

CABINET MISSION PLAN, 1946

Cabinet Mission was a high-powered mission sent in February 1946 to India by the Atlee Government (British Prime Minister.) The mission had three British cabinet members – Pethick Lawrence, Stafford Cripps, & and A.V. Alexander. The Cabinet Mission's aim was to discuss the transfer of power from British to Indian leadership.

NOTE : Lord Wavell was not a member of the Cabinet Mission but was involved.

Objectives of Cabinet Mission

- To obtain an agreement with the Indian leaders as to the framing of a constitution for India.
- To formulate a constitution-making body (the Constituent Assembly of India).
- To establish an Executive Council with the support of the major Indian parties.
- Make arrangements for interim Government.
- Thus the mission was like a declaration of India's independence.
- The mission spent some 3 weeks to discuss with the leaders of various political parties, but could not arrive at any agreed solution. So finally it announced its own recommendations on May 16, 1946.
- The cabinet mission plan of 1946 proposed that there *shall be a Union of India which was to be empowered to deal with the defense, foreign affairs and communications.*
- The cabinet mission recommended an undivided India and turned down the Muslim league's demand for a separate Pakistan. The Cabinet mission restricted the Communal representation
- It provided that all the members of the Interim cabinet would be Indians and there would be minimum interference by the Viceroy.
- It also provided for formation of the constituent assembly on democratic principle of population.
- It recognized Indian Right to cede from the Commonwealth.
- The Union Government and its legislature were to have limited powers, dealing with Finance, Foreign Affairs and Communications. The union would have powers necessary to raise the finances to manage the subjects. *Thus, the Cabinet Mission plan proposed a weak Centre. We can realize what would have been of the country if this plan was approved and implemented.*
- All subjects other than the Union Subjects and all the residuary powers would be vested in the provinces.
- The Princely states would retain all subjects and all residuary powers.
- A Constituent Assembly will be formed of the representatives of the Provincial Assemblies and the Princely states. Each province had to be allotted a total number of seats in proportion to the its population. The Constituent assembly had to comprise 293 Members from the British Provinces and 93 members from the Princely states.

- The representation of the Provincial legislatures was to be break up into 3 sections.
 - Section A: Madras, UP, Central provinces, Bombay, Bihar & Orissa
 - Section B: Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, Baluchistan
 - Section C: Assam and Bengal.

Reaction to the plan

- The Congress was not keen on the idea of the groupings of provinces on the basis of Hindu-Muslim majority and vying for control at the centre. It was also against the idea of a weak centre. The Muslim League did not want any changes to the proposals.
- Since the plan was not accepted, a new plan was proposed by the mission in June 1946. This plan proposed the division of India into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority India later to be renamed Pakistan. A list of princely states was also made that could either join the union or remain independent.
- The Congress Party under Jawaharlal Nehru did not accept the second plan. Instead, it agreed to be part of the constituent assembly.
- The Viceroy invited 14 men to form the interim government. There were 5 from the Congress, 5 from the League, 1 member each representing the Sikh, Parsee, Indian Christian and scheduled caste communities.
- Both the League and the Congress were given the right to nominate 5 members to the Viceroy's interim council. The Congress nominated Zakir Hussain as one of the members to which the League objected saying only it represented Indian Muslims and no other party. The Muslim League did not take part in it.
- The Congress leaders entered the viceroy's interim council and thus Nehru headed the interim government. The new government began the task of framing a constitution for the country.
- Congress-led governments were formed in most provinces including the NWFP. In Bengal and Sind, the League formed the governments.
- Jinnah and the League objected to the new central government. He geared to agitate for Pakistan and urged Muslims to demand Pakistan by any means. He called for 'Direct Action Day' on 16 August 1946.
- This call led to widespread communal rioting in the country with 5000 people being killed on the first day in Calcutta. Communal riots spread to many other areas notably Noakhali and Bihar.
- There was a call for the partitioning of the country on account of the riots. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was one of the first Congress leaders to acknowledge the inevitability of the partition as a means to stop the brutal violence.