

CABINET MISSION PLAN (1946)

The struggle for freedom entered a decisive phase in the year 1945-1946. All attempts by the British government to establish peace between the Congress and the Muslim League had failed. The result of the general elections held in 1945-1946 served to underline the urgency to find a solution to the political deadlock, the result of non-cooperation between the two major parties. To end this, the British government sent a special mission of cabinet ministers to India.

The British Prime Minister, Lord Attlee, made a declaration on 15 March 1946, that a Cabinet Mission would visit India to make recommendations regarding constitutional reforms to be introduced in India. The mission envisaged the establishment of a Constituent Assembly to frame the Constitution as well as an interim government. The purpose of the mission could be summed up as follows:

1. Preparatory discussions with the elected representatives of British India and the Indian states to secure agreement as to the method of framing the constitution.
2. Setting up of a constitution body.
3. Setting up an Executive Council with the support of the main Indian parties.

It consisted of Lord Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty. The Mission arrived on 24

March 1946. After extensive discussions with the Congress and the Muslim League, the Cabinet Mission put forward its own proposal on 16 May 1946. The main points of the plan were as follows;

1. There would be a union of India which will include both the British India as well as the Indian states and in which the Union would deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications. The union would involve an Executive and a Legislature.
2. All residuary powers would belong to the provinces.
3. A province would be divided into three sections. The provinces could opt out of any group after the first general election. (a) Northwest frontier provinces, Baluchistan and Punjab; (b) Bengal and Assam and (c) the other states.
4. There would also be an interim government having the support of the major political parties.
5. The Pakistan demand was rejected.
6. A federal constitution would be formed, and a separate electorate considered.

The Congress accepted the plan on 24 May 1946, though it rejected the interim set up. The Muslim League accepted the plan on 6 June 1946. The Viceroy should now have invited the Muslim League to form the government as it had accepted the interim set up; but he did not do so.

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