of water awaited solutions that called for massive effort by the national government. However, the approach adopted was often too bureaucratic. Ignoring the advice of several development experts that to tame the rivers, to construct embankments and drainage channels, to excavate the silted tanks and canals called for ‘giant efforts’ by human labour\(^6\) the Muslim League government unhesitatingly adopted the bureaucratic approach to water control.

The other argument I will develop in this context will relate to the field executive, especially the District Officers, who played a key role in shaping these schemes. These officers who constituted an important part of the colonial district administration were responsible for the development programmes of the national government. The experience of Madarsha illustrated a conflict that was central to the process of nation-building in post-independence East Bengal. This was the conflict between the bureaucracy and the people. Time and again, the popular urge to participate in government programme was thwarted by a bureaucracy nurtured in the traditions of colonial administration. A major failure of political leadership lay in its inability to resolve, or even manage, this contradiction. Our discussion of the control of water resources aims to highlight this problem in recent East Bengal History.

II

Due to the long neglect by the colonial administration the river system reached a ‘sorry state’ by the time the country became independent. Writing in 1926 Panandikar mentioned that apart from the deltaic part the rivers in other parts of Bengal were sitting
up. The changes in the Teesta during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the changes in the course of the Brahmaputra, Ganges or the Meghna during the last two hundred years, according to Abdur Razzaq, ‘had been more momentous facts’ in the life and labour of the people than ‘all the noisy activities of the government during the same period’.8

Water logging, drainage, salinity, and silting up of the river beds and canals and at times sudden changing of course by rivers became the salient features of the water system in the province. As early as September 1947 the League activists in the Workers Conference drew attention of the government to the condition of rivers and rivulets, canals and marshes, ditches and drains which needed re-excavation.9 Innumerable canals and large number of rivers were silted up. Important among them were the khal from Taltola to Lohajang and river Ichhamati in Dhaka district, the waterways in North Barisal, the north Bengal river system, especially the Karatoa, the Bangali, the Nagar, the Ichamati and the Fuljhore in the districts of Bogra and Pabna. The Gazna Bil in Pabna and Salta Bil in north Barisal needed immediate drainage. The canals between the Brahmaputra and the Dhaleswari were in a bad shape. The following canals (i) Narsingdi to Hatirdia via Shibpur; (ii) Baliapara to Narayanganj, (iii) Tetlaba Rupsi, (iv) Rajarbari to Pubail (v) Mugrapara to Narayanganj, (vi) Munshiganj to Dighirpar, and the rivers Sitalakhya, Banar, Buriganga, Bangsal-all in Dhaka district-needed immediate resuscitation. Panchkulia and Chitalmari khal in Bagerhat subdivision in Khulna were silted up. In Comilla the Gumti embankments which were built during the Raj developed breaches in a number of places and the re-excavation of the Titas close to Akhaura was long due. The Teesta and Atrai in the north Bengal and the canals linking Gourmadi and Shikarpur and Mahilara linking Nalchara - all in Barisal district were silted up. In Sylhet the river Surma was dead and the Kushiara was dying and all the little canals dried up. Over and above, the haor of Kaligot and Halir Haor of Dharmapasha police station in Sylhet were affected every year due to inadequate drainage.10
[Source: Haroun Er Rashid, Geography of Bangladesh, Dacca, 1977, p. 57]
The situation deteriorated every year and in 1951 the Governor of the Province drew attention to the problem. He mentioned in his Tour Note that the mouth of Gorai in Kushtia district had been silted up and was causing serious inconvenience to the people.11 The District Magistrate of Kushtia reported that the natural drainage of the area which existed 50 years ago had been closed 'on account of the silting up of the rivers'.12 In Rajshahi the Bural, the Narad and the Old Atrayee were almost dead.13 The members of the Hatiya Ramgati Islands' Association informed the government that the canals in the islands were in a bad condition.14 An additional problem was that of salinity in the coastal Khulna rivers which needed embankments urgently. Gradual silting of the Someswari, Nital, Kangsa, Khagra in Mymensingh district resulted in the failure to contain the onrush of water from the Garo Hills as the depth of the river beds decreased over time. As a result, Durgapur, Kamla Kanda, Netrokona and Mohanganj police stations were badly flooded regularly. Almost every year, Netrokona subdivision was affected by flood wrote the Yugantar correspondent.15 Feni sub-division was also affected by flood almost regularly whereas the Sadar Subdivision of Noakhali had to faced with the problem of water-logging. Regular inundation of paddy fields followed by rains caused immense damage every year in parts of Begumganj, Ramganj and Senbag police stations of Noakhali.16 On 4 July 1952 a serious flood in Gumti affected almost half of the people in Comilla district. Large areas in the town were also inundated with flood water. Vast areas of Bogra, Jessore, Netrokona and Sirajganj sub-division went underwater in July that year. Increase in the water level in the Surma also caused flood in Companyganj, Gosaihat and Jaintia areas of Sylhet.17 About Khulna, the Governor observed in 1951 that saline water breaking the embankments had destroyed the rice crop the year before and there was none in 1951 either.18 A Secret Report on the Situation in East Bengal in the second half of June 1953 mentioned that the embankment in Gumti was breached at a number of places due to high current and increased in volume of water. An area of approximately ten square miles of cultivated land was inundated causing damage to crops and hamlets. In fact, the breaches of the embankment on this river became an annual feature.19 And the 12-mile long Dhuruy Khal in Fatikchari police station in Chittagong got flooded regularly affecting people of...
three to four police stations.20 And during the rains the low lying areas on either side of
the Halda used to be frequently flooded causing damage to crops and property of the
people.21

Almost every year during the last days of the Raj and the beginning of the new rule, local
flood caused crop losses that aggravated the food situation in the country. We know from
our earlier Chapters that the government was trying various methods to tackle the food
problem in the province. Those efforts were limited to the schemes of procurement and
distribution of food-grains and, moreover, these were short term emergency measures.
But the question of increasing the volume of food-grain production in the long run was
directly related to the question of water management.

If one goes through the EBLA debates and discussions and the government documents
and party resolutions during the years of Muslim League rule, one might conclude that
the ruling elite of East Pakistan, contrary to accusations by Professor Abdur Razzaq, took
the issue of water control quite seriously.22 A number of schemes were adopted and
executed as a testimony to the development perspective of the government in the sphere
of water control. The Minister for Irrigation told the Assembly that there was 'no irrigation
proper in the province'. Colonial neglect was blamed for the problem. On the plea of
heavy annual rainfall of about 80 inches, irrigation was perceived to be unnecessary in
the region by the Raj. So the genesis of the incomprehension of the problem of water
management lay, in the official perception, in an uneven distribution of rainfall which
affected crops both ways - once by shortage and again by abundance of water.23 Over
time the neglect of water management led to a number of serious problems for the
region. 'There was so much water', observed Abdur Razzaq, 'that it required detailed,
careful attention before it could be useful was an idea which just did not occur, not till the
end of the British rule'.24

The gross insensitivity of the colonial rulers to the ecology of the province was
manifested in the railway construction programme undertaken in this part of the province
in 1897. The railways created a problem of water logging in various parts of the province. The area to the east of Kulaura-Sylhet railway line was 'greatly affected'; owing to the small numbers of bridges, the water could not be adequately drained off. As a result, at the onset of rain a vast area in the police stations of Kulaura, Fenchuganj, Baralekha, Beanilazar, and Gopalganj went under water. A memorandum from the inhabitants of Charkhai in Sylhet district informs us that the number of bridges on the Fenchuganj-Sylhet Railway Bridges were not sufficient for the drainage of water of the area. Again due to the construction of Bhairab Railway Bridge the water descending from the hills of Assam was stranded due to inadequate outlet. The sudden rise in the water level caused total destruction of crops. The bawa crop was regularly destroyed in Kishoreganj, a deficit subdivision of Mymensingh district. The District Magistrate of Mymensingh informed the Governor that the Bhairab Bridge caused flood in the haors. While touring Mymensingh, the Governor noticed a large sheet of water on both sides of the railway line beyond the Gaffargaon Railway Station. But before the next station the train crossed a river, by a railway bridge which almost adjoined the railway station after Gaffargaon. The surface of the water in the river seemed much lower than the sheet of water along the railway line. 'It appeared to be about 10 or 12 feet below the ground on both banks.' The Governor forwarded his observation to the relevant Department to attend to the problem created by the Bridge. The national Government inherited these problems. 'Alien rulers,' complained a Member of the Assembly, 'did not help us in this respect (water management) rather harmed us'.

But the post-colonial government do not seem to have learnt from its own criticism of colonial practices. East Bengal started with about 600 miles of good road but immediately after independence a Five Year Road Plan was initiated by the government which set a target of five thousand miles of good road in the province. By August 1951 work on two thousand miles was nearing completion. The 'very ambitious scheme' of road building showed an equally large degree of callousness toward the ecology of the Province. To the thinking of many, the priority was wrong. They suggested that irrigation should have received priority over road building. But the ruling elite, for various reasons, went ahead
with road building. As a result a lot of crop lands were wasted, and areas prone to malaria were created all along the Dhaka-Aricha road in Manikganj subdivision in Dhaka district. Reverend A H Newnham, an Australian missionary in Mymensingh, informed the Governor that the eighty-five mile long border road which the government built along the Assam border had dammed up the river water and damaged crops as there were no culverts under the road.

The East Bengal river systems known for their abundance of silt made cultivation precarious in certain areas. Uneven accumulation of silt in the river beds resulted in collection of water in certain areas and lack of irrigation in other areas. The dead and dying rivers of Rajshahi were an important factor affecting public health. Malaria was rampant in the districts of Jessore and Kushtia as a result of the drying up of the rivers. A Member from Manikganj held the view that malaria increased in Manikganj because of the silted up rivers. The villages around Teesta, Atrai, Ichhamati were depopulated due to malaria and kala-azar. And Mymensingh became a hotbed of cholera, smallpox, kala-azar and malaria due to the silting up of Brahmaputra. In fact, malaria became endemic in many areas in the province due to water logging and claimed about 4 lakh lives. Dead rivers and malaria, one of the biggest claimants of life in East Bengal, had causal connections.

There was yet another problem which affected the crops and which needed immediate attention. A ‘pernicious weed’ called water hyacinth introduced in Bengal as an ‘ornamental plant’ around 1916 turned into an ‘unmanageable menace’. It covered most of the low lying areas, choking tanks, water ways and ponds all over. It impeded the flow of water, obstructed navigation and irrigation, harboured insects, pests and their louvæ, caused high degree of evaporation and affected fish life through eutrofication. Water hyacinths destroyed lot of A is in many areas, and in Comilla, as told by a MLA, the Aman could not be grown due to these weeds. For instance, an area of about 20,000 acres of paddy lands, stretching about 8 miles from Karanpur village of Akhaura Union to Pattan Union in Comilla district, were reported to be ‘terribly menaced’ by these weeds.
But the elimination of water hyacinths also was linked with the drainage of the water bodies.

The excavation of silted up rivers not only helped carry extra flood water but also made the rivers navigable throughout the year and destroyed malaria in the opinion of one Muslim League MLA. It would have also cleared water hyacinths. The problem created by dead and dying rivers was one that was raised in the Assembly by Members of all groups. They introduced a number of Motions in the March 1948 Session of the Assembly to draw attention of the government to the pitiable condition of the river system in the province. And it was not that the problems had not been perceived at all the levels of government. The Minister of Irrigation emphasised that the ‘Resuscitation of dead and dying rivers’ was connected ‘with the food of the country’, ‘the health of the country’ and in fact, ‘the entire life problem of the country’.

In the discussions that took place in the Provincial Assembly the following were mentioned as reasons for water control:

(i) for protecting crops from recurrent flooding.

(ii) to save people from great loss and hardships caused by erosion of the Padma, Meghna and other rivers.

(iii) for irrigation of agricultural land to increase productivity.

(iv) to make proper drainage to make waterlogged areas cultivable and free from diseases.

(v) to make waterways navigable for economic development.

To achieve these goals, the elected representatives insisted that the Government developed ‘a definite, well thought out, comprehensive’ water control plan for the province including excavation of canals, re-excavation of *khalas*, resuscitation of dead and dying rivers and erection of embankments. Indeed, the expansion of irrigation was perceived to be the panacea for the solution of food problems in the election manifest of the United Front also.
The demand for proper management of water became important after political independence. In a memorandum to the Government on 17 September, 1948, the inhabitants of Churkhai in Sylhet demanded canals in their area. The memorialists stressed the need for drainage of water from the locality which, then suggested, could be done by digging ‘a good system of canals’ joining the Surma. The members of the Hatiya Ramgati Islands’ Association in their memorandum to the Government on 14 November 1952 demanded the government’s ‘immediate attention’ to ‘the old and silted-up canals’ which were in most cases responsible for bad crops in the area and occasional failure of crops - especially in the lowlands of the region. They asked for re-excavation of old canals for drainage of water and excavation of new canals along with embankments along the sea-coast.

On 22 February 1949 a District Agriculture Officer in his memorandum to the Director of Agriculture mentioned the need of the local people for a canal connecting the Brahmaputra and Laksha rivers. The demand for excavation and re-excavations of silted up canals and rivers was regularly made through petitions, memoranda and at times in the form of resolutions in public meetings. In the Workers’ Conference of the Muslim League held at Dhaka on 6 and 7 September 1947, it was resolved that ‘immediate arrangements should be made’ for the water management of the rivers in [East] Pakistan. A Muslim League activist of Bogra demanded water control arrangements for the Brahmaputra and Jamuna and an embankment for the Teesta. In the leaflet titled ‘The Demand of the Poor People’, Maulana Bhashani expressed the immediate need of proper irrigation in the country. He also demanded a ‘comprehensive plan’ for the elimination of water hyacinths. In an appeal to the Chief Secretary some people of Bagura union in Sylkupa police station demanded a canal linking the village Dalitpur with the river Kumar. They felt that the existing canal was inadequate to flush out all the rainwaters. ‘When the public meet us they demand so many things’, told a Muslim League MLA, ‘of this the most modest demand is the re-excavation of small canals’. As the problem of water hyacinths persisted, the Muslim League Worker's
Conference on 23 and 24 June 1949 at Dhaka resolved to organise eradication of this weed from the province. Members repeatedly harped in the Assembly on the menace caused by the weeds to the crops.

However, the government did not sit idle. For the period between 31 March 1948 to 31 March 1949 Rs 8 lakhs were sanctioned for excavation and re-excavation and drainage works for Rajshahi, Pabna, Mymensingh, Barisal, Sylhet and Chittagong. The Minister for Irrigation informed the Assembly of 51 schemes for improving the drainage and sanitary conditions of the country and helping the ‘Grow More Food’ campaign. Six schemes were reported to be in progress in the district of Rangpur; Dinajpur had been allotted three and Kushtia two, while Pabna, Bogra, Jessore, Khulna and Faridpur were allotted one each. Two schemes were in progress in the district of Barisal. Comilla got seven including Gumti Embankment Scheme which was expected to save 50 square miles from devastating floods, five in Noakhali, seven in Chittagong, and five in Dhaka where as Mymensingh and Sylhet were assigned eight and nine schemes respectively. The total area expected to benefit from the schemes was about 263,000 acres of land in the province and 28 lakh mounds of extra food grains was expected from the schemes.

In 1953, Rs 1,000,000 for drainage schemes and Rs 600,000 for special repairs for Gumti Embankment and a further Rs 1,181,000 for a number of Irrigation Development Schemes apart from the giant Karnaphuli and Ganges Kobadak multi-purpose projects was made available.

Obviously, sanctioning money for projects and offering technical solutions to the problem of water control was perceived to be the only task of the government by the nationalist leadership. A large fleet of 36 dredgers from Holland was ordered, delivery of which was expected to have been completed by September 1953. The dredgers were expected to operate in Faridpur, Kushtia, Mymensingh and Dhaka, covering about 5,000 square miles. By 1953, according to the government claim, 126 drainage schemes had been completed and another sixty approved.
The government's policy of controlling water resources came in for severe criticism by many activists both of the Muslim League and other shades. Members of the Opposition alleged that the Government 'lacked any comprehensive policy' for water management. Provash Chandra Lahiry in fact, blamed the government for 'bad planning of the schemes'. Not only did many schemes survive only on the pages of the government Budget; but also some schemes shown in the Budget provision for 1950 had actually been initiated by the colonial government. Abdus Sabur Khan, a prominent Muslim League member complained that many projects announced in 1948 had never been taken up for implementation. In some places projects were left incomplete or suffered from poor execution. Laksmipur embankment was stopped well before it was completed. An Opposition member complained that embankment work started in Noakhali stopped after sporadic execution. The Hangor Khal embankment in Chittagong, completed at the expense of Rs 70,000, broke immediately after it was formally inaugurated by the Minister. In Noakhali Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000 was spent for excavating small canals which silted up again. A District Agriculture Officer reported to the Director of Agriculture on 22 February 1949 that a canal excavated by the District Board had the same fate. Abdul Hakim Mia, a Muslim League MLA, was frustrated the way the Irrigation Department conducted itself. He urged the Minister to see that all undertaking had been completed within a reasonable amount of time and should not have ended in schemes alone. There were complaints and resentment about the inadequacy of funding for the irrigation schemes. According to a Muslim League MLA, 'The sum of Rs 2[1] 3/4 lakhs for the irrigation of the province' was 'most inadequate and insufficient'. Maulana Bhashani complained against corruption in executing irrigation schemes, essentially, in selecting and designing of projects. Even the Governor of the Province drew the attention of the government to the unmitigated corruption of the Irrigation Department. He wrote in his Tour Note that 'It was alleged that the Contractor usually pays 5 per cent of the total amount to the Engineering Staff'. He was also informed that the Overseers and Engineers of the Subdivisional Officers Standard in the Irrigation Branch were rich enough to afford motor cars. The mismanagement and corruption of the Department was also the subject of criticism in the Legislative Assembly.
Some members of the Assembly complained against the official planning of the schemes and disagreed with many such plans. They also believed that some schemes had added to the miseries of the people. River Narod was excavated and was silted up in the following year. Dakatia khal in Raipur was excavated without any consideration of how much excavation would be needed to facilitate the flow of water. The amount of work done in Dhurung khal in Fatikchari was inadequate. In some schemes more land was wasted than reclaimed. In some other cases the schemes were executed at a time when the aus paddy had just sprouted in the field. Members complained that 'many of the projects could be accomplished at a much lesser cost'. Some members were quite angry about the failure of schemes and demanded 'punishment' for the officers involved in executing the projects. In the March session of the Assembly in 1953, Nawajest Ahmed, a Muslim League MLA, complained that even after three years some schemes were still awaiting completion.

The Muslim League government put a lot of emphasised dredging and the executives drew big schemes for water management. In his interview with the Governor, the Superintendent of Irrigation of Rajshahi, clearly expressed his preference for dredging when the former raised the question of water control in Rajshahi. The officers had no faith in local initiative nor in mobilizing the local resources for this 'gigantic task'; whereas most of these undertakings were of collective character and would have required the cooperation of many people to be successfully implemented. The government was criticised by members of the Assembly for being too dependent on dredgers. Some MLAs brought to the notice of the Government the necessity for easy drainage system and for cutting small khals to drain out standing water during the rains. A member from Noakhali insisted that the government take up 'extensive step' for cutting small canals to help drainage along the coastal areas of Sudharam, Companyganj and Lakkhipur police stations. Small schemes were in fact in great demand as they needed small amounts of money and could be executed within a very short time. The Muslim League member
from Manikganj emphasised that small projects of irrigation would have done 'enormous good to the people' of Manikganj by arranging outlet for egress of water.73

Along with the demand for small projects came the demand for popular co-operation in their execution. Some Congress members were quite vocal in their demands for non-official participation in water management schemes. Provash Chandra Lahiry insisted that irrigation projects should have been proposed by a committee composed of 'locally important people' and officers of the Government.74 The demand for committees came also from some Muslim League members, Madar Box being the most insistent among them. He urged the government to issue instruction to local officers immediately to form committees to expedite the execution of the schemes.75 Suggestions for forming committees at district and sub-divisional levels continued to be put forward in the Assembly.76 The need for coordination in the field of water management was obvious by the intensity and scale of the problem that afflicted East Bengal in those days.

In a country where administrative boundaries were quite arbitrary and rarely corresponded to the limits of river systems, appropriate embankments and drainage channels required, considerable co-operation between different landholders, villagers and even district officials.77 Simple solutions like involving 'locally important people' as suggested by some Congress and Muslim League members could perhaps extend the base of local participation to a certain degree but possibly would have failed to generate sufficient enthusiasm among the vast number of people without whose involvement at the level of decision making and participation in these projects, success could not be expected. Given the relationship between the rural power structure and the bureaucracy,78 many projects were privately determined. Many projects were taken up to the mutual advantage of both these groups. Popular consultation prior to taking up such projects was avoided most of the time. Irrigation projects were designed to save the land of influential persons and objections were often raised from purely personal consideration when execution of works had started. Sometimes public officials would not care to save agricultural lands by making slight changes to the projects. The ordinary
people, for whose benefits the projects were undertaken, were not consulted. This attitude received a lot of criticism both from elected representatives and from sections of the public. Petitions, memoranda were regularly sent to the concerned ministry by the affected people. Dhirendra Nath Datta urged the government to hold meetings with the peasants in all unions before taking up the projects. 79

But rural participation in water control, as it was espoused by many political activists of the time, was a project in class collaboration. Without being linked to the question of land distribution to the tillers, the issue of water management remained at the level of rhetoric only. The members of the EBLA, true to their class interest, articulated the claim of the rural well-to-do to have a share in the water resources of the nation. This was what was behind the demand for 'committees'.

On many occasions the ordinary people demanded to be consulted. In a memorandum to the Executive Engineer of Irrigation Department of Bogra Division of the Government the people demanded to be consulted about the proposed project, for they differed with the official decision in respect of the design of the canal. ‘A change in plan', they maintained, 'could have saved a lot of agricultural land'.

However, the antagonism of the bureaucracy toward popular participation or consultation with their representatives remained unabated. Abdul Ahad, a member from Satkhira, told the Assembly that the Government departments were ‘callous and negligent’ towards the grievances of the people. The departmental officers allegedly ‘did not feel like taking’ the opinion of the members in matters of water management schemes. In fact, the officers did not give any importance to any of their suggestions. These were typical complaints by the elected representatives. Mujibur Rahman, a Muslim League MLA, demanded that ‘people’s representatives should be consulted in free Pakistan’. 83

But the government continued to depend on the bureaucracy. Any complaint about problems arising out of too much and too little water was sure to be followed by an official
report, entailing all the administrative paraphernalia that went into making such a report, on the situation. The Governor observed in his Tour Note of Rajshahi on 20 August 1951 that he still thought ‘owing to the difficulty of movement in the country most of the surveying work’ was done by the subordinate staff without any supervision or spot checks by higher qualified officers. Some of the Muslim League members had very little faith in the reports of these officials. Members often asked the Minister if he could visit the areas where problems relating to water control arose for his personal inspection of the grievances of the people. For a canal from Kushiara to Mathura in Sylhet district, to cite one example, the Minister was requested to acquaint himself with the problem personally.

In areas such as Madarsha where a large section of the community was affected every year by floods and other related problems, control of water resources was a strong and popular demand. In a report to the sub-divisional officer of Brahmanbaria, on 12 June 1950, one Ansar commander mentioned the enthusiasm and the spontaneity of the people who ‘lined up for selfless services and co-operation since they found in the project a substantial remedy to their age-long sufferings.’ During his fieldwork in the early 50’s in East Bengal, Aird noticed the enthusiasm and involvement of the people in building a road on their own in a village in Dhaka. ‘Working for the most part after hours by moonlight’, wrote Aird, ‘the villagers undertook to construct the road and on another occasion a school house’. Such instances of collective participation in solving day-to-day problems in the countryside were not rare. Madar Box informed the government of the willingness of the people to offer ‘free labour’ for water control schemes. The Ansar commander mentioned earlier claimed in his petition to the sub-divisional officer that he had encouraged popular participation to clear out water hyacinths, that ‘terribly menaced agricultural land of a large area in Comilla’. The problem and the perceived solution was discussed in a ‘vast public meeting’ and the people were involved in
planning the project also. As a result, 'in the course of five days', claimed the commander, 'the entire work was completed'. The barrage was constructed and the vast tract of land about 20,000 acres was saved from the regular arrivals of the menacing water hyacinths.

Examples may be found of popular involvement in nation-building projects encouraged and initiated by the officials of the government. But such instances were few and far between, and what happened in Madarsha, where about thirty to thirty-five thousand people gathered on their own determined to control the annual flooding in the river Halda, was, in the end, more typical of the situation. The people themselves evolved a solution here that conflicted with the official answer to the problem.

The Halda, the river which created the problem, runs through the hilly region of Fatikchari police station and then separated Hathazari and Raozan police stations and merged with the Karnafulli a little above the Kalurghat bridge in Chittagong. It took a very zig-zag course although forming quite a number of loop-like bends on the way. But the course of the river could be shortened, in fact, by several miles by cutting small canals between two points of the loops. Indeed, it became necessary to do so. The Halda flooded the low lying areas of the region almost regularly causing damage to crops and property of the people. The local people thought that if they could somehow straighten the river course by cutting canals at the big bends, all their miseries caused by flooding would be remedied.

So in the month of September 1948, the people of the affected areas became anxious to cut the canals. After failing in their effort to seek help from the government which did not respond 'on account of paucity of funds', the people by themselves evolved a solution. In February 1948 the people of the affected areas called a conference at the village, Nanupur in Fatikchari police station which the Minister for Local Self Government attended and presided over. The presence of a Muslim League Minister in this locally-organised conference and the name of a local Muslim League activist among the
dead on 29 September 1948 bear testimony to the involvement of local level Muslim League organisation in this effort of the villagers at Madarsha.

But, according to the enquiry report, 'the views of the people' ran counter to the opinion of the experts of the Irrigation Department. The Department relied on the dredgers, the much acclaimed means of water control of the day. Moreover, the experts did not agree to the 'indiscriminate tampering with the natural course of the river'. The problem of flood control, according to the concerned experts, needed to be tackled on a 'scientific basis'. The Sub-divisional Officer of the Halda project in his deposition told that the investigation was going on under his supervision which involved a collection of hydrological data of the Halda river and all its tributaries, which was to be followed by a detailed survey of the main river and its tributaries and an aerial contour survey of the Halda catchment by Pakistan Survey Party. And after the conclusion of this investigation a scheme would have been submitted to the government with suggestions as to how best the flood problem could be tackled.

But the people would not wait that long. Their familiarity with governmental activities, well known for its procrastination in executing such schemes, made them restive. Even a Muslim League MLA failed to understand the delay, when it was so easy to re-excavate the dead and decadent rivers with popular participation. He questioned the Minister, using patriotic hyperbole not altogether unusual, whether the nation would excuse the delay when millions of people were suffering. The main reason for the delay, according to him, was lack of cooperation between the people and the officials in executing the schemes and the latter's deliberate reluctance to seek cooperation of the people. To him the delay was 'quite unnatural' because the people demanded the project.

But the government continued to depend on its officers for reports regarding problems created by rivers and canals. Thus when a MLA suggested that the difficulties created by two loops that had been formed between the villages Gopala and Jagannathpur in Sylhet district be removed, the Minister for Irrigation informed him that the Government could not
The slow nature of bureaucratic response was often at loggerheads with popular demands and initiatives. In the three thanas of south Chittagong, for example, one more flood meant the loss of one more crop with the attendant sufferings.

In the month of September, after the monsoon, the people of the affected areas ‘became anxious’ to cut the canals and announced their intention to do so as widely as possible by the beat of drums. A mobilization took place. The details on the process of this mobilization - which perhaps involved after-work small meetings in the courtyard of affluent peasants, informing each other on the hat days, leaders convincing the sceptics to take part in the project and other usual elements that come into operation in such mobilizations - are lacking. However, we know from the enquiry report by the SDO that the people were mobilized and they in fact succeeded in cutting three small canals at (1) Mekhal, (2) Kottalighona, and (3) Gohira, towards the middle of September. The people then decided to cut the khat at Ramadas tek. It was the biggest bend and the proposed canal was to be a little over one-fourth of a mile long, shortening the river route by about five to six miles.

On 29 September, a large number of people of Chibatali, Gumardan, Dharmapur, Baktapur, North Madarsha, Gurdwara, and other villages of the three thanas assembled at the spot to excavate the canal. The people who assembled were very determined and as a testimony to their determination the SDO quoted a number of people saying that ‘we must cut the khat and save the lives of the people of three Thanas. we do not fear bullets’. The enquiry report laid sufficient emphasis on the resolution of the ‘violent mob’ to defy government order prohibiting the excavation of the canal. ‘A large body of people were engaged’, says the report, ‘in cutting these canals’ and there was ‘no effective opposition from the landowners who were only a few in number’.

But serious opposition came from the district administration. The report is not very clear about the nature of resistance the ‘few landowners’ offered to the project. The officer-in-
The charge of Hathazari police station learnt that opposition to this contemplated project would come from three different sources. The owners of land through which the canals were to be cut, according to the SDO, ‘naturally objected strongly to this course of action’. The next serious objection came from the Fishery Department. And the Irrigation Department was also ‘strongly against such indiscriminate cutting of canals’. The report mentioned that the number of landowners was few, yet the state sided with them. The state not only recognised the inviolability of private property but ruthlessly protected the right of the few along with its own interest. The interest of the community became secondary to the interest of private property and governmental priorities. In fact, whenever the private interests and the community interests were at conflict the state sided with the former. It was mainly from this standpoint that the officials attempted to dissuade the people from cutting all the canals that the latter had decided to go ahead with.

The official document admitted that ‘all persuasive efforts failed and the villagers became adamant’ to carry out the project. As a result section 144 of the Cr.P.C. was imposed and the administration was determined to confront the situation, if necessary with violence. In fact, the latter resorted to violence and opened fire on the people. Amongst the ten who died were Dr Abul Khair Chowdhury, a member of the Union Board and Secretary of the local School Committee and Abdul Jabbar Bali, a local level Muslim League activist. Earlier on the same year on 11 April the police opened fire at the site of the re-excavation of Eochia khal of Satkania in Chittagong district. The conflict between the Irrigation Department and the people arose from a controversy regarding the selection of a site of the proposed excavation scheme.

But the firing at Madarsha was decisive. It successfully stifled the process of self-mobilization by the people in the countryside on the issue of water management. We do not hear of other similar attempts during the Muslim League rule. It is known from the complaints of the members of the Assembly that many such collective efforts as the Hangoar Khal Embankment Committee for instance ‘appealed to the minister many times’
for government help in the project but after failing in their attempt they refrained from proceeding on their own to execute the scheme. Maulana Bhashani referred to Madarsha firing, in one of his speeches, as an act that 'stultified popular initiative' in the country. 99

Thus, the events at Madarsha marked a significant departure from the normal practice of participation by the people in changing and controlling their own environment. The 'apparent paradox', as observed by scholars, that arose from the rural people's reliance upon the government for support and their lack of confidence in the representatives of the state was much less evident in this case.100 Madarsha defied the bureaucratic assumption, shared by many elite political activists, that 'the rural people were passive, fatalistic, uninterested in initiating anything of their own, incapable of undertaking initiative to change their lives', and they needed constant prodding and supervision.101

For all these ills, a Muslim League member blamed the British for depriving the people of their capacity to act for themselves. He also observed that the people approached the government, even after the British had left, 'in good old fashion with prayers and petitions, with deputations and memoranda, urging upon the Government the urgent and imperative necessity of adopting immediate measures - as the Government may deem fit and proper'. The MLA lamented that the people could not think of any other method of redressing their grievances of their distress.102 But Madarsha showed quite a different pattern of political mobilization. The people there, in fact, made use of the changed political circumstance that was inaugurated in August 1947. They invited the Muslim League Minister and apprised him of the magnitude of the problem and resolved to go ahead with their own project bypassing the District Administration. The 'co-operation' which was advocated by the District Administration later in the form of postponing the excavation of the river was perceived by the people as only another version of the old practice of 'implicit subservience' to the directives of the Government in the name of co-operation. In the Government's perception, the people had deliberately disregarded their Union Board President's advice, who implored the participants, indeed being asked by
the District Administration, to maintain the status quo and follow the Government directives.\textsuperscript{103} But Madarsha enacted, if one may say so, a minor rebellion against all that bureaucracy stood for - that is 'implicit submission and unquestioning surrender to powers that ruled'.\textsuperscript{104} The collectivity that expressed itself in a festive atmosphere- 'the people in the mob were beating drums and playing sanais'- was subsequently demobilized by police action. The authoritarian intervention of the magistrate with the police force destroyed an alternative, albeit nascent, model of 'participative efforts' in nation-building.

The Commissioner of Chittagong Division mentioned in his report that 'it was weakness to have allowed these lawless acts as they naturally encouraged the people to believe that they could continue these on much longer scale with impunity'.\textsuperscript{105} In the official perception the aspiration of the people to undertake such tasks 'on much longer scale' was admitted but at the same time the phrase 'impunity' suggested the juridical status of such acts. The commissioner thus reduced the whole practice of the flood affected peoples' attempt at self-mobilization into a law and order problem which only needed to be contained and negated. The will and power of the new state succeeded in doing just this.

\textbf{IV}

Being pressed by the demand of the elected members of the Assembly, the Minister advised them to rely on the District Magistrate for solving the immediate and emergency problems arising out of too much or too little water in the province. He reminded the members of Section 25 of the Embankment Act of the Raj, by which the Collector who was also the District Magistrate had been empowered to take up any scheme of embankment or otherwise. The Minister told the House that he had issued orders to the Collectors concerned to take up some projects and he saw no reason why contrary to the allegations of the members, would have refused to do the works.\textsuperscript{106} The Governor also
suggested that the Collectors should have had no limit, contrary to what was imposed on him during the Raj, to fix the cess for water control projects.\textsuperscript{107} In fact, the District Magistrate was the central figure in deciding everything relating to the project of water control.

While forwarding the executive enquiry report on the police firing at Madarsha by the SDO Sadar 'A' of Chittagong to the Chief Secretary, the Commissioner commented that 'the situation in the initial stages was manhandled and that considering the serious nature of the trouble that was obviously brewing, the District Magistrate himself should have intervened long before the occurrence'. He further commented that orders under Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code were issued too late and could not possibly have been promulgated in all the villages.\textsuperscript{108} The Commissioner's report suggests that there was a clear case of negligence on the part of the District Magistrate. The Commissioner believed that had the District Magistrate intervened earlier, it was possible that the 'tragedy which occurred' might have been averted. The Commissioner pointed his finger towards the District Magistrate but no disciplinary or departmental action against the latter was suggested. Ten people were killed, many more sustained injuries but the District Magistrate, being the protagonist of 'the tragedy', escaped any proceedings by the government.

The tradition of the Raj that made the District Officers unaccountable to the public for their negligence of duty continued throughout the whole period of the Muslim League rule in East Bengal. In his district the officer continued to exercise, as he did during the Raj, wide discretionary powers and was largely independent of his administrative superiors as his tenure in the office was secured.\textsuperscript{109}

The Pakistan bureaucracy, especially the civil service, inherited and further reinforced the 'highly knit' structure of the British bureaucracy in India. 'It was a closed group - almost a caste of its own', because membership was limited to those who had undergone the examination and selection procedures and no one could be appointed to it any other way.
The whole service demonstrated a remarkable ‘esprit de corps’. The CSP District Magistrate of Chittagong ‘being one of the brotherhood’ naturally got the benefit of it. The privileged officers of the Civil Service who held the posts of District Magistrate were politically more powerful in the Provinces than even the elected representatives simply because they were directly appointed by the Central Government and were bound by the directives of the Cabinet Secretariat. To a great extent this explains why the District Magistrate was only politely reminded of his failure to handle the incident at Madarsha as nothing could have happened to him in the particular context of his situation in the service structure of East Bengal during the period of our investigation.

The events at Madarsha underscore, once again, the importance of the District Magistrate, whom we have encountered so many times in the previous chapters, in perpetuating certain traditions of the state. The District Magistrate served as ‘a multi-purpose link’ between people and the government. Indeed, as ‘the local visible representative of the Government’ the District Magistrate controlled and supervised the administration of the districts. Police, jails, education, municipalities, roads, sanitation, dispensaries, the local taxation and the revenue of his district were ‘to him matters of daily concern’. He was also expected to make himself acquainted with every phase of the social life of the people and with the ecology of the country. He should also to have possessed ‘no mean knowledge of agriculture, political economy, and engineering’. This was the District Officer of William Hunter’s time, in the late 19th century India. He grew further in importance and power as the Raj faced more challenges to the power in the 20th century. Within the district, the stimulation of economic development, and the encouragement of local initiative was to be dependent on him as had been observed by Braibanti.

The Commissioner, the head of the Division who was to oversee the activities of the District Officers, rightly emphasised the role of the District Magistrate, who was the most important person in the chain of command that was involved in the incident at Madarsha. We have no document to show why the District Magistrate did not intervene personally,
as expected by the Commissioner, and did not accompany the police force to the scene of occurrence. But a number of propositions can be suggested based mainly on the assessment of the District Officers by the elected representatives and observations of scholars about the nature and method of district administration.

There were complaints of negligence of duties from various quarters against the District Officers. Members of the EBLA complained against the 'habitual negligence of district officers' in attending offices. Madar Box, a MLA, complained irregularities in the district officers' working habits: 'we never found them (district officers) attending offices regularly and people do not know when they attend office and when they leave office'. This irregularity, needless to mention, exposed people to all kinds of difficulties and harassment. The people who came to seek relief from the District Executive often allegedly ended up spending money and time to no purpose. The ways of the District Office influenced official behaviour in the subordinate office also. The Sub-Registrars in the Thana Headquarters, complained a MLA, 'come to the office around 2 to 2.30 p.m. after having a lunch and a siesta'. The Vice-Chairman of Sylhet Local Board and the Vice-President of South Sylhet Sub-Division Muslim League complained to the Minister-in-Charge of Agriculture that 'thousands of poor peasants' went to Barlekha to bid for the beels as was announced by beat of drums, but the SDO did not turn up. A Congress Member of the Assembly reported that officers indulged in alcoholic beverages and gambling at night and remained hung-over during the day and it was in that state that they discharged their official duties. The Prime Minister, in a speech in the Assembly, mentioned that he was pained to learn that some of the District Officers did not attend offices punctually. The officers were doing it, he observed, 'in derogation of their duties and in contravention of the circulars' that were issued to them regularly. He promised the House 'more circulars' to ensure regular attendance in offices by District Officers and their subordinates.

Apart from irregularity in attending offices there were complaints of inefficiency and 'of a certain laxity' in the district administration. One member noticed 'inefficiency
everywhere'. Among various instances of inefficiency by the District Officers, the callousness with which they attended the question of police firing was simply staggering. They seldom applied their minds to this question. In a memorandum written on 14 December 1949, a Deputy Secretary of the Government of East Bengal urged upon the District and Sub-Divisional Officers to make 'an earnest endeavour' to sift evidence and to decide whether the firing was justified or not instead of making the enquiries as 'routine manner'. But this does not seem to have had much effect. 'It has come to the notice of the Government', wrote an Under Secretary on 23 February 1953 'that in many cases where reports were asked for from District Officers, they simply forward[ed] the enquiry reports of subordinate enquiring officers without adding any comment of their own and without scrutinizing the very obvious discrepancies in them'. This practice, apart from being highly irregular, gave the impression to the Government that District Officers did not carefully examine the papers, and tried to 'avoid forming their opinion' and 'giving Government the benefit of it'. The Government insisted that the District Officers gave their own comments and opinion on matters of public interest. Sometimes the District Officers even 'failed to report events of considerable political and administrative importance to the Government in time'.

Again there was 'unreasonable delay in the disposal of matters', complained an MLA. It was reported that a large number of cases arising out of the violation of the Levy Order, 1948, were lying undisposed of. The Secretary to the Government of East Bengal observed that the delay could have been due in some cases to lack of time and not infrequently because District Officers were not interested in them. In the matter of disbursement of compensation money for lands acquired by Government after the partition, the District Officers failed considerably.

A memorandum circulated by the Department of Land Revenue pointed out that 'unfortunately many District Officers did not submit their statements regularly inspite of repeated telegraphic, radiographic, and DO [Demi-Official] reminders. The quarterly returns from a particular district were received only after repeated reminders. Those
returns which were, however, received in time are found not to be in the proper form... The monthly and quarterly report never tallied with each other'. 127 The memorandum went on to say that the Revenue Department had, however, been continuously and seriously urging upon the District Officers to be up and doing to make payment quickly to the people whose lands had already been taken off', but it concluded, 'the success has not been appreciable'. A district-by-district run-down in the memorandum showed that, in certain districts, acquisition proceedings did not progress satisfactorily inspite of the number of circulars that had been issued to the District Magistrate from time-to-time. Those circulars were simply ignored. As a result a sum of Rs 10 lakhs which was allotted as compensation, for lands which were permanently acquired in Chittagong in 1953, was not distributed to owners of the land till early 1958. 128

Essentially the district administration had been an autocratic institution with a strong touch of paternalism. 129 Colonial bureaucratic ethos of privileges, formalism and secrecy continued to constitute the life and work of the district officers of the nationalist government. In the Civil Service of Pakistan the District Magistrate assumed a grandiose style of carrying himself in his official as well as in his private life. Muneer Ahmad, a Pakistani scholar, gave picturesque details of all the typical signs of ostentatious power that marked the District Magistrate seems so powerful and important in the district administration. ‘There would be a huge peon with a big red turban standing in the door’, wrote Ahmad, as was the norm during the Raj. 130 The ‘plentitude and excess’ that marked the lifestyle of the District Officers during the Raj continued uninterrupted while the office was replaced by lesser beings, ‘availing accelerated promotions for almost all offices’. 131 Moreover, most of the district officers were ‘young and inexperienced’. 132 But compared to local standards they lived in luxury. Their ‘bungalows were sturdy structures; their furniture was extensive; their food in plentiful’. 133

This kind of luxury in which the District Magistrates lived occasionally drew attention of higher executives and politicians. In his Tour Note on Kushtia the Governor made a special mention about the District Magistrate’s house: ‘the District Magistrate lives in a
specious house which originally belonged to an Englishman ... There is a very large bedroom in it with a beautiful verandah'. The Governor was so impressed that he recommended that 'on future occasions when high officials come here they can without much inconvenience put up in this room'. Moreover, there was electricity in the house, a privilege not enjoyed by the town. These 'anglicised officers', complained a member of the Parliament from Chittagong, were being encouraged to adopt this life style, 'to live in the District Magistrate's bungalow on the hill top'. People had no easy access to him or to his office. There was a complicated paraphernalia to go through to have an audience with the District Magistrate. Access was much more difficult than writing one's name on a card as was believed by Ahmad. Goodnow observed that CSP officers who were in charge of districts spoke English fluently, were well groomed, wore conservative western clothes and rode to office in a chauffeur-driven automobile. Such was the aura as the post-independence District Magistrate created around himself that a Congress member compared him to 'a little nabab of the olden days'.

In fact, some members of the Assembly were particularly unhappy with the way the District Officers lived and conducted themselves. According to them, they remained in their offices wearing 'coats and pants' and 'neckties' and seldom went to the villages to see things for themselves. Moreover, the isolation was aggravated by their 'aloofness' in their personal relationships with others. As a result District Officers were viewed as 'strangers' with some fear and suspicion. In this circumstance 'contact with villagers was reduced to official dossiers, as observed by von Vorys 'and perhaps at times to nostalgic memories' only.

In deed, to make this small socially isolated group a key element in the implementation of government policies that aimed at consolidating the 'nationhood of the young country' could not but be a self-contradictory exercise. As the local ruler 'his duties included attending to distress caused by floods, famine or even clouds of locusts, waging an anti-flu or grow-more-food campaign, preparation of electoral rolls, control of prices, etc'. The office work was so varied that the District Officer was simply reduced to a 'signing
machine' as many would have believed and it is needless to say that such a concentration of duties in the hand of the District Officer predictably led to inefficiency\textsuperscript{144} in addition to the incompetence that generally marked the administration in the province. All these duties left him practically no time to acquire any first hand knowledge of the conditions prevalent in the districts, though for many District Magistrates this might not have been true. In any case it was often said of the District Officers that they seldom went to the village to see things for themselves.\textsuperscript{145}

To save the situation at Madarsha the district administration hurriedly called a conference of the leading persons of the Unions involved in the project on 29 September in the district headquarters. They tried unsuccessfully to use the Presidents of the Union Boards, their traditional link with the rural world, to influence the villagers. But the latter were not to be dissuaded from undertaking further excavation in the Halda.

The administration in their traditional way of reaching the rural people depended on the President of the Union Board. That was how the history of the local government had evolved during the Raj. Rural and Urban Boards which were introduced in Bengal at the beginning of the twentieth centuries, following the Montague-Chelmsford reform of 1919 envisaged that chairmen of the Boards were to be elected and the bureaucrats were to withdraw from Local Government activity. However, in Bengal where a complete system of village council was achieved the decision of local bodies still remained under the supervision of the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{146}

The Union Boards of East Bengal consisted of eight to ten members elected from some twenty villages containing about 8,000 people. However, as events at Madarsha show, the District Officer would block any action of the Board or the villagers of which he did not approve.\textsuperscript{147} All the presidents of the Union Boards and the members were reportedly
involved in incidents in Madarsha. One of them was even a victim of police firing. The unity of the local Board and the local level Muslim League activists and the people of the villages were expressed through the ‘South Chittagong Flood Control Conference’ that was held before the confrontation. The popular expression of solidarity which involved thirty to thirty-five thousand people of thirteen unions was disregarded by the district officials. The District Officers’ response to popular initiative and mobilization can partly be assessed from their attitude to Local Government which was the grassroot organisation of the representative government in the country. They behaved as if they were allergic to the little authority and power the elected representatives of the Local Government wielded. Monopoly and centralisation of power and authority continued to be the norm for the executrices even after independence from colonial rule.

In fact, some District Magistrates had very low opinions of the elected representatives of the Local Governments not to speak of the political activists and the ‘dumb, mute’ rural masses. The District Magistrate of Kushtia did not conceal his feelings when he told the Governor of the Province that ‘some of the Presidents of the Union Boards’ were ‘no help to the administration’. They were ‘no better than dumb creatures’. The reluctance of the District Magistrates and the Sub-Divisional Officers to relinquish power to the elected representatives of the Local Boards were nowhere so succinctly suggested than it was in a report on Union Boards by a young CSP Sub-Divisional Officer of East Pakistan. In the report he suggested continuation of the traditional practice of the Union Boards which ‘looked to the Sub-Divisional Officer for guidance and could never afford to be indifferent to his instructions’. ‘Unscrupulous politics’ - as politics in the village was allegedly dominated over by ‘touts and troublesome persons’ - after partition was blamed for the decline of the administrative control over the Union Boards. He observed that the ‘Union Boards instead of serving as primary administrative units, became primary political units’ and ‘politics became a part of their daily life’. He upheld in his recommendation the power of the District Magistrate or Commissioner to supersede or suspend Local Boards. ‘The independence of the Union Boards’ which led to establishment of direct relationships with the political leaders, was bitterly resented in the report. The Sub-
Divisional Officer was perhaps less discreet in expressing annoyance at the 'exploitation' of 'visits of Hon'ble Ministers and other leaders in trying to impress the local officers'. The contact with the people had to be achieved, as suggested by him, on grounds of Government policy and 'not according to the whims and satisfaction of Union Board touts'. In the true tradition of the ICS who 'tolerated no outside interference', he suggested continuation of the old relation between the local government and the district administration.

Such attitudes of field executives greatly hampered the attempts of Local Governments in executing rural development involving popular participation. Any gesture of self assertion by the villagers was resented by the field executives. That explained why on many occasions Union Boards were 'eclipsed' from the social polity as disputes regarding elections were not settled on time thus making them inoperative. 'There was abnormal delay', complained a political activist, in disposal of disputes in the Union Boards by the District Magistrates. 'There should be no control and authority', believed the young SDO, 'on the Local Government, except that of District Magistrate and Sub-Divisional Officer subject to the control of Commissioner where necessary'.

Thus the attitude of 'benevolent paternalism' of the field executives often dampened ordinary people's capacity for self-government and self-mobilisation. The casualty was 'participative democracy'; a stifling of the political urge of the people, as happened at Madarsha. However, Madarsha remained a symbol of a process that generated local initiative - even if it meant going a different way from the path chalked out by the bureaucrats - to control the recurrent flooding that visited the peasantry in many areas of East Bengal. Indeed, Madarsha symbolised the ideals of political independence in which self-mobilization of the people was a fundamental right rather than a privilege. The bureaucracy, however, was never at ease with such a conception of political order.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1  Ittehad, on 3 October 1948, headlined that ‘Police opened fire upon thirty-five thousand people in the Madarsha village’. See Ittehad 3 October 1948, Calcutta.


3  Ittehad, 3 October 1948.

4  ibid, 26 June 1949.

5  Judhya Dalil Patra, Vol 1, p.380.

6  Stefan de Vylder and Daniel Asplaund, Contradictions and Distortions in a Rural Economy, A Swedish International Development Authority Report, Copenhagen 1979,from now on SIDA Report, p.126.


8  Abdur Razzaq, Bangladesh: State of the Nation, Dacca, 1981; For an informed discussion on the conditions of the rivers in Bengal based on the information available till the 30’s of this century, See Radhakamal Mukerjee, The Changing Face of Bengal- A Study in Riverine Economy, Calcutta, 1938.


10 This information about the condition of the rivers and canals and other water bodies were provided in the Legislative Assembly by the members of the Session on 29 March 1948. For more see EBLA, progs., Vol. 1 No. 3.

11 Tour Note, Kushtia, 29th July, 1956, p.3.

12 ibid, p.10.


14 Memorandum, Hatiya-Ramgati, p.15.

15 Sen, Chithi, p.91.

16 EBLA, progs., Vol.10, No. 1, p.310.

17 Sen, Chithi, p.202, 25 July

18 Tour Note, Barisal.

19 Secret Report on Situation in East Bengal for second half of June 1953, Home Poll., Bundle, No.147.


21 Ittehad, 3 October, 1948.

22 Abdur Razzaq, Nation, p.9.

23 EBLA, progs., Vol 10, No. 1, p.304.
26 ibid, p.80.
27 Agriculture, B-progs., April 1949, Nos. 100-102.
28 EBLA, progs., Vol. 3, No. 3, p.32.
29 Tour Note, Mymensingh, pp.18-19.
31 East Pakistan Forges Ahead, p.15.
32 EBLA, progs., Vol.10, No. 1, p.98.
33 Tour Note, Mymensingh, p.,15.
35 ibid, Vol. 1, No. 3, p.31.
36 ibid, p.32.
41 Home Police, B-progs.,August, 1950, No. 299.
42 EBLA, progs., Vol. 7, No. 7, p.60.
44 ibid, Vol. 1, No. 3; Vol. 3, No. 3; and Vol.10, No. 1.
46 Agriculture, B-progs., April, 1949,Nos.100-2.
47 Memorandum,Hatiya-Ramgati.
48 Agriculture, B-progs., April 1949, No. 191-192.
49 Umar,(ed.), *Dalil*, p.28.
50 ibid,p.35.
52 EBLA,progs., Vol. 4, No. 7, p.79.
56 ibid, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.75.
57 For details of the cost and scale of Karnaphuli Hydro Electric Project in Chittagong and the Ganges Kobadak in Kushtia see EBLA, Vol.10, No. 1, p.306.
58 ibid, Vol.1, No. 3, p.29.
59 ibid, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.82.
60 ibid, Vol.10, No. 1, p.309.
61 ibid, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.86.
63 ibid, Vol. 4, No. 7, p.98.
64 Ittehad, 26 June, 1949.
65 Tour Note, Barisal, p.10.
66 EBLA, progs., Vol. 1, No. 3, p.29.
67 ibid, Vol.10, No. 1, p.311.
68 ibid., p.311.
69 ibid, p.313.
71 Tour Note, Rajshahi, p.3.
72 EBLA, progs., Vol.10, No. 1, p.309.
73 ibid, Vol. 4, No. 7, p.122.
75 ibid, Vol. 4, No. 7, p.79.
77 SIDA Report, p.129.
78 This point has been developed in Chapter 3, Section V of my thesis.
81 Home Poll., B-Progs., April 1956, Nos. 495-500.
82 EBLA, progs., Vol. 1, No. 3, p.35.
Examples of such involvement of public persons are not rare in East Bengal. For more on these see Amit Bhaduri and Anisur Rahman (eds.) *Studies in Rural Participation*, Delhi, 1982, pp. 90-120.

*Ittehad*, 3 October 1948, Calcutta.

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110 Hamza Alavi, 'Class and State', in Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (eds), Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship, pp.72-73.


112 In East Bengal the following posts have been earmarked for the CSP Officers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>No.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member, Board of Revenue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioners</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretaries</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Secretaries</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Secretaries</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Transport Commissioner</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>District Magistrates</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional District Magistrates</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Judges</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional District Judges</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Land Records and Survey</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Private Secretary to Governor</td>
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<td>Commissioner of Excise and Taxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registrar of Co-operative Societies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrar, High Court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judges, High Court</td>
<td>2</td>
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113 A Hussain, Elite Politics in an Ideological State, The Case of Pakistan, Dawson, 1978, p.68. This point has been made by Sayeed also, see ibid, p.139.

114 Aslam, Deputy Commissioner, p.16.

115 Sayeed, 'Political Role', p.140.


118 EBLA, progs., Vol. 10, No. 1, p.346.

119 Agriculture, Co-operative and Relief, B-progs., September 1953, Nos. 461-472.

120 EBLA, progs., Vol. 10, No. 1, p.112.

121 ibid, p.18.


123 Home Political, B-progs, August 1953, No. 279.

124 Home Political Department, Memo No. 8281 (3) Political.
ibid. In fact, delay in payment of compensation for land acquisition was regularly complained by the affected. On one such issue four MLAs from different constituencies of Chittagong resigned from the Parliamentary party. They resented the delay and the amount of the compensation fixed by the District Administration for the land acquisition in Muradpur in Chittagong district. For more see, Tour Note, Chittagong.

Ralph Braibanti, Research, p.156.

Muneer Ahmad, The Civil Servant in Pakistan, Karachi, 1964, p.6

Kamruddin Ahmad, Social History, p.93.

Address of the Prime Minister in the Annual Conference of the Commissioners of Divisions and Heads of Departments, Home Political, Bundle No. 64.

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Tour Note, Kushtia, 29 July 1951, pp.9-10.

Extract from Speeches of Maulavi Farid Ahmad before the National Assembly of Pakistan, February 15, 1957, taken from Ralph Braibanti's Research, Appendix 4.

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Lahiry, India Partitioned, p.21, also Firoz Khan Noon, From Memory, Lahore, 1966, p.240.


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149 Report by Syed Munir Hussain, CSP, Sub-Divisional Officer, Brahmanbaria, Home Poll., Bundle, No.152.

150 ibid., p.62.


152 Muneer Ahmad, *Civil Servant*, p.103.