

UNIT 6 – UPSC - Mutiny in Royal Indian Navy

India's History : Modern India : Mutiny in Royal Indian Navy; Cabinet Mission's plan announced; Muslim League decides to participate in the Interim Government; Interim Government formed; Constituent Assembly's first meeting : 1946

The Indian Navy Mutiny



On the 21st of February 1946, mutiny broke out on board the Royal Indian Navy sloop, H.M.I.S. Hindustan. The 2nd Battalion of the Black watch was called from their barracks in Karachi to deal with this mutiny on Manora Island. Several ratings from shore establishments had taken over the Hindustan and refused to leave and began firing on anyone who tried to board the ship. At midnight, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to proceed to Manora as trouble was expected from the Indian naval ratings who had taken over the shore establishments H M I S Bahadur, Chamak and Himalaya and from the Royal Naval AA School on the island. The Battalion was ferried silently across in launches and landing craft. D company was the first across, and they immediately proceeded to the southern end of the island to Chamak. The remainder of the Battalion stayed at the southern end of the Island. Next morning the astonished residents woke to find British soldiers had once again secured the island. No one had heard them arrive in the night.



The first priority was to deal with the Indian naval ratings on board the Hindustan that was armed with 4-in. guns. During the morning three guns (caliber unknown) from the Royal Artillery C. Troop arrived on the island. The Royal Artillery positioned the battery within point blank range of the Hindustan on the dockside. An ultimatum was delivered to the mutineers aboard Hindustan, stating that if they did not the leave the ship and put down their weapons by a 10:30 a.m. They would have to face the consequences. The deadline came and went and there was no message from the ship or any movement. Orders were given to open fire at 10:33 a.m. The RAs first round was on target. On board the Hindustan the Indian naval ratings began to return gunfire and several shells whistled over the Royal Artillery guns, fortunately without hitting anyone. Most of the shells fired by the Indian ratings went harmlessly overhead and fell on Karachi itself. They had not been primed so there were no civilian casualties. At 10:51 a.m. a white flag suddenly appeared from a hatch aboard the Hindustan. British naval personnel boarded the ship to remove casualties and the remainder of the mutinous crew. Extensive damage had been done to Hindustan's superstructure and there were many casualties among the Indian sailors. These young Indian ratings, many of them still in their teens, had paid a heavy price for allowing them to be misguided into mutiny.

Soon more trouble broke out on the Bahadur. Several Indian naval officers were thrown off the ship by ratings and the situation became serious. Soon after midday the 2nd Battalion was ordered to storm Bahadur, and then the other establishments on the island. This was achieved and all Indian naval personnel returned to their barracks. By the evening D company was in possession of the A A school and Chamak, B company had taken the Himalaya, while the rest of the Battalion had secured Bahadur. The mutiny was over.

The 1946 Cabinet Mission



When the Cabinet mission arrived in Delhi in March, it had three members, Cripps, A.V. Alexander and Pethick-Lawrence. They would work in close conjunction with the Viceroy who was assured that it was not intended that he should be treated as a lay figure.

The Mission's task was to try to bring the leaders of the principle Indian political parties to agreement on two matters: The method of framing a constitution for a self-

governing, independent India The setting up of a new Executive Council or interim government that would hold office while the constitution was being hammered out.

The main problem was, as it always had been, the Hindu-Muslim partition. Congress wanted a unified India and the Muslim League wanted a separate, independent Pakistan. The Mission set to work at once, spending two weeks in lengthy discussions with representatives of all the principal political parties, the Indian States, the Sikhs, Scheduled Castes and other communities, and with Gandhi and several other prominent individuals. But at the end of these discussions there was still no prospect of an agreement between the parties and the mission decided to put forward the two possible solutions for consideration. A truncated Pakistan, which Wavell had wanted to tell Jinnah was all he would get if he kept insisting on a sovereign Pakistan.

A loose federation with a three-tier constitution - provinces, group of provinces and an all-India union embracing both British India and the Indian States, which Cripps had devised with the help of two Indian officials, V.P. Menon and Sir B.N. Rau. The Union would be limited to three subjects, foreign affairs, defence and communications, with powers to raise funds for all three; all other subjects would vest in the provinces, but the provinces would be free to form groups, with their own executives and legislatures, that would deal with such subjects as the provinces within the group might assign them. In this way the Provinces that Jinnah claimed for Pakistan could form Groups or sub-federations and enjoy a large measure of autonomy thus approximating to Pakistan.

After some demur, Jinnah agreed to the federation plan, Congress also reluctantly agreeing and both parties were invited to send representatives to discuss it with the Mission at Simla. A week of discussions led to no agreement and the Mission decided to refurbish the plan to meet the views of the parties as far as possible that had been expressed at Simla. The final statement of the plan was published on May 16th.

The statement rejected decisively a wholly sovereign Pakistan of the larger or the smaller truncated variety. It went on to commend the plan for an all-India Union, with a three-tier constitution and went on to indicate the method how it should be brought about. A Constituent Assembly was to be elected by members of the Provincial Legislatures and after a preliminary full meeting, at which an advisory committee would be set up on fundamental rights, minorities and tribal areas, would divide into three Sections - Section A consisting of the representatives of the six Hindu-majority provinces; Section B of the representatives of the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province and Sind; and Section C of the representatives of Bengal and Assam. These sections would draw up constitutions for the provinces included in them and would also decide whether a group should be formed and, if so, with what subjects; but a province would have the option to opt out of a group by a vote of its legislature after the new constitutional arrangements had come into operation. Finally the Constituent Assembly was to meet again as a whole, this time along with representatives of the Indian States in appropriate numbers to settle the Union Constitution.

The Statement was well received and was widely accepted as clear evidence of the British Government's genuine desire to bring British rule in India to a peaceful end. Gandhi pronounced it 'the best document the British Government could have

produced in the circumstances.' Jinnah was less enthusiastic, but both sides gave it consideration. Congress wanted to interpret the statement as meaning that provinces could choose whether or not to belong to the section in which they had been placed, but the Mission countered this with a further Statement on 25th May, in that the provinces in each section were an essential feature of the scheme.

Wavell and the mission wrote to the Indian states rulers, warning them that when Britain quit India it would cease to exercise the powers or shoulder the obligations of paramountcy. They would not in any circumstances transfer paramountcy to an Indian Government, but the ending of the relationship would leave a void, and it was suggested, would be best filled by entering into a federal relationship with the new Government of India as units in the proposed Union. They would retain their internal sovereignty and all their powers save those ceded to the Union in connection with the three subjects of foreign affairs, defence and communications. The Princes were reasonably content with this.

While the League and Congress were giving thought to the Statement of May 16th, the Mission went about the formation of a new executive council or interim government, but they also prepared and sent home a breakdown plan. The plan followed the premise that one of the main parties would reject the proposals. If the Muslim League rejected the proposals, Congress would go ahead on the premise that parts of the country not willing would be left out of the union. If Congress dismissed the proposals, it might be followed by a threat to seize power in another 'Quit India' movement. Wavell proposed that the British should then withdraw from the six Hindu-majority provinces and allow them to become entirely independent but retain control of the other provinces until fresh arrangements acceptable to their population could be made.

However, he opened discussion regarding the formation of an interim government, which the Mission decided should be initiated by Wavell, with the party leaders while they and the mission were still in Simla. The members of the interim government, except the Viceroy, would all be Indian and it would be, as far as possible, like a dominion government, but the Viceroy, in light of the existing constitution, would still retain overriding powers. Congress accepted these stipulations with a bad grace, but pleased Jinnah and the League who were happy to accept any check to Congress dominance of the interim government.

Discussions were still in progress when, on 6th June, the Muslim League voted to accept the constitutional proposals. The acceptance was said to be 'in the hope that it would ultimately result in the establishment of a complete sovereign Pakistan'. The Congress working committee delayed giving their verdict, and further discussions about the interim government failed to bring about agreement as the League wanted parity with Congress and the exclusive right to nominate all Muslim members, both of which had been rejected by Congress.

The Mission, who was impatient to end their work and head home, decided to put forward compromise proposals. On June 16th, the Viceroy announced that discussion with the parties would not be further prolonged and that he was issuing invitations to fourteen named persons to serve as members of an interim government, Six were

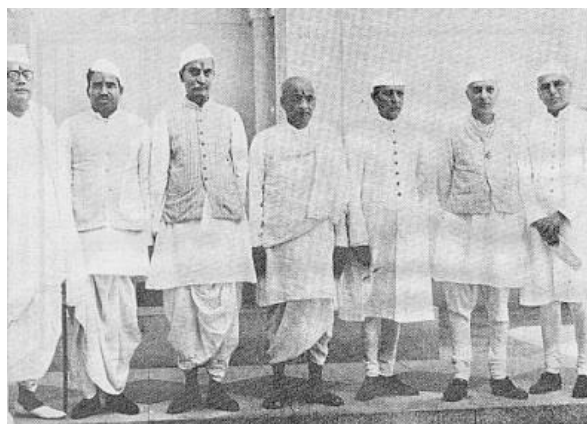
Hindu members of Congress including one member of the Scheduled castes, five were members of the Muslim League, and the remaining three a Sikh, a Parsee and an Indian Christian. The message also included a statement that stated:

'In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in setting up a coalition government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an interim government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the Statement of May 16th.'

With the Muslim League ready to accept, Congress appeared to be on the verge of accepting until Gandhi intervened. Gandhi took his stand on principle, regardless of practical consequences. He said that acquiescence by Congress in the non-inclusion of a Congress Muslim in the interim government would be, he argued, the sacrifice of a vital principle to which Congress, as a national party with a Muslim president, could never agree at any time or place or in any circumstances. They rejected the interim government proposals. The Mission took the statement of June 16th to mean that Congress had agreed with the May 16th Statement that it was no longer possible to proceed with the formation of an interim government. Jinnah was infuriated by this interpretation, and now felt outwitted by Congress and tricked by Cripps. He declared the Mission's interpretation had been dishonestly 'concocted by the legalistic talents of the Cabinet Mission and charged the Mission and the Viceroy with breach of faith. He also stated that the Congress acceptance of the May 16th Statement had not been genuine.

Wavell agreed with this view, but the mission wanted to try and salvage something and in a valedictory statement they expressed their gladness that 'Constitution-making can now proceed with the two major parties and their regret at the failure to form an interim coalition government, but said that after the elections to the Constituent Assembly had finished, the Viceroy would make fresh efforts to bring one into being. Meanwhile, a temporary caretaker government would be set up. The mission left bearing a note from Wavell that the government should be prepared for a crisis in India and must therefore have a breakdown policy in readiness.

The Interim Government



Wavell wrote identical letters to Nehru and Jinnah on July 22, 1946 asking them whether the Congress and the Muslim League would be prepared to enter an interim

government on the basis that six members (including one Scheduled Caste representative) would be nominated by the Congress and five by the Muslim League. The Viceroy would nominate three representatives of the minorities. Jinnah replied that the proposal was not acceptable to the Muslim League because it destroyed the principle of parity. At Nehru's invitation, he and Jinnah conferred together on August 15 but could not come to an agreement on the question of the Congress joining the interim government.

The Working Committee of the Muslim League had decided in the meantime that Friday 16 August, 1946 would be marked as the 'Direct Action Day'. There was serious trouble in Calcutta and some rioting in Sylhet on that day. The casualty figures in Calcutta during the period of 16-19 August were 4,000 dead and 10,000 injured. In his letter to Pethick-Lawrence, Wavell had reported that appreciably more Muslims than Hindus had been killed. The "Great Calcutta Killing" marked the start of the bloodiest phase of the "war of succession" between the Hindus and the Muslims and it became increasingly difficult for the British to retain control. Now, they had to cope with the Congress civil disobedience movement as well as furious Muslims that had also come out in the streets in thousands.

The negotiations with the League reached a deadlock and the Viceroy decided to form an interim government with the Congress alone, leaving the door open for the League to come in later. A communiqué was issued on August 24, which announced that the existing members of the Governor General's Executive Council had resigned and that on their places new persons had been appointed. It was stated that the interim government would be installed on September 2.

Jinnah declared two days later that the Viceroy had struck a severe blow to Indian Muslims and had added insult to injury by nominating three Muslims who did not command the confidence of Muslims of India. He reiterated that the only solution to Indian problem was the division of India into Pakistan and Hindustan. The formation of an interim government consisting only of the Congress nominees added further fuel to the communal fire. The Muslims regarded the formation of the interim government as an unconditional surrender of power to the Hindus, and feared that the Governor General would be unable to prevent the Hindus from using their newly acquired power of suppressing Muslims all over India.

After the Congress had taken the reins at the Center on September 2, Jinnah faced a desperate situation. The armed forces were predominantly Hindu and Sikh and the Indian members of the other services were also predominantly Hindu. The British were preparing to concede independence to India if they withdrew the Congress was to be in undisputed control, the Congress was to be free to deal with the Muslims as it wished. Wavell too, felt unhappy at the purely Congress interim government. He genuinely desired a Hindu-Muslim settlement and united India, and had worked hard for that end. Wavell pleaded with Nehru and Gandhi, in separate interviews, that it would help him to persuade Jinnah to cooperate if they could give him an assurance that the Congress would not insist on nominating a Nationalist Muslim. Both of them refused to give way on that issue. Wavell informed Jinnah two days later that he had not succeeded in persuading the Congress leaders to make a gesture by not appointing a Nationalist Muslim. Jinnah realized that the Congress would not give up

the right to nominate a Nationalist Muslim and that he would have to accept the position if he did not wish to leave the interim government solely in the hands of the Congress. On October 13, he wrote to Wavell that, though the Muslim League did not agree with much that had happened, "in the interests of the Muslims and other communities it will be fatal to leave the entire field of administration of the Central Government in the hands of the Congress". The League had therefore decided to nominate five members for the interim government. On October 15, he gave the Viceroy the following five names:

Liaquat Ali Khan, I.I Chundrigar, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Jogindar Nath Mandal. The last name was a Scheduled Caste Hindu and was obviously a tit-for-tat for the Congress insistence upon including a Nationalist Muslim in its own quota.

Interim Government	
External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations	Jawaharlal Nehru
Defence	Baldev Singh
Home (including Information and Broadcasting)	Vallabhbhai Patel
Finance	Liaquat Ali Khan
Posts and Air	Abdur Rab Nishtar
Food and Agriculture	Rajendra Parsad
Labor	Rajivram Ram
Transport and Railways	M.Asaf Ali
Industries and Supplies	John Matthai
Education and Arts	C. Rajgopalacharia
Works, Mines and Power	C.H. Babha
Commerce	I.I. Chundrigar
Law	Jogindar Nath Mandal
Health	Ghazanfar Ali Khan