

1952 and Nazimuddin's role

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It was indeed tragic for East Pakistan that it did not get either Fazlul Huq or Suhrawardy as its first Chief Minister. Fazlul Huq was out ab initio as he belonged to the Sramik Praja Party and not Muslim League. Neither Jinnah nor Liaqat liked Suhrawardy. Jinnah's protégé Nazimuddin had hardly any links with Calcutta and being the Nawab his base was in Dhaka. With Nazimuddin were his brother Khwaja Shahabuddin, Fazlur Rahman, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, Abdus Salam, Gias Uddin Pathan, Ibrahim Khan, Nurul Huq Chowdhury, Habibullah Bahar whereas Suhrawardy was supported by Abul Hashem, Mohammad Ali, Nawabzada Hassan Ali, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Maulana Ragib Ahsan, Kamruddin Ahmed, Shamsul Huq, Sheikh Mujib, Dr. M.A. Malik etc. Jinnah supported the Nazimuddin group. Most of the MLAs threw in their lot with Nazimuddin for the upcoming leadership election hoping for dole out of loaves and fishes. The majority of the Muslim MLAs was so busy looking at Dhaka that they ignored the machinations of the Congress to completely truncate East Pakistan in the conspiracy of Mountbatten and Radcliffe. A deep study of the events of July and August 1947 would surely reveal that hardly any attention was paid to the partition of Bengal either by the Central Muslim League or by the Provincial Muslim League.

Jinnah had assured Suhrawardy that there would be no election for the leadership of East Pakistan Parliamentary Leadership just as there was no such election for the West Pakistan Parliament. Suhrawardy was quite busy in keeping communal harmony in Bengal and also making effort to get a just share of the territory for East Pakistan as such he did not devote much time in wooing support for party leadership. Liaqat announced that August 5, 1947 would be the date when election would be held for East Pakistan Parliamentary Leadership. Suhrawardy's trusted colleague Abul Hashem did not participate in the lobbying. Under the Chairmanship of Central Muslim Leader Chundrigarh Nazimuddin won the contest against Suhrawardy by 75 to 39 votes. This would prove quite tragic for East Pakistan as subsequent events show.

It may be recalled that the Lahore Resolution, March 1940 envisaged 'North Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.' In April 1946, Jinnah had this resolution amended to 'That the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North East be constituted into one sovereign independence state . . .'. In retrospect you see by this resolution the seeds of conflict and disharmony was sown. Actually, Bangladesh was created on 14 August 1947 and not on 16 December 1971. The period in between was an aberration. One can only surmise how events would have turned out if the Lahore Resolution had remained intact.

The movement to make Urdu the national language had started immediately after the independence in August 1947. The Bangla Language Movement is a monumental subject and just a few major events will be highlighted.

Conflict between the two wings of Pakistan surfaced before the Independence Day on 14 August 1947. In July 1947, Ziauddin Ahmad, Vice Chancellor of Aligarh University made a statement to the effect that Hindi should be the National Language of India and Urdu the National Language of Pakistan. To Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah must go the credit of first suggesting Bangla as the National Language of Pakistan. In a rejoinder to Ziauddin Ahmad's statement, Dr. Shahidullah in an article published in July 1947 in the Daily Azad stated 'To follow the stipulated Hindi of the Congress's India, Pakistan's sole choice of state language Urdu will be a retrograde step . . . the only argument against English is that it is not the mother tongue of any province. The same logic applies to Urdu as it is not the mother tongue of any area comprising Pakistan.'

A few students and teachers took the initiative to form the Tamaddun Majlis on the 2 September 1947. They published a booklet titled 'State Language of Pakistan Bangla or Urdu?' A few extracts from the booklet. This booklet contained a proposal 'A) Bangla will be (i) medium of instruction in East Pakistan, (ii) court language in East Pakistan, (iii) official language of East Pakistan. B) The language of the central government of Pakistan will be both Urdu and Bangla. C) (i) The first language of East Pakistan will be Bangla which 100% of the

students will have to learn, (ii) Urdu will be second language, (iii) English will be third language . . .'

An educational conference was held in Karachi in which a unanimous resolution was passed stating that Urdu shall be the sole state language of Pakistan. The participants from East Pakistan included Ministers Habibullah Bahar and Abdul Hamid. This decision of the education conference was severely opposed by the students and teachers of Dhaka University in a meeting held on 6 December 1947 and subsequently there was lot of opposition among the students and the public about the statements made by Fazlur Rahman.

On 5 December 1947 the Bengal Provincial Muslim League working committee had its last meeting under the chairmanship of Maulana Akram Khan where a resolution was passed that Urdu shall not be the official language of East Pakistan.

The first session of the Pakistan Legislative Assembly was held on February 23, 1948. In that session Dhirendranath Dutta an MLA from East Pakistan moved a resolution demanding Bangla as one of the languages besides Urdu and English to be used

demonstrators outside the Assembly building. Opposition party members in the Assembly compelled Nazimuddin to speak about the agreement. Nazimuddin placed the report of his talks with the Action Committee at the Assembly. After further questions by the members of the Assembly Nazimuddin read out the terms of the agreement. Meanwhile, the demonstration outside Assembly continued unabated and the police were unable to control the situation.

Nazimuddin thought it prudent to request General Ayub Khan, the General Officer Commanding to immediately come for the protection of the Government. The Assembly was in a riotous mood. Even after the representatives of demonstrators meeting Nazimuddin the agitation had not died down. Ayub Khan met Nazimuddin in his chamber and advised him to leave at once for his residence after postponing the Assembly. After this Ayub Khan ordered the Chief Minister's car to be brought behind the Assembly building and Ayub personally escorted Nazimuddin through the old kitchen of Jagannath Hall to the car. After sending the PM Ayub came to the front of

English.

ii. The medium of education in East Bengal was to be Bangla or as applicable to the mother tongue of the majority of students as the respective institution.

There was strong objection and tumult in the Assembly as Nazimuddin expressed such proposals but referring to Jinnah's speech Nazimuddin refused to withdraw his proposal. Although the students' movement lulled for a short while after the language movement in 1948 other movements on economic, political and cultural problems began to be organized.

Suhrawardy, a strong rival of Nazimuddin arrived in Dhaka on 3 June 1948 to establish communal harmony and to check the exodus of the minority community to India. Considering him as a rival Nazimuddin had him interned and informed him that he would be released if he agreed to leave Dhaka immediately. Suhrawardy agreed to do so and after release left at once for Calcutta. This event seems mind boggling in retrospect.

The move to write Bangla in the Arabic script had started at that time at the initiative of Central Education Minister Fazlur

About Nazimuddin's speech Nurul Amin said ' . . . Written in the Urdu script this Bangla speech was brought by Nazimuddin from Karachi. Before the speech I had no idea about the contents. I was sitting next to Mohon Mian and I said to him that this was a dormant issue and Nazimuddin has converted into a live issue.' The Chief Secretary Aziz Ahmed who was the representative of Karachi in Dhaka stated "I knew nothing about this matter but afterwards when Nazimuddin asked me if I had seen the script of the speech before. When I said 'no', he said that he had instructed his private secretary to show it to him. Had I seen it I would have definitely advised him not to make this speech."

The events of 21 February are too well known to recount here. A general strike was observed. At noon a meeting was held in the campus of Dhaka University. Students decided to defy the official ban imposed by Nurul Amin's administration and processions were taken out to stage a demonstration in front of the Provincial Assembly. Police started lobbying tear gas shells at the students and the students retaliated with brick bats. The ensuing riots spread to the



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

at the Legislative Assembly. The resolution came under severe criticism by the Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. Nazimuddin, Chief Minister of East Pakistan opposed the proposal and said that the majority of the East Pakistan MLAs agreed that only Urdu should be made as state language.

Students expressed their resentments through strikes and rallies. The National Language Action Committee demanded Bangla to be made only state language of Pakistan and passed a resolution to call a province wide strike on March 11, 1948 in protest against the decision of the Pakistan Legislative Assembly. On the 11 March while picketing in front of the secretariat several protesters including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were arrested and sent for detention in the Dhaka Central Jail. There was a strong protest in front of residence of Chief Minister Nazimuddin. The Chief Minister agreed to meet members of the National Language Action Committee. There was an 8 point agreement signed between the action committee and Nazimuddin which included the release of all arrested in connection with the language movement and the granting of Bangla as equal status with Urdu to be moved in the Pakistan National Assembly.

That afternoon after the general meeting of the students, they held a rally in front of the Legislative Assembly. The students were unaware of the agreement and as the students became agitated Abul Kashem informed them about the signed agreement. But the students were not happy and expressed their dissatisfaction with the terms. They demanded to know about the agreement from Nazimuddin himself. There were a large number of students and other

the Assembly building and told the students "the bird has flown" and the announcement was greeted with a roar of laughter and the atmosphere became less tense.

Governor General Mohammad Ali Jinnah visited Dhaka on the 19 March 1948. It was just to ensure that there was no demonstration by the students of the Dhaka University or by the people of the city during his presence Nazimuddin made his hasty acceptance of the conditions set by the action committee. Besides, he had hoped that on the language issue Jinnah would definitely speak in favour of Urdu. That would weaken the language movement. Jinnah reached Dhaka in the afternoon of March 19, 1948. Thousands of people assembled at the airport to welcome him in several thousands gathered by the roadside to have a glimpse of him.

He made several speeches in Dhaka and Chittagong but the most relevant one was what Jinnah delivered at the Dhaka University convocation. In the speech he stated 'The State Language, therefore, must obviously be Urdu . . .'. There were loud protests from the students during his speech. It is frequently quoted by many that Jinnah had stated 'Urdu and Urdu alone would be the State Language of Pakistan.' Having examined text of all the speeches made by Jinnah nowhere could this repetition be located. Obviously it is a misquote.

After Jinnah had left the East Bengal Legislative Assembly was in session again on April 6, 1948. On this day Nazimuddin broke off the conditions he had agreed upon earlier and advanced the following proposals:

i. In East Bengal Bengali was to be accepted as the official language in place of

Rahman. Fazlur Rahman elaborated on this matter on 7th February 1949 at the education conference held in Peshawar.

After the death of Jinnah on 11 September 1948, Nazimuddin was appointed Governor General of Pakistan and Nurul Amin the Chief Minister of East Bengal. Liaqat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan was assassinated on October 16, 1951 and was succeeded by Nazimuddin.

Nazimuddin came to Dhaka at the end of January 1952 as Prime Minister and spoke in a public meeting at the Paltan Maidan. It was presided over by Chief Minister Nurul Amin and beside him on the dais was seated Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohon Mian). In his speech Nazimuddin quoted from the speech made by Jinnah at a public meeting in Dhaka on the 21 March 1948 wherein Jinnah clearly stated ' . . . But let me make it very clear to you that the State Language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. . . .'. Apart from Urdu Nazimuddin also stated that at the initiative of the government Bangla will be written in Arabic script. Already under the supervision of the government in 21 centres Bangla is being written in Arabic script. Apart from that 'the Arabic script is also being tried out in countless centres opened by the general people.'

Nazimuddin made his speech in Bangla but as he was not proficient enough in the language the speech was written for him in Urdu. Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohon Mian) stated afterwards that 'We had absolutely no previous knowledge of what Nazimuddin was going to say in his Paltan speech and both Nurul Amin and I after hearing the speech were absolutely stupefied.'

nearby campuses of the Medical and Engineering Colleges. In the afternoon police open fired in front of the Medical College hostel killing five persons, Salauddin, Jabbar, Barkat, Rafiq and Salam. There was a spontaneous uprising throughout East Bengal. The government gave full authority to the police and the military to bring the situation in Dhaka back to normal within 48 hours. During these 48 hours police arrested almost all the student and political leaders associated with the language movement.

The language movement added a new dimension to politics in Pakistan. It left a deep impression on the minds of the younger generation of Bengalis and imbued them with the spirit of Bengali nationalism.

POSTSCRIPT

May 7, 1954: The Pakistan Government recognises Bangla as a State Language (during the Prime Ministership of Mohammad Ali Bogra.

February 26, 1956: The Constituent Assembly passes the first constituent of Pakistan recognising Bangla as a State Language.

March 23, 1956: The first constitution of Pakistan comes into effect (during the Prime Ministership of Chaudhry Mohammad Ali).

The result of Nazimuddin speech were the events leading up to 21 February 1952 which has been immortalised as Language Martyrs Day. UNESCO adopted a resolution on 17 November 1999 proclaiming 21 February as International Mother Language Day.

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