

Arrival of the Cabinet Mission in India

The Cabinet Mission formed by the British government to resolve the constitutional deadlock between the Indian political leaders regarding the transfer of power, arrived in India on March 24, 1946. This is an important topic in the modern Indian history segment of the UPSC syllabus.

Background of the Cabinet Mission

- The Cabinet Mission was formed at the initiative of the British Prime Minister Clement Atlee.
- It was composed of three members namely, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State of India; AV Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty; and Sir Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade.
- The Viceroy at the time, Lord Wavell, was involved in the process although he was not an official member.
- The objectives of the Cabinet Mission were to secure an agreement with the leaders of the Indian political spectrum regarding the framing of a constitution for India, to establish a body for framing the future constitution of India, and to create an executive council with Indian support.
- The Congress Party and the Muslim League which by this time could not see eye to eye on almost all issues had basic ideological differences and this was hindering them from finding any common ground.
- The Congress wanted a strong centre with minimal powers vested with the provinces. The League wanted strong safeguards for the rights of the Muslims, the largest minority group in India.
- In May 1946, the Mission proposed the following:
 - Independence would be given to the Indian Dominion without any partition.
 - The provinces would be classified into three groups or sections:
 - Group A: Madras, Central Provinces, UP, Bihar, Bombay and Orissa
 - Group B: Punjab, Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan
 - Group C: Bengal and Assam
 - The Centre would keep the powers over defence, communications, foreign powers and currency. The provinces would get the remaining powers.
 - A constituent assembly would be set up. The new government would be formed as per this constitution. Meanwhile, an interim government would be established.

What were the reasons that the Cabinet Mission Failed?

- While the Muslim League agreed to the proposals and did not wish any changes, the Congress party did not agree to all the proposals. It was against the idea of grouping provinces on the basis of religion. It also argued for a stronger centre.
- Since the May plan was not accepted, a new plan was proposed in June. This plan proposed the partition of India into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority India. A list of princely states was also made that could either join the union or remain independent.
- The second plan was not accepted by the Congress. It did agree to be part of the Constituent Assembly.
- Lord Wavell invited 14 men from different parties and represented different religious and social groups. When the Congress nominated Zakir Hussain, the League protested claiming Muslims could be represented only by the League. The League stayed away from the process.
- Jawaharlal Nehru headed the new interim government and the task of framing a constitution for the country was started.
- Governments were formed by the Congress in most provinces including the NWFP. The League formed the governments in Bengal and Sind. It agitated against the new central government.
- It urged Muslims to demand and agitate for Pakistan. Jinnah called for 'Direct Action Day' on 16th August 1946.
- This led to extreme communal violence in many places starting with Calcutta where the first day saw 5000 deaths.
- Now the call for the country's partition became more aggressive. Even those opposed to it concealed that this could be the only solution to end the brutal riots in the country. The Partition of India, would become an inevitable reality