

Direct Action Day - Muslim League Proclamation (16 August, 1946) - This Day in History

The Muslim League Council proclaimed 16th August 1946 as 'Direct Action Day' in order to accentuate their demand of a separate Muslim homeland after the British left the Indian subcontinent. Their main aim was to attain a different country with a Muslim majority.

The topic 'Direct Action Day' comes under the Modern Indian History syllabus of the UPSC Exam. Modern Indian History is one of the parts of History syllabus asked in Prelims and Mains GS 1.

Direct Action Day	
When was the Direct Action Day?	16th August 1946
Who presided over Direct Action Day?	It was initiated by Muslim League and led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah
What was the purpose of Direct Action Day?	When the Cabinet Mission plan of 1946 failed to find middle ground between INC and Muslim League for a united India as the league wanted a separate homeland for Muslims, Muslim League called for the Direct Action Day.

Direct Action Day – Series of Events

- In 1946, the **Cabinet Mission** was sent to India by the British government to find a resolution to the conflict between the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League on the issue of independence. The two parties were the largest in India's Constituent Assembly.
- The League wanted a separate homeland for the Muslims they called Pakistan while the **INC** wanted a united India.
- The Mission was not successful since the League and the Congress could not agree on the point of a united India with a strong centre.
- Since the Mission failed, the **Muslim League** announced 16th August as Direct Action Day and called for a general hartal in order to protest the INC's stand and demand vehemently a separate homeland.
- The Chief Minister of Bengal at that time was Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy of the Muslim League. The League announced that there was to be a mass rally presided over by Suhrawardy. Processions of people would come from different places and meet at the Ochterlony Monument to attend the rally.
- The rally started at noon, although there were instances of forced closing down of shops, stabbing and stoning from morning itself.

It is believed that when Muhammad Ali Jinnah asked the people to 'suspend all business', he did not expect the riot to get so violent. However, the outcome of this Direct Action Day turned out to be extremely violent and took the lives of hundreds of people in both countries.

Direct Action Day – Outcome

- League leaders gave fiery speeches at the rally which got the massive crowd excited.
- This was followed by large-scale rioting in Calcutta. Around 4000 people were killed on the first day. The riots involved killing, rape, forced conversions and looting.
- Many people blame Suhrawardy for inciting the people and then failing to put an end to the violence as Chief Minister.
- Some also put the blame on the Governor of Bengal, Sir Frederick John Burrows for not taking control of the situation.
- This communal violence soon spread to other parts of northern India particularly Bihar. Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) saw gruesome violence.
- The violence witnessed during and after the Direct Action Day has also been called the Great Calcutta Killings. Some of the places saw rioting on the scale of what can be termed genocide.
- India's independence was overshadowed by thousands of people getting killed or tortured in various riots particularly in eastern, northern and north-west India. The Calcutta killings were the first of such pre-independence rioting.
- All this bloodshed and communal tensions ultimately led to the INC's acceptance of the partition of the country in order to suppress the violence and blood bath.

Also Read: [India and Pakistan Partition](#)

Learning about the main points of 'Direct Action Day' is important for the civil services examination GS Paper 1. Also, aspirants should read all the important topics of Modern Indian History. They can take help from [Modern Indian History NCERT Notes for UPSC](#).

Also read:

Simon Commission	Indian National Congress Sessions	Non-Cooperation Movement	Government of India Act 1919	Morley Minto Reforms
Governors-General of Bengal & India	Rowlatt Act & Jallianwala Bagh Massacre	Quit India Movement	Charter Act of 1813	India and Pakistan Partition