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[The following text is comprised of chapters one and two of a recently completed draft manuscript: *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine, Riots and the End of Empire: 1939-1946*. I am currently shopping the manuscript with publishers. Please do not cite or circulate without permission.]

Chapter One

War

On December 30th 1940, in an industrial suburb of colonial Calcutta, a shabbily contrived Nazi aircraft circled low over a small formation of native huts erected in the shadows of the sprawling jute and cotton mills that line the banks of the river Hooghly. Across the river, in Calcutta proper, stood the grand, if now somewhat weatherworn, Victorian buildings that formerly housed the central administrative apparatus of the British Raj in India. As the plane came into view, according to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*:

Lighting restrictors who were tasking people of the peaceful hamlet over which the enemy aircraft was spotted flying met with opposition from a group of villagers who flashed their torch lights for locating their huts. Following this bombs were hurled by the bomber plane demolishing a number of huts and as a result, fire broke out in the locality. The entire personnel of the A.R.P. [Air Raid Precaution] organization handled the situation promptly, extinguished fires, demolished dangerous structures, rescued people from underneath debris, rendered first aid, and removed cases to Hospital in ambulance cars.¹

A.R.P. trainees had performed admirably in this test of air-raid preparedness: "all the different parties, the messengers, the lighting restrictors, the reconnaissance party, the gas decontamination party, the fire extinguishing party and the first aid party all worked together in complete harmony as soon as the sirens were sounded on spotting the enemy aircraft."² If only the public could be educated to the necessities of maintaining order...

In subsequent press releases, and over the All-India Radio airwaves, strict regulations were iterated and reiterated to the public. On the sounding of the sirens - a series of five second blasts from street-side and factory "hooters" -

- 1.) Any person who has no duties and is within a building shall remain.
- 2.) Any person who has no duties and is in the open shall take nearest cover.
- 3.) All vehicular traffic shall pull to the left and stop.
- 4.) All animals drawing vehicles shall be unyoked and tied to the nearest post.
- 5.) Only police and Civic Guard vehicles, ambulances, fire engines and lorries, Rescue Party lorries, authorized Air Raid Precautionary staff vehicles, and defense service vehicles shall be permitted to proceed on roads.³

When the sirens sounded again on January 30th, however, again there was "opposition." In his notes on this second occasion, A.R.P. controller, N.V.H Symons grumbled, "too much attention was paid to vehicular traffic and little or none to pedestrians. I found trams, buses, cars and lorries all well parked on the side of the road, but pedestrians were wandering all over the place under the very noses of the police."⁴ To add insult to injury; "draft animals were not unyoked... large numbers of the public stayed under verandas and in doorways instead of going into houses [and] too many people, amongst whom women were noticeable, were gazing out of windows... on the whole [police] constables were very lazy...they frequently were found standing about doing nothing... they need more instruction as to the reasons for all these orders and as to how to enforce [them] by reasoning with the public and polite requests rather than shouted commands."⁵ Laborers were found to be less lethargic, if just as lacking in discipline, "in Strand Road, North, coolies were still loading jute onto carts at 3:50 P.M....and near the Talla Bridge a gang of men were found pumping water."⁶

This exercise, a second test of war-readiness in Calcutta, had been a failure. Great Britain was at war - and with it India - and yet, in Calcutta, the putative "second city" of empire, the general public remained apathetic. Urgent work was needed to "train the general public in their duties."⁷ Even the sirens were deficient, Symons noted, they were "very faint, and might easily go unnoticed in a rain storm...there is nothing about them to startle anybody into a realization that danger is imminent."⁸ A.D. Gordon,

Inspector General of the Bengal police, concurred that the idea that danger was imminent needed to be "dinned into their minds by constant propaganda."⁹

The fact that Nazi Germany was, in fact, an extremely remote "enemy," however, made the war a difficult sell. Resources meanwhile limited imagination and measures taken to discipline the recalcitrant public remained fanciful. The majority of the population of Bengal was beyond the state's rhetorical reach - and would remain that way throughout the period. In London, on the other hand, farsighted and well resourced preparations for war had been underway for quite some time.

Food Security

Winston Churchill, for one, had long experience with the role that a nation's food supply could play in war. As England's First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War, he had overseen the British naval blockade of Germany. This "maneuver" - as he later wrote - had "treated the whole of Germany as if it were a beleaguered fortress, and avowedly sought to starve the whole population - men, women, and children, old and young, wounded and sound - into submission."¹⁰ For his role as the architect of such blockades he had earned the nickname "the famisher" in France.¹¹ He and other British war-planners knew well that hunger was a working weapon in the arsenal of modern warfare, and that a combatant nation's food security was a top priority in preparation for war.

With tensions in Europe bristling, early in the summer of 1936 a subcommittee on rationing was formed, with Sir William Beveridge, Permanent Secretary to the First Ministry of Food (during WWI), as Chair. Beveridge argued that the need to "think out in advance, *and as a whole*, the civilian side of the next war is as important as to design measures of military attack and defense."¹² A Food (Defense Plans) Department of His Majesty's Government [HMG] was established in December of the same year. The objective was to ensure that "every member of the public would be able to obtain a fair share of the national food supply at a reasonable price."¹³ Nineteen regional administrative divisions were demarcated and 1,400 local food committees organized to meet the department's "fair share" goal.¹⁴ Detailed schemes for the flat-rate rationing of

sugar, butter, bacon, ham and other meat were drawn up, and arrangements were also made to provide a heavily subsidized "buffer" of bread and potatoes.¹⁵

As importantly, the plan included strict measures to control bulk purchasing. Bulk purchasing by vested interests and commodity speculators, it was well understood, could radically destabilize markets during war-time, leading to uncontrolled inflation and ultimately shortages. As such, detailed plans were drawn up for governmental appropriation and storage of large quantities of food grains in order to control markets. The pace of preparations was accelerated after the Munich Crisis in September 1938, at which time more food was stockpiled and arrangement for the transport of large shipments of grains were elaborated.¹⁶ As further guarantee the Food Department's plans would meet with smooth transition it, it was agreed that a Second Food Ministry (second to the First in WWI) would be established "within hours of the outbreak of hostilities."¹⁷

Accordingly, Britain's Second Ministry of Food was established almost immediately on the declaration of war against Germany. Ration books, which had been printed in advance, were distributed and the rationing of sugar, butter, ham and bacon began in January of 1940. Meat was included in March and tea, margarine and cooking fats, in July. Early in 1941 preserves and cheese were rolled in, and the rationing of cloth began. Differential access to non-rationed foods created some discontent, and so a "points-rationing" system was also introduced in December for the purchase of items like canned fish, dried fruits, rice, and biscuits. A scheme for rationing chocolate and confectionaries was launched a short time later.¹⁸ In the industrial sector, heavily subsidized canteens were set up and agricultural laborers were given a supplementary ration of cheese.¹⁹ Children under five were guaranteed free fruit juices and cod-liver oil, and daily meals served to schoolchildren increased from approximately 160,000 before the war to 1.6 million in 1945.

The results of such foresight and initiative were remarkable. Despite routine bombings and broadly stretched resources, by the end of the war an overall *improvement* in public health was evident.²⁰ The Ministry of Food, in retrospect, noted, "general health was good throughout the period of war [and the] fitness of babies and school children was particularly striking."²¹ Moreover, despite the fact that food imports had fully halved

during wartime,²² average per capita spending on foodstuffs, due to the success of the rationing system, had declined.²³

With the lack of any similar initiatives in India, the only real guidelines for managing the food supply in Bengal during World War II was the Bengal Famine Code; first published in 1897, updated once in 1905, and then lastly in 1913. The Code was the product of Britain's long experience with starvation in India. Between the devastating famine of 1770 and the famine of 1896-97, there had been at least twenty-five officially recorded famines in colonial India.²⁴ In 1880 a Famine Commission was established in Bengal to outline measures of redress. According to the commission's findings the Bengal Famine Code was published some sixteen years later - in the midst of the most devastating famine since 1770. Meanwhile, from the year before the Famine Code's first publication in 1896 until its revision and republication in 1903, it is estimated that up to 19 million people died of starvation and disease in India.²⁵

Of primary importance in the Bengal Famine Code was to train administrative personnel how to identify famine in the offing. In this regard, protocols were established for bi-weekly reporting on crop conditions, rainfall, "the health of the people" and the "existence of any scarcity or distress." Particular instruction were given to promptly report any "rise in prices above 20 percent over normal rates." Statistical compilations of records that should be used to determine "normal rates" were sketched in detail, and if these statistically established normal rates failed to apply, a detailed report was to be made and sent to the Government of India. In the event that prices continue to remain abnormal, prompt reporting of early signs of imminent famine were required. These signs included:

- 1.) The contraction of private charity indicated by the wandering of paupers.
- 2.) Contraction of credit.
- 3.) Feverish activity in the grain trade.
- 4.) Restlessness shown in an increase of crime.
- 5.) Unusual movements of flocks and herds in search of pasturage.
- 6.) Unusual wandering of people.²⁶

When any combination of these occurrences was observed, according to the Code, a Famine Commissioner was to be immediately appointed and District Officers were required to open "test works" to determine the extent of need. The nature of the "test works" (essentially labor-camps for the hungry) is also outlined in detail. The test works were of ultimate importance, because if such test works attracted applicants in large numbers, famine was to be officially declared and various schemes of famine relief were to commence at once - the "test" has proved positive.

Importantly, although according to the Famine Code relief was to be run through local channels, it was duly recognized that famine entailed distinct extra-local, as well as extra-provincial, and ultimately imperial responsibilities. In this regard local officials were directed to notify their superiors, and their superiors to notify the Government of India promptly of:

- 1.) The extent to which Imperial aid is likely to be required... if there is any reason to believe that the Provincial funds will prove insufficient to meet the exigencies of famine.
- 2.) The extent to which suspension or remission of land revenue may be considered necessary. [And,]
- 3.) The extent to which the Provincial staff requires to be increased by drafts from Imperial departments or otherwise.²⁷

In all the Bengal Famine Code was a fairly comprehensive and pragmatic document. I include mention of it here because it was – ostensibly - the only guideline for food security available in Bengal during the war-period. Discussion of the Bengal Famine Code here is a something moot point however. Famine was never declared in the 1940s in Bengal and the Bengal Famine Code failed to apply. (In fact, as K.C Neogy, Bengal MLA²⁸ testified to the Famine Enquiry Commission in 1944, the Bengal Famine Code - at the time of this particular mass starvation in India - had been long out of print.²⁹ A "Famine Manual" stamped "for official use only" had been drafted in 1941, but was not readily available for consideration. Neogy himself could only get a hold of it "surreptitiously."³⁰ In any case, he revealed to the Enquiry Commission, the elusive Famine Manual began: "This Manual is not intended to displace the Bengal Famine Code

but to indicate how its leading principles ought to be applied." This despite the fact that Neogy, when he inquired about consulting the Bengal Famine Code during the height of famine in 1943, had been told by the Revenue Minister of Bengal that it had been superseded since the advent of "Provincial Autonomy."³¹ Neogy was suspicious...)

Enforcing Morale

Short of a comprehensive plan to secure the public welfare in terms of the food supply, war planning in Bengal consisted primarily of the establishment of "Civil Defense" forces; organizations of locally recruited young men who would constitute a somewhat ad-hoc, loyalist, native police force, which over the years would serve the aims of empire in diverse and creative ways - few with any direct relation to the "war effort." The structure, authority, and partiality of these organizations would also sow seeds of conflict in society at large, exasperating increasingly deep divisions among the population which would periodically erupt into violence - class, communal, or otherwise - which these same services would then be called on to police.

The A.R.P.

The first of these forces to be established was the Air Raid Protection services, or A.R.P. In July of 1938, even before war had broken out, a committee was appointed in to sketch out a plan for the A.R.P. in Calcutta and its surrounding suburbs, most importantly the docks at Kidderpore and the industrial belt spanning both sides of the River Hooghly.³² The Commissioner of the Presidency Division³³ was appointed Chair of the coordinating committee, and District Magistrates of Howrah, Hooghly and the 24 Parganas were responsible for development in their respective jurisdictions. The municipality of Calcutta was to be managed by the Commissioner of Police; a delegation of authority that created an outcry. Members of the Calcutta Corporation³⁴ - always a hotbed of political contention - argued that the Mayor of Calcutta, appointed himself by the democratically elected Corporation, should be in charge of the Calcutta A.R.P., rather than the Chief of Police, a colonially appointed official. Concessions were made, but at length the Corporation condemned the scheme as "unscientific and puerile,"³⁵ and refused

to take part, discounting, in any case, the likelihood of an "enemy" attack on Calcutta or its suburbs.³⁶

Nevertheless, "the whole of 1940 and 1941 saw the expansion and development of the Air Raid Precautionary measures [and] during this period an intensive propaganda campaign for recruitment of volunteers was undertaken."³⁷ Recruitment in Howrah and the suburbs went well, but in Calcutta it did not.³⁸ The rift with the Corporation had damaged the A.R.P.'s reputation and the Corporation's affiliation with Indian National Congress and its program of "non-cooperation," entrenched the situation further. Furthermore, as one organizing member noted, "it was no easy task educating the public. There was a common belief that once recruited in the A.R.P. they would be sent abroad as fighting forces."³⁹ On December 10th of 1941 a system of pay was introduced and later allowances for subsidized food grains were added, and recruitment picked up. With rapid inflation taking hold and increasing scarcity beginning to bite, a remunerative position of local authority, sanctioned by imperial authority, in and around Calcutta became increasingly more attractive in the coming years. By the time of its demobilization at the end of 1945, in addition to at least 66,000 volunteers,⁴⁰ the paid A.R.P. ranks numbered over 26,000, the majority of whom were engaged in "administrative" work.⁴¹

In the early days of war, given that the Indian Army itself was at the time "starved of money and poorly equipped,"⁴² the A.R.P. had its work cut out for it. Along all the main thoroughfares of Calcutta and the industrial districts, "slit trenches" were dug to serve as shelters in case of bombing.⁴³ The slit trenches were no more than six foot deep gulleys, without overhead protection or drainage. They were protected on the sides by "baffle walls" made of local brick, and reinforced with sand bags. Baffles walls were also constructed at the entrances to governmental and residential buildings in the downtown area. As a back-up to the Corporation's water treatment facility, arrangements were also made to sink 2000 deep tube wells (at an average depth of 250 feet) and 500 shallow tube wells (averaging 70 feet in depth.) A mammoth task. In Calcutta, 20 hospitals were selected and asked to reserve 100 beds on their premises strictly for A.R.P. purposes. Officers were appointed to serve as local Wardens, and managers were assigned to various work crews to oversee and execute lighting restrictions, fire fighting, rescue and

demolition, medical treatment, gas decontamination, and corpse disposal. Mass burial pits were dug at Gobra on the northern outskirts of the city to accommodate many thousand of corpses,⁴⁴ and loose plans were outlined for the maintenance of essential services such as sewage, gas, electric, and food supply.⁴⁵

Officers' uniforms consisted of khaki drill tunics fastened with four silver A.R.P. buttons, khaki slacks, shirts, socks and neckties, brown shoes, and a steel helmet bearing the A.R.P. insignia. Officers and all other members of the forces were to wear a "navy blue brassard on which the prescribed Air Raid Precautions Service Badge shall remain imposed," which would "remain the property of the crown."⁴⁶ In addition the Viceroy of India, Victor Hope, Second Marquess of Linlithgow, signed an ordinance in 1941 stating: "no suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against the Controller or any member of an Air Raid Precautions service for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done in pursuance of this Ordinance or any rules made there under"⁴⁷ – thus granting members of the A.R.P. pervasive immunity in relation to their nebulously defined civil authority.

The Civic Guards

Shortly thereafter the colonial government also began organizing a second mechanism to maintain order amongst urban populations in the province, the Civic Guard. In 1941 it was announced in a government press release that Governor, Sir John Herbert "had made certain rules for the Civic Guard organization in Bengal."⁴⁸ This executive decision [announced in the past tense] had been possible in relation to the exercise of powers conferred to him in the Civic Guard Ordinance 1940, which until that time had not been enacted. According to Herbert's scheme, the Commissioner of Police would be responsible for units in Calcutta, with local Superintendents, under direction of District Magistrates, organizing in smaller cities. Recruits, it was also announced, would "be formally enrolled with due ceremony on parade and during this ceremony each recruit shall take the oath of allegiance to His Majesty the King Emperor."⁴⁹

At the time of this announcement the duties of the Civic Guard were few, but broad in scope. They were:

- 1.) to assist the regular police force in the protection of the civil population against the forces of crime and disorder
- 2.) to work in close touch with air raid precautions and to maintain and enforce order during black-outs and air raid alarms, [and]
- 3.) to perform such duties in connection with the protection of persons and property, or the public safety, as the Provincial Government may from time to time assign to them.⁵⁰

A few weeks later, "the promotion of communal harmony," the prevention of "the spread of false rumors," and the circulation of "accurate war news" were all amended to their duties. Additionally, it was expected "that every member of the Civic Guard [would] consider himself a servant of the public at all times, and be ready to help, without hope of reward, anybody who is to be found in distress or difficulty."⁵¹

The lack of reward, however - and again - did seem to hamper recruitment. In the government's quarterly "War Diary" the Inspector-General of the Bengal Police, explained:

In most districts the Civic Guards have been inactive; little progress has been made with training in drill and law, while physical training has been neglected...it is hoped that with the posting of Adjutants and Quarter-Masters, the issue of new uniforms, *and a scheme of allowances*...the waning enthusiasm will be revived.⁵²

Taking into consideration the additional privileges that can be assumed to have accrued to positions of imperially recognized authority during a period of acute scarcity and administrative chaos - it can be ventured that the non-monetary benefits of membership in the Civic Guard were also increasingly significant. By the next year the ranks of the Civic Guard in Calcutta alone numbered close to 5000, and they were reported to be acting as an effective "special police" throughout Bengal.⁵³

The Home Guards

Control in the countryside was a more complex question. With its more than 90,000 villages and 20,000 miles of water communications winding through thick jungle, and its human geography an "infinite variety of local agrarian structures,"⁵⁴ much of the province had proven a governmental conundrum from the earliest days of European penetration. From the earliest times of the East India Company adventures in India until

the advent of WWII, colonial forays into the Bengal countryside had remained "a journey into the unknown in more than one sense."⁵⁵ Moreover, with the "Permanent Settlement" of land tenures in 1792, revenue collecting responsibilities had been conferred on local landlords and Government was able to maintain a light administrative footprint, intervening directly only as necessary - most often to enforce "order."

Order in rural Bengal, however, seemed chronically beyond colonial reach. "Special Officer" L.G. Pinnell - who would play a fateful role in the lives of many million Bengalis - narrated his equivocal record of administration in the Bengal countryside during the war and famine tellingly:

I do hope that some of the members of the Commission will go on tour by the watercourses along the coastal routes of Bengal; if they do so they will appreciate how impossible it is to administer that area in detail with the staff that exists...the whole area is a network of tidal *khal* running between very big and dangerous rivers and your staff consists of the sub-divisional officer, perhaps a couple of circle officers for an area of 600 square miles, and a *thana* staff of a sub-inspector with perhaps one assistant for an area of - I would not like to exactly say...

As the rural population comprised at least 90% of total of Bengal's population at the time, Government could not content itself with civil defense measures that focused on cities alone. In this context, the Governor of Bengal, acting under Government of India authority, and ultimately the War Office in London, introduced, in addition to the A.R.P. and the Civic Guards, the Bengal Home Guard, or *Bangya Griharakshi Dal*. The duties of the Home Guard were officially outlined as:

- 1.) the preservation of peace and order
- 2.) aiding and assisting evacuees or refugees who may pass through the area
- 3.) raising and stiffening the morale of the people, discounting and denying false rumor and rumor-mongering generally, and;
- 4.) in the areas near the coast and eastern frontiers, watching for and reporting anything of a suspicious nature.

Additionally, "if necessary," it was later added, "in times of emergency, they would also be available for maintaining the food supply and similar activities."⁵⁶ No specific plans for this last function were outlined.

The Home Guard would be organized under police supervision and would operate in rural areas only. Local officials, under the direction of District Magistrates were responsible to enlist ranks in the following, highly divisive, manner:

within the area of a police station they will co-opt two influential non-officials, of whom one will be Hindu and one Muslim...in consultation with these co-opted members Circle Officer and Circle Inspector of Police will select a suitable local man to be the Captain... the Captain will be entrusted with enrolling a group of at least 25 effectives.⁵⁷

In this way Government would be able to extend its authority, if not its own human resources, into the far reaches of the countryside. Home Guard members would be required to wear an identifying badge "indicating in Bengali letters the title of the organization," and would be armed with *lathis*, but – initially - were to receive no pay. Based on previous experience with recruitment in such volunteer organizations, however, it was added that, "if the Home Guards prove a success and establish themselves in the esteem and affection of the persons whose services they are enrolled, there is no need to anticipate insurmountable difficulties in the way of providing them with uniforms and possibly other amenities..."⁵⁸ By the end of the war the Home Guards in Bengal numbered close to 200,000.

Hearts and Minds

For a significant portion of the population, however, cooperation with the war effort amounted to colonial collaboration and, as such, national betrayal. Increasingly confrontational anti-colonial movements had been gaining steam for decades, and when, in 1939 the Viceroy declared war on India's behalf without any consultation, long standing resentments of colonial rule came to a head. Opposition to the war was widespread and resistance and rebellion increasingly entrenched. Understanding the risks to empire at war of a restive population, in June of 1940 the War Cabinet in London approved the Viceroy's scheme for a Revolutionary Movements Ordinance, "conferring extraordinary powers [on the Government of India] in the event of civil disobedience."⁵⁹

About this, maverick British journalist, Arthur Moore, wrote to the incoming Secretary of State for India Leo Amery ominously:

the idea that, with their base in England largely out of the reckoning, the handful of British here can, by invoking a Defense of the Realm Act, keep army and police control and hold the country down, is dangerous madness.⁶⁰

In October of 1940, riding the wave of discontent, the Indian Congress High Command announced the resignation of all its elected representatives in protest against unrepresentative cooption into Britain's war against Germany. Seven provinces had elected Chief Ministers who were members of Congress, and as such these ministries were effectively dissolved by the resignations. Consequently, Section 93 of the Defense of India Rules was enacted, giving the imperially appointed Governors of these seven provinces emergency rule. Provincial Autonomy, established in 1935, was turning out to be something less in practice than what it had been imagined in theory. Linlithgow himself, panicked by the breakdown in governmental order, "was getting very desperate, felt he could do nothing and wanted to resign and come home."⁶¹ Perhaps his high sense of dignity could not accommodate the nitty-gritty of holding empire together in times of war and rebellion. As Reforms Commissioner, Henry Hodson describes, the Viceroy "was a formidable-looking man. Very tall, ungainly in motion, with a long solemn face like a sad clown that belied his rich humor, he displayed the deterrent reserve of a naturally shy man. As if this were not enough to awe an official caller at Viceroy's House, he always sat on a big throne-like chair raised several inches on a dais behind a massive desk."⁶²

Material concerns, meanwhile, motivated the majority of the population of Bengal and a deep apathy towards the war prevailed. During a third A.R.P. exercise, in Sovabazar, not only were "numbers of *bhadralok*⁶³ walking about on their business and ignoring the exercise," but even more alarmingly, "two *chokras*⁶⁴ aged 13 or 14 were seen wearing A.R.P. armllets."⁶⁵ An investigation was launched and it was found that at least seventeen firms in Calcutta were selling unauthorized A.R.P. brassards and badges to civilians. An order under Defense of India Rules was issued prohibiting manufacture or sale of unauthorized badges, and a directive was circulated stating that "it should be

made clear that anyone found in unauthorized possession of such articles shall be severely dealt with."⁶⁶ Several orders followed, detailing the exact procedure of authorization and distribution of badges and other identifying paraphernalia related to A.R.P. and Civic Guard membership - to what effect it is difficult to discover.

In Bengal, where anti-British sentiment had long been sharp, there were also more alarming signs of disorder. Posters were hung in 1940 warning:

The British Empire Is On The Verge Of Annihilation: Don't Be A Recruited Soldier!"⁶⁷

Leaflets, entitled "Civic Guard or a Treacherous Force?" were circulated, and strident anti-war appeals were openly publicized:

If the British Agents Would Approach You for War Contributions
Turn them Out!

Do Not Betray Your Country by Enrolling Yourself in the Civic Guard!

Killed by Hitler on the other side of the ocean,
the British Raj has greatly increased repression on us.
Let us get ready to retaliate!"⁶⁸

Significant contributions to the war fund failed to materialize, and withdrawals from post office banks further undermined the finance of war.⁶⁹ Measures to improve "morale" continued to meet with failure, and repeated calls to "stand to" were met with the contrary inclination to flee. Even after Japan's entry into the war, while there was considerable anxiety and uncertainty in the province, the alarm with which the British looked east from Calcutta was not shared by many among the Indian population. In fact, the vulnerability of the British Empire was greeted with a measure of glee as well as cynicism. Even as the A.R.P. and Civic Guard paraded in the streets, behind closed doors; in schoolrooms, playgrounds, and in Bengali kitchens, a humorous ditty - that few would forget⁷⁰ - made the rounds:

***Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni
Bom phelechhe Japani,
Bomar maidhe keute sap
British bole bapre-bap!***

(Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti
A bomb was dropped by the Japanese
In the bomb is a cobra snake
The British shout "For Heaven's Sake!")

The Countryside

Particularly in the countryside, concern for the war was attenuated by the more pressing struggle for elemental survival. In 1934, Satish Chandra Mitter published a book with the retrospectively ironic title *A Recovery Plan for Bengal*. In his appended, hand typed appreciation of the work, Rabindranath Tagore calls *Recovery Plan* "the best possible book one can wish for," at a time when "our villages are driven to desolation [and their inhabitants] are grown inconspicuous by the deadly pallor of their anemic existence."⁷¹ Mitter himself paints a grim picture of rural Bengal circa 1934. "It is evident to anyone familiar with agricultural conditions...and with the lives of the cultivators," he writes, "that they exist rather than live, and that the margin between starvation and existence is an extremely small one."⁷² The index of jute prices, set at 100 in 1914, had plummeted to 40 by 1934,⁷³ and jute producers were pushed to the brink. Rice prices, similarly, were perilously deflated, with the value to the cultivator in 1934 half that which it had been five years earlier.⁷⁴ Malaria had depopulated important sectors of the economy, and the fishing industry was in shambles.⁷⁵ Milk cows were being slaughtered out of economic necessity, and, with the cost of living was 150% pre-WWI levels, inhabitants of Bengal's countryside, Mitter cautioned, "[could not] but be hunger-stricken and starving, and eventually insolvent."⁷⁶

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, due to increasing commercialization in grain markets and slumping jute prices, "many peasants fell into debt and could only carry on by borrowing seed and grain from year to year; and in course of time, were reduced to a position close to that of landless laborers."⁷⁷ Cultivators were trapped in a cycle of debt and repayment that left them on the verge of starvation between crops, forced to sell their products at deflated prices during the post-harvest glut, in order to pay loans taken during the pre-harvest "starvation" season. Meanwhile, restrictions on rent increases mandated by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, compounded

by the increasing pressures of population and diminishing sizes of land holdings, had made it increasingly difficult for landlords to profit from rent extraction. The rural gentry had thus increasingly turned to usurious relationships with their tenants to stay afloat,⁷⁸ further straitening the already impoverished peasantry, and further entrenching class - and communal - resentments.

Subsequently, by the late 1930s the rural credit market had all but totally collapsed.⁷⁹ Deflation of prices in rice and jute markets, throughout the decade, meant unpaid credit balances. While "recovery" from the Great Depression had been achieved in the U.S. and Europe, credit relations in Bengal failed to rebound and poverty deepened.⁸⁰ By the turn of the decade moneylenders "had shut their money-chests...[and] the supply of grain had largely been taken out of the orbit of credit and subjected to the convulsions of a wartime product market"⁸¹ In the meantime, the cycle of subsistence and starvation remained, with many millions of cultivators now falling into abject destitution. To make ends meet in the absence of credit, cultivators entered into cynically usufructary mortgages and lost their lands, or managed to hang on by selling off family ornaments, brass-wear and other moveable possessions. The poor of Bengal had been through a devastating decade, and even in the late 30s many were already starving.

With the declaration of war in 1939 – and dislocations in commodity markets related to the same - the price of rice rose 33% in a single year⁸² - a shock that the rural population could ill afford. In October, 1940, Mihirlal Chatterjee, member of the All India Village Association issued an appeal to the provincial government in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, warning that "the gloom of a frightful famine [had] cast its shadow all over Birbhum," and remarking:

it is high time that the authorities at the head of the Provincial Government should gather first hand knowledge of the exact situation and do everything in their power to combat the famine. Let it never be said to the eternal disgrace of the responsible ministers at the head of a provincial autonomous Government that, like the bureaucratic administration of the past, they have also studiously refrained from declaring famine when actually that condition prevailed.⁸³

Dr. Profulla Chandra Ghosh, ardent Gandhian and future Chief Minister of independent West Bengal, set up the West Bengal Famine Relief Committee to raise relief funds for the "famine-stricken people of Midnapur, Birbhum, Bankura and Murshidabad."⁸⁴ Floods

during the monsoon season had compounded the difficulties of inflation, and scarcity was taking a toll.

A year later, in September of 1941, the price of rice had risen another 36%, and distress deepened in rural Bengal.⁸⁵ In its quarterly diary of war activities, the Government of Bengal reported:

In the districts the abnormal rise in prices of paddy, rice and piece goods has hit the poorer section of the people very hard. Though the general rise in prices is taken to be an outcome of the war, the failure to exercise any effective control over the price...has been a great disappointment to many.⁸⁶

In Noakhali and Tippera (in eastern Bengal) with jute prices failing to follow the inflationary curve, the rice-purchasing power of cultivators plummeted dangerously. The Commissioner worried that "economic distress and the high price of rice may lead to organized goondaism."⁸⁷ "Test Works" - the primary indicator of famine laid out in the Bengal Famine Code - were opened in both Tippera and Noakhali. Rates of recompense were negligible, but the works drew "considerable numbers."⁸⁸ The "test" had proven positive, but no further resources were expended and famine was not declared. Hunger marches were organized to demand relief,⁸⁹ and in north Bengal sharecroppers and landless laborers looted rice paddy from the storehouses of rich landholders (*jotedars*).⁹⁰ Prices of sugar, cooking oil, kerosene and pulses of all varieties had also risen steeply,⁹¹ and "the price of yarn hit the hand-loom weavers in the province so hard that they had to suspend business."⁹²

In the same quarter, the War Diary reports, "25 important articles on A.R.P., war, war funds, etc. were published, 38 press notes were issued and 22 leaflets, pamphlets, etc. were distributed, and movie-tone war news reels and war films, prepared, purchased, or hired, continue to be displayed by the National Welfare Units."⁹³ For this last purpose Government had at its disposal, not only six publicity vans, but also 8 bullock carts, and 4 river boats, commissioned to spread the word of imminent danger down into the countryside.⁹⁴ One can only imagine how such efforts might have been received... According to the Director of Public Instruction, literacy rates in Bengal were not more than 15%, and life expectancy no more than 27 years.⁹⁵ In this context, there is little doubt that distinct knowledge of, not to mention support for, the British war effort was extremely limited.

When Japan entered the war, things disintegrated further. "The slogan 'resist Japan'," as Sunil Sen has suggested, "[could have] hardly made any sense to the [impoverished, illiterate and disenfranchised] peasant."⁹⁶ In a poignant scene in Satyajit Ray's 1973 movie *Asani Sanket*,⁹⁷ in a typical village of central Bengal, circa 1942, the population is struggling to survive. Prices have risen prohibitively and the poorest have already begun to starve. An educated member of the village reads a newspaper to a gathered crowd. "The British have been defeated! Singapore has fallen to the Japanese!" The news is accompanied by much excitement. One naive member of the audience enquires hesitantly, however, "...but where is Singapore?" The newsreader pauses to consider, then responds confidently, "not far from Midnapore..."⁹⁸ Apparently the bullock vans had not made their way yet to this particular village...

Establishing Priorities

In the factories surrounding Calcutta there were also acute economic anxieties. From the earliest days of the war, strikes for wage increases, "dearness allowances," war bonuses, and the opening of "controlled shops"⁹⁹ were common. The dominant industry in Bengal was jute manufacturing, employing more than 285,000 workers, the majority of whom were migrant laborers from Bihar, the United Provinces and Orissa.¹⁰⁰ As in the jute mills, in the all-important cotton mills,¹⁰¹ workers were primarily migrant, unskilled, and easily replaceable. But war meant profit, and maximization of profit demanded maintaining a stable labor force, which was not always easy to achieve.

In November of 1939 a strike involving more than 11,000 workers at the Hukumchand Jute Mill in the northern suburbs of Calcutta drew quick response from the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA). Bengal's jute production at the time accounted for more than half the supply of jute world-wide,¹⁰² and as such production in Calcutta was estimated as essential to the war effort. The IJMA quickly settled the strike and instituted a flat-rate wage increase of ten percent throughout the industry, which, however, did not succeed in dampening widespread labor actions. In May of 1941, 9000 workers at Baranagar jute mills went on strike and in July 12,000 workers at the Anglo Indian Jute Mills followed suit.¹⁰³ Earlier, in March of 1940, 20,000 workers of the Calcutta Corporation; street cleaners, sewage workers, and other menial laborers, had also gone on

strike, and in September workers of the Calcutta Tramways and Calcutta Port Trust began petitioning for war-bonuses as well. The President of the Bengal Labor Association had moved a resolution in the legislature asking for the grant of a 25% war-bonus to *all* factory and mill labor,¹⁰⁴ but the resolution was defeated and discontent simmered.

The appeal of remaining in oppressive mills and factories, and run the additional hazard of being targeted by "enemy" aircraft, began to pale just as labor requirements were increasing. Consequently, in February of 1941 the "Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance" was promulgated by the Government of India. The Ordinance defined as essential "war industries" including: cotton and jute mills, armament factories, engineering firms, paper mills, printing facilities, and even tobacco factories, gin presses, food service workers, and stone masons, as well as employees of municipal, provincial or central governments.¹⁰⁵ All of these workers, because deemed "essential" to the war-effort, were put under extraordinary restrictions:

The ordinance makes it an offence punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year and with fine, for any person [covered under the ordinance] to abandon such employment or absent himself without reasonable excuse. The fact that a person apprehends that by continuing in his employment he will be exposed to increased physical danger does not constitute a reasonable excuse.¹⁰⁶

In declaring the workers, essential, in another sense, the government was also signifying them as "priority" citizens.¹⁰⁷ Such a designation would have an increasingly important significance in the coming years - as the differential "priority" of citizens of Calcutta became almost the sole measure of life and death.

But, to date, very little had actually been done regarding the actual defense of Calcutta - the idea of which played such a central rhetorical role in colonial governance at the time. The British themselves, though they had mobilized a native police force of close to 300,000 in Bengal, were less than well-organized on the military front. In his *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War*, Bisheswar Prasad admits, "till the end of 1941 no effective measures for the defense of Burma or India on the eastern side had been adopted."¹⁰⁸ For all the fanfare, the Empire's Second City remained largely unprotected. "There were virtually no anti-aircraft guns, air-raid flood lights, or radar sets, and the Royal Indian Air Force could only deploy 8 'serviceable

Mohawks' to defend Calcutta."¹⁰⁹ Historian Eric Stokes, who himself served in the British armed forces in India during the war, places further doubt on the urgency of British preparedness. Bayly and Harper note:

Throughout the war India Command's fortnightly situation appreciations conventionally began with an account of operations on the North West Frontier in which British officers pursued shadowy Mullahs over the hills and frustrated the plots of obscure tribal insurgents. Stokes felt that the Faqir of Ipi, a Muslim rebel [in Waziristan] and long time thorn in the imperial flesh, seemed to loom as large in their minds as Tojo and Hitler even when the Japanese stood at the gates of India.¹¹⁰

(Some things don't seem to change.)

The Fortress Falls

Above all, Britain's strategy for the defense of its colonial possessions in South and Southeast Asia hinged on the presumed invulnerability of 'Fortress Singapore.' Originally under the administrative ambit of the Bengal Presidency, Singapore became a crown colony in 1867, and by 1930 23% of all British trade passed through this single port.¹¹¹ The naval base built at Sembawang (on the northern coast of the island) boasted the largest dry dock in the world, and the southern coast was fortified with a battery of huge artillery guns poised to repel naval attack at long range - but, importantly, only if that attack came from the south.

In 1940 Japanese officers on a reconnaissance mission to the area informed their commanding Colonel, Masanobu Tsuji, that Singapore was indeed vulnerable to attack - from the Johore Strait to the north.¹¹² Later the same year, when the British commander of Malaya, Lieutenant-General Lionel Bond, surveyed the situation, he similarly concluded that Singapore remained perilously vulnerable to invasion from the north, and advised swift preparations to defend against this line of attack. But only symbolic measures of defense were taken. Bond had suggested that a minimum of 336 first-line aircraft were needed to secure the peninsula, but in January of 1942, Malaya was defended by only *ninety* antiquated "Brewster Buffalo" aircraft, which had been rejected for service in Europe. The seas were patrolled by the ad hoc 'Force Z,' consisting only of two battleships, the HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, backed by four destroyers. There were no aircraft carriers within range, and not a single tank on the ground. In

November of 1941, when approached by "frantic" Australian generals about the situation in Singapore, Churchill pointedly declined to reinforce the Southeast Asia defenses, citing the urgency of war in the Middle East.¹¹³

Several hours before the attack on Pearl Harbor even, Japan launched an ambitious assault on the northern coast of Malaya at Kota Bahru, raining bombs down on unprepared British aerodromes and landing infantry battalions on unguarded beaches; marshaling 125,000 men, 534 aircraft and 79 tanks.¹¹⁴ The British were caught completely unawares. Sixty of ninety Allied aircraft were destroyed in their hangers. The Indian troops of the 1st Hyderabad fought to defend the railhead, then in disorganized retreat shot and killed their British commander.¹¹⁵ Force Z steamed from Singapore on the afternoon of December 8th and, without air support, engaged the Japanese naval force off the northern coast of Malaya. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were quickly sunk and Admiral Phillips and 840 of his men were killed. Word of this startling defeat shook the Empire. The following day in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill mourned, "in my whole experience I do not remember any naval blow so heavy or so painful as the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* on Monday last. These two vast, powerful ships constituted an essential feature in our plans for meeting the new Japanese danger as it loomed against us in the last few months."¹¹⁶ Kota Bahru was abandoned and Japanese forces landing in Thailand pushed south to reinforce the invading army.

Japanese divisions, each equipped with 6,000 bicycles and light tanks, advanced down the Malaya peninsula rapidly. Several lines of defense were hastily erected, but fell quickly to the swift advance of Japanese troops. At Jitra British/Indian defenses were consolidated, but collapsed in fifteen short hours. Retreating soldiers left behind vast stores of tinned food, petrol and other military supplies that Japan swept up as they moved south. The Japanese air-force, meanwhile, pummeled British staging grounds at Panang and Singapore. The colonial administration, in a state of panic, hastened to evacuate Europeans from the line of fire, leaving Malaysians and Indians to their own devices.¹¹⁷ On January 27th, 1942 Malaya was surrendered, and Allied forces, demolishing the bridge behind them, retreated to 'Fortress Singapore.'

Singapore itself had been under air-attack since the 8th of December, and many of its European residents had already been evacuated. The big guns on the southern coast

remained silent, and the Japanese air-force redoubled its assault, blanketing the island from high altitudes. Communication lines were knocked out and hospitals overflowed with wounded soldiers and civilians alike. Rumors of gas attacks circulated and as menial labors began to flee in mass, civic services collapsed. The remaining Europeans gathered in luxury hotels and country clubs, guzzling whiskey from basement casks and cursing their commanders.¹¹⁸ In the Asian quarters, corpses rotted on street corners and families hunkered in hand-dug earthen pits. The fall of Singapore, however, could not be countenanced. On the 10th of February, Churchill telegraphed his regional Commander in Chief, Archibald Wavell:

There must be at this stage no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end and at all costs... Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honor of the British Empire and the British Army is at stake.¹¹⁹

Churchill's orders, however, were met with skepticism. The Governor himself argued for capitulation. Allied troops, demoralized by defeat, looted city shops and threatened their own officers with revolvers.¹²⁰ Surrender came on the afternoon of February 15th, 1942. In all, the British Army had lost as many as 130,000 troops to death or capture, many of them Indian forces, and also the Crown possessions of Malaya and Singapore. Churchill called the defeat "the worst disaster and the largest capitulation in British history."

Burmese Days

Reginald Dorman-Smith had been appointed Governor of Burma in May of 1941. Before his inauguration he frankly admitted his pervasive ignorance of the country: "my knowledge of Burma was precisely nil... I knew approximately where it was on the map, that its capital was Rangoon, and that the Irrawaddy flowed through it, but my knowledge did not extend beyond this."¹²¹ Unsurprisingly, when Japan began bombing Rangoon in the last week of December, chaos broke out immediately. The Burmese population fled the city in droves, retreating to monasteries and homes in the countryside, and the majority Indian population of the city "simply scattered in terror."¹²² Rumors of violence against Indians by Burmese nationals circulated widely, and the British began evacuating all their own "non-essential" personal in preparation for a long siege.

With success in Malaya well in hand, Japan turned more of its military might in the direction of Burma and the fissures in the British system opened further. Inexperienced and disaffected British troops put up only sporadic and uninspired resistance and Indian troops, paired with Burmese recruits, were hampered by language difficulties that plagued their bi-national battalions. American volunteer forces, in Burma to secure the Burma Road, were openly critical of British military prowess, going so far as to burn "lend-lease" vehicles rather than allow their use by British forces.¹²³ Furthermore, British heavy artillery, though impressive in theory, was unsuitable for the conditions. Dorman-Smith reported with dismay that Japanese troops were able to simply "walk around" British defensive positions - their tanks and heavy guns sunk deep in mud - as they made their way towards Rangoon.¹²⁴

As Japanese forces approached the city, life in the capitol deteriorated precipitously. Disease spread as sweepers fled in terror, compelling Dorman-Smith to conclude that life in a colonial metropolis "begins with the sweeper. That lowest of all human beings who holds in his hands the difference between health and disease, cleanliness and filth."¹²⁵ Calcutta would learn the same lesson in the months to come. The British army withdrew large contingents of troops to the north in order to regroup, while the US consul departed for Chungking. The bombings continued. Telecommunications broke down and chaos reigned. The official report of February 21st reported: "the docks during the night were in a state which it is hardly believable could have existed in any British possession... I do not think there was a single sober man anywhere. The crews of the boats alongside and the troops had looted liquor and were rolling about the place in the last stages of drunkenness."¹²⁶ The city was surrendered on March 7th.

It is estimated that at least 600,000 Indian refugees fled Burma after British defeat, with at least 400,000 forced to travel the 600 miles of perilous mule tracks and cart-roads, across the high mountain passes and thick jungle of eastern India on foot, eventually filtering into the villages and by-lanes of rural Bengal.¹²⁷ Along the way there was no shelter, no medical aid, and little or no food. People traveled with whatever possessions they could carry and left their dead on the side of the road. British caravans, complete with local porters and pack animals, edged starving families to the side of the road as they hurried past to safety.¹²⁸ At improvised refugee encampments, dysentery,

small pox and malaria flourished.¹²⁹ When the rains came, the road was washed away in places and some had to make their way on their knees through mud and along perilous precipices. The Government of India sent no help. They had now conceded Burma, and the fate of the British Indian citizens stranded in that country was not a priority. At least 80,000 died in transit.

Those who survived the journey to India, according to a British Army Brigadier who witnessed their arrival in Bengal, were in a state of "complete exhaustion, physical and mental, with disease superimposed...all social sense lost...they suffer from bad nightmares and their delirium is a babble of rivers and crossings, of mud and corpses...emaciation and loss of weight are universal."¹³⁰ In this state they entered into the villages of Bengal, begging at the bazaars, and telling stories of Japanese atrocities - and British capitulation.

Nobody's Home

As Japan breezed through British defenses in Asia, attitudes - both administrative and popular - underwent a rapid change, and the strategic importance of Calcutta to the war effort expanded exponentially day after day. With the defeat in Burma, the city was then the last eastern industrial frontier of British Empire, and, as such, vital to the fight (back) against Japan. Of utmost importance was to keep the factories, writing desks and ports of Calcutta operating at emergency pace, and the handful of British who "held it down" were unequal to the task. "Native" allegiance to the city of Calcutta, however, proved a slippery problem. The British, much to their chagrin, quickly found that, though they had built it, and the people had come, Calcutta was not yet "home" to those the complex array of migrants who had made their way to the city for many decades past in search of economic survival¹³¹ and the personnel that they required to run their factories and offices in and around Calcutta proved less than "patriotic."

When Japan attacked in Singapore and Burma an acute crisis of confidence ensued and the immigrant-dependent mosaic of labor, industry and administration in Calcutta began to unravel at pace. On December 18th, 1941 Calcutta and its suburbs were declared a 'dangerous area,' and despite all calls to stand-to, residents of Calcutta

began to flee the colonial city in large numbers. The war had at last entered into popular consciousness and clinging to Calcutta had risks outweighing the penalties established by the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance. Non-Bengali laborers boarded trains and congested roads and headed for their native provinces in their tens of thousand and "Marwari businessmen in Calcutta were selling their stocks at reduced prices, closing down their businesses and moving in large numbers to central and north India."¹³² Defections from the Ishapore Rifle Factory and the Cossipore Gun and Shell Factory were cause for alarm.¹³³ On January 1st, 1942 the Mayor of Calcutta issued an appeal, calling on laborers to remain at their posts, but the exodus continued.¹³⁴ The departure of Marwari traders, in particular, meant the immobilization of a significant sector of Calcutta trade, including in rice. Meanwhile, the air was rife with rumors of Britain's imminent defeat, "black-outs" were observed every night, and the Bengali white-collar, middle-class also was fleeing to the countryside in numbers, leaving only earning members, as necessary, behind.

It was a hard sell to keep the natives in their place while the British themselves were making plans for hasty retreat. I.C.S. Special Officer, L.G. Pinnell - whose assorted appointments by the Government of India would have deep implications for Bengal - hustled off to Darjeeling with his family, even as he wondered at the Indian exodus: "before Burma had actually fallen," he lamented, "the trains leaving Calcutta were crowded beyond capacity with people trying to get away...and to get their valuables away. Large numbers of merchants and traders left and I was told that ordinary shop commodities in Calcutta could be bought for nothing."¹³⁵

A scene in Bimal Kar's novel, *Dewal*, depicts the chaos of exodus more intimately:

Burdened down with any belongings they can carry, people are boarding taxis, and lorries, horse-drawn buggies and ox-carts and *moving on*. Their faces are dark and lined with worry. Small children stare dully and cry. Girls, abandoning their accustomed modesty, push desperately onto fly-swarmed railway cars, tearing their saris or falling into strangers' laps. Feverish babies cry and vomit. Old folks gasp for breath, more dead than alive. Men are running in every direction, withdrawing money from banks, handing out bribes for favors, and falling at the feet of taxi drivers to beg them for consideration. Yesterday's fare of five rupees has become twenty-five today.¹³⁶

Those left behind (mostly those without the means to flee) dwelt in a city depopulated, houses were boarded up and dark, the streets desolate, and the mood apprehensive.

Meanwhile, as Calcutta emptied out and refugees poured into Bengal, secret plans were being made to take the war and its priorities deep into the countryside - and things began to unravel at an alarming pace.

Chapter Two

Denial

By December of 1941, the price of rice had risen by nearly 75% since the declaration of war.¹³⁷ Rice was in high demand in relation to the war-effort, particularly to feed industrial labor. Wheat prices had risen still more sharply, and so rice was also in high demand in western India and the Middle-East as a hedge on wheat. This precipitated a drain of rice from eastern India, exasperating other difficulties in the food supply that war entailed. Coinciding with the onset of war against Japan, the export from Bengal of a record 45,000 tons of rice in January of 1942 represented a quadrupling of exports for the same month in the previous year. In February exports increased again to 60,000 tons, in March to 61,000 tons, and in April to more than 66,000 tons.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, the influx of Calcuttans into rural districts, with their relatively substantial economic resources, was stressing local commodity markets further, as poor villagers were now forced to compete with rich city folk for increasingly dear provisions. Refugees from Burma also continued to pour in, and local shortages of sugar, coal, matches, raw cotton, cotton yarn, piece goods, paper, and cooking fuel were making life increasingly difficult for many millions.

With war fueling inflation and threatening the economic stability of India as a whole, the Viceroy convened a "Price Control Conference" in New Delhi on February 6. It was, in fact, the Fourth Price Control Conference, the preceding three having accomplished little to stem rising prices. At this time the Government of India had no Food Department, and so the question of civilian food supply fell under the auspices of the Commerce Department - which created something of a tautological outcome to the Conference.

No price control was adopted. Instead it was concluded that a broad facilitation of "free trade" would solve the problem. A pervasive de-centralization of authority over the purchase and movement of foodstuffs was recommended and provinces were encouraged to lift bans on exports and allow foodstuffs to move freely about the sub-continent. The difficulty of transportation during wartime was also addressed. A Central Transport Authority was established and protocols for the priority movement of food grains were established. The idea was that these measures, alone, would cause prices in deficit provinces to stabilize. As for the more immediate "scramble for supplies, rising prices, competitive buying, reluctance to sell, and speculation,"¹³⁹ that were making the lives of the poor increasingly difficult; the President of the conference advocated a "process of tightening up the belt."¹⁴⁰

In the coming months food did, in fact, begin to move - and the belt did tighten. Major General Wood, in charge of military transport, testified before the Famine Enquiry Commission that he himself "was procuring and moving a considerable amount of food all the time, and in 1941-42 commenced to wonder why."¹⁴¹ That the Major-General himself was uncertain why such quantities were being shifted - and to whom - is telling. What was manifest was that food grains were, in fact, moving *out* of the hands of those who needed it most - the rural poor - and into the warehouses of large capitalists, the military, government, and also unspecified points outside Bengal. In this regard, Major-General Wood later argued before the Famine Enquiry Commission that the deregulation of the movement of food grains established at the Fourth Price Control Conference was "the most significant single factor that led to the food crisis."¹⁴²

In Calcutta it was now clear that rice had become a central strategic necessity in the increasingly complicated chessboard of war in Asia. War-related labor actions were

nothing new, but now that war production was in full gear, government and industrial employers were quicker to grant demands for wartime concessions. In February 1942 Calcutta Corporation workers, whose strike in March of 1940 for wartime "dearness allowances" had ended in police firings, again threatened a strike for access to subsidized foodstuffs. In response this time, the Corporation quickly opened food stores to sell rice and other staples to its employees at concession rates.¹⁴³ This kept sweepers, waste workers and other essential city services working, which was now well known to be necessary to the prosecution of war. But labor actions continued to be widespread - particularly in relation to "dearness allowances" and subsidized food stores.¹⁴⁴

On March 3rd of 1942, the Government of India, fully cognizant of mounting difficulties, advised the Bengal Chamber of Commerce that "industrial concerns should adopt the practice of making themselves responsible for feeding their employees."¹⁴⁵ Toward this end it was suggested that industrial firms should keep three months of food grains, sufficient to all its employees, in stock. This injunction, according to the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, was not a warning based on a shortage of supplies, but rather was a precautionary measure related to A.R.P. planning. Beginning in March the appeal was broadened to include the general public, and uncertainty proliferated.¹⁴⁶ This measure, according to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, had "extremely adverse" effects on the food supply, and widespread hoarding soon began by industrial interests and private citizens alike.¹⁴⁷ Azizul Haque, former speaker of the Legislative Assembly in Bengal and now High Commissioner for India in London, pointed to the deleterious effects on the food supply that the injunction to stockpile had entailed: "if a Government asks its people publicly to hoard stocks for three months," he testified, "the tendency [will] be for everybody to store up stocks for six months or more, and to that extent the stocks are immobilized."¹⁴⁸ By June the price of rice had risen an additional 30%.¹⁴⁹

Concurrent with the A.R.P.'s call for stockpiling food were intensive negotiations at the national level. Sir Stanford Cripps, sanctioned by the House of Commons in London, arrived in Delhi in March to attempt to broker a political solution to the impasse between India and Britain. At length, negotiations with the Indian National Congress broke down around the all-important question of war support.¹⁵⁰ Government of India

Reforms Commissioner, Henry Hodson, discussing the failure to reach agreement noted that, "Linlithgow's opinion of Indian character and political sense was," in any case, "not high."¹⁵¹ Nor did his office seem to have any understanding of the difficulties that the Indian population was facing. On the ground in India, food security was increasingly the over-determining problem of the day. A telling anecdote by Hodson illustrates the disconnect and is worth quoting at length:

A grand charity ball was announced to take place at Viceroy's House in New Delhi during the visit of Sir Stafford Cripps in March 1942. When it was cancelled I assumed that Cripps himself had protested, but the *Times* resident correspondent told me that he had been responsible. He had warned the Viceroy's private secretary that demonstrations against the ball were planned, denouncing the scarcity and high price of food and mocking the lavish supper menu that had been published in the press; his advice that this would do great harm to the image of British rule at a critical time had been reluctantly accepted.¹⁵²

The ultimate failure of the Cripps Mission was disappointing, but Linlithgow was pragmatic, "We can carry on easily enough," he told Hodson, "so long as the war lasts and people are afraid of stirring up too much trouble."¹⁵³

"Denial"

Under the mandates of the Government of India Act of 1935, Ministers of provincial Legislative Assemblies had been given a wide range of administrative responsibilities that comprehensively limited the central government's *accountability* in regards to regional affairs. The real limits of the power allocated to elected officials by the Act, however, proved to be surprisingly contingent. The Governor - appointed by the His Majesty's Government (HMG) in London - retained certain broad "discretionary powers," including the authority to suspend ministerial authority altogether and enforce emergency rule in accordance with Section 93, as had been done in the seven former Congress provinces. Furthermore, in the "special circumstances" related to the prosecution of war, the breadth of emergency powers available to the Governor - even without Section 93 - proved expansive.

Sometime toward the end of March 1942 Governor Herbert was instructed through central government channels to begin a scorched earth campaign in coastal

Bengal. The vast deltaic coastline of Bengal, until this time, had been left almost entirely undefended by the British military.¹⁵⁴ The recommendation was, however, not for a concerted effort at organizing military defense, but rather for an ad hoc campaign of "Denial." In their landings in Malaya and Burma, Japanese forces had made expedient use of existing resources on the ground to facilitate advance. In Bengal, no doubt, they would do the same. If - the rhetoric went - the colonial government itself could make a preemptive strike and denude the coastal region of the resources that might enable invasion; they would be able to discourage attack without unnecessary expenditures on military defense. "Denial," was the term used for the various measures undertaken by the Government of India ostensibly to deprive invading Japanese forces the means of sustaining an advance on Calcutta in an over-land attack.

Rice:

In March of 1942 Governor Herbert - without any consultation with elected officials - appointed British civil servant, and former Personal Secretary to the Viceroy, L.G. Pinnell, "Special Officer" in general charge of "denial" operations in Bengal. Shortly thereafter, Herbert summoned the Joint Secretary of the Commerce and Labor Department, M. K. Kirpalani - also appointed by the Governor himself - and assigned him the more specific task of implementing the first prong of "denial," the appropriation of all "surplus" rice throughout coastal Bengal. Kirpalani later testified that he "was asked to get this done almost immediately by the Governor."¹⁵⁵ The Bengal Ministry, meanwhile, were out of session for the Easter recess, and by the time they had returned "denial" operations were underway.

Kirpalani estimated that in the three districts involved – Midnapore, Khulna and Barisal - there would be a surplus of at least 123,000 tons of rice; the "denial" of which posed an estimable challenge.¹⁵⁶ Kirpalani approached M. A. Ispahani, whose firm had considerable experience in the rice markets of Bengal, though limited experience procuring in any of these three districts. More worrisome was that Ispahani was a staunch supporter of the Muslim League with intimate ties to Muhammad Ali Jinnah.¹⁵⁷ His appointment was sure to draw fire from Huq, Mookerji and Congress supporters. Ispahani himself recognized the potential for contention, and so suggested that the

commission be given, in name, to an agent of his, Mirza Ali Akhbar, while Ispahani Ltd. would guarantee the standing accounts.¹⁵⁸ Because the Governor was anxious to get the work underway at once, the Joint Secretary quickly agreed and advanced 2 million rupees to Ispahani's man to expedite the process.¹⁵⁹

When Ministers got word of the plan already underway, there was a great "hue and cry" in the Assembly. Fazlul Huq accused Herbert of having acted "as if the Government of India Act in Bengal had been suspended, and he was at the head of an administration under Section 93 of the Act."¹⁶⁰ Members of the opposition, particularly Hindus, decried the Governor's appointment of "political opponents" who, they said, would use the platform of "denial" to penetrate the countryside in order "to make political propaganda there."¹⁶¹ The protests were loud enough to force the Governor's hand. Four other agents were quickly appointed; one, H. Dutta, was a Hindu Mahasabite put forward by S. P. Mookerji, another, B. K. Poddar, was advanced by the Scheduled Caste Ministers, a third, Ahmed Khan, was a (Muslim) Congress man, and lastly, Ashutosh Bhattacharjee made the list by dint of his commercial connections.¹⁶² The contentious political nature of these appointments, together with the inexperience of several,¹⁶³ contributed greatly to the pervasive chaos and corruption that characterized the whole "denial" scheme.

In Bengal there are three seasons of paddy production: the *boro* crop planted in the winter and harvested in spring, the *aus* crop, planted in early spring and harvested in late summer, and the *aman* crop, planted in late spring and harvested in winter. Because the *aman* crop was planted just prior to the monsoon season and receives rain-fed irrigation, it was the most consistent and abundant of the three crops, accounting for at least 75% of the total rice production in Bengal.¹⁶⁴ For cultivators, once the *aman* crop had been marketed, or consumed, a long season of hardship often followed. The *aman* crop, harvested between the end of November and the beginning of February, for this reason, was desperately anticipated in the "starvation" months, when most cultivators also had to take loans in order to survive. According to Ispahani, "the Bengal cultivator, [even] before the war, had three months of feasting, five months of subsistence diet and four months of starvation."¹⁶⁵ The merchants (*paikars*, *beparis*, or *farias*) who bought the

cultivators' paddy were also money and rice lenders, which made trade relationships that much more intricate. Difficulty was compounded in that, during these lean months the price of rice and paddy would inevitably increase, so that a loan taken at this time was a disproportionate burden to pay off. Then with the *aman* harvest in, an abundance of paddy would make its way to markets and prices would again sink. The indebted cultivator was forced to sell at deflated prices to pay off debts - starting the cycle of feast and famine yet again. The relationships that cultivators were able to forge with merchants and creditors were critical to their very survival. Furthermore, in Bengal there were tens of thousands of petty traders who bought from cultivators,¹⁶⁶ and relationships were highly personalized. A memorandum drafted by the Bengal Rice Mills Association describing these relationships - before "denial" - is worth quoting at length:

In Bengal, as probably in many parts of the world, the trade is not carried out as a single unconnected transaction. Most of the *beparis, paikars*, merchants, etc. have got an undefined but fairly rigid area of operation, for each and every person in the trade has got his own sellers, *beparis, paikars* and mills which he has been in trade association with for many years. Frequently this association has not merely meant the sale and purchase of the goods year after year for many years...such transactions have frequently been carried out as partly cash and partly credit transactions on the basis of a running account. The association has been in many cases one of several generations. Mutual influence and obligations between the parties in such cases... has therefore been enormous.¹⁶⁷

In 1942, agents and sub-agents for denial operations were enlisted indiscriminately and according to political manipulations, and these existing market systems were completely ignored. Credit relations, patronage, commercial familiarity and existing patterns of trade all collapsed, leading to a dangerous breakdown in the operations of the rice trade in Bengal, almost overnight. Resistance to governmental schemes was met with force, and without the necessary expertise or knowledge of existing agrarian relations, extraordinary means were often resorted to:

Persons acting on behalf of Government [did] not always act either tactfully or fairly and the [Bengal Rice Mills Association] got the information that in many cases undue pressure was used on the growers and sellers to compel them to sell to people entirely unknown to them...this further stiffened the resolve of the growers. A few of the agents of Government...did not know the real and actual sources whence substantial stocks could be collected and were further handicapped by the attitude of the sellers... this exasperated them and also

enraged them especially, because...Government was putting pressure on them for showing better purchases. At this stage it was reported that considerable pressure amounting in some cases to oppression was used on many people for obtaining stocks and it was not un-often said that such action was not merely countenanced and tolerated, but backed by local officers of Government who had been instructed to help the agents.¹⁶⁸

Not only were growers reluctant to part with their product, but the pre-existing petty merchants approached by denial agents were likewise harassed to sell under Government conditions. Their stocks were also reported to have been summarily seized for non-compliance.¹⁶⁹

Special Officer L. G. Pinnell, for his part, rued that "for anyone who knows the Bengal cultivator it was a completely heart-breaking job."¹⁷⁰ But a job is a job, and as such he also, "had no objection to 'taking the gloves off.'"¹⁷¹ For the most part, however, Pinnell was careful to gauge the threat of resistance and adjust to the opposition. "If we had moved along certain routes," he noted, "the transport would have been obstructed or looted by the people."¹⁷² In many areas, however, despite the threat - and at times reality of looting¹⁷³ - Government was able to exercise their scheme without direct violence. In this regard Pinnell testified: "We got away with it by luck and money."¹⁷⁴ At the beginning of the denial scheme the maximum price to be paid by denial agents was fixed at the current market price, *plus* 10%. But with the contagion of agents combing the countryside looking to snap up all "surplus" rice, this ceiling soon became market price, and prices kept rising.¹⁷⁵ As the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce noted: "the fact that it was the Government who were buying in the market... was sufficient to induce both a rise in prices and a feeling of panic among the general public."¹⁷⁶

Charges of corruption were also rampant, and not easy to dismiss.¹⁷⁷ Nawab Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, Government of Bengal Minister of Agriculture, testified before the Famine Enquiry Commission that denial agents had been operating well outside the stipulated "denial" zone, "pretending in other areas that they were buying on behalf of Government."¹⁷⁸ In addition, "owing to the practical monopoly of Government agents in [denial] districts, others flocked to non-denial areas and affected markets, established organization and connections."¹⁷⁹ In short, though the objectives of "denial" were ostensibly limited to certain coastal districts, denial created sharp dislocations in the

trade that threw Bengal rice markets, as a whole, into a state of complete disarray. Despite protests from many quarters, including the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, "denial" continued unabated for many months to come.¹⁸⁰

The question of the real impact on actual stocks of paddy and rice that denial represented is impossible to determine. By official account the total of purchases transferred to Government warehouses, was rather small - 40,000 tons.¹⁸¹ This number, however, does not represent the actual extent of purchases made. Much of the paddy that Government purchased remained where it was in the countryside due to a weak mill capacity and difficulties with transportation during the war, effectively frozen from the market, but unrecorded. No records exist either to determine what percentage of the record exports leaving Bengal at the time were related to purchases made - officially or unofficially - under the nebulous umbrella of "denial." Pinnell himself testified that exports were taking place without Government authorization and that backroom deals were being struck between large-scale dealers and transportation officials.¹⁸² In the 24 Parganas, south of Calcutta, by May 1st, at least one hundred boat-loads of rice per month were "getting away." The District Magistrate, in a secret memo to the Joint Secretary, estimated that if this pace could be maintained through August all "surplus" rice would be cleared by the end of the summer.¹⁸³ But though this massive effort was being undertaken under Government authority, and in relation to "denial," none of the rice or paddy involved appears to have been destined for government warehouses. Instead, special permits for boat transport were being granted to rice mill owners and large stockists so that *they* could "buy up and remove most of the surplus stock."¹⁸⁴

Boats:

The special permits mentioned above were necessary in relation to the second main prong of the Government of India's scheme - "boat denial." The coastal region of Bengal lies in the vast and volatile Ganges river delta. The silt of the Ganges and its tributaries has fertilized the delta for millennia, and as such it is one of the most productive agricultural regions in India. The Padma, Jamuna and Meghna rivers, with rich cultural, as well as economic significance, converge in a seemingly infinite and shifting series of tidal estuaries, bayous and backwaters that constitute the coastal belt of

Bengal. The people of this region are deeply connected not only to the land that sustains them, but just as importantly to the waters that move them, that bathe them, that feed them, and that connect them at all to the world beyond. The "country boats" of Bengal, in this context, were as much an inextricable part of the landscape as the waterways themselves.

Potters in Chittagong depended on country boats to move the earth that was necessary for their livelihood. The *khalasis* of Noakhali, expert at navigating the shifting deltaic tides from Midnapore to Burma, also depended on country boats to survive. The *char* cultivators of Khulna and Bakargunj transplanted their paddy and harvested their crops from extremely fertile islands off the coast by means of country boats, and even the *babus* of Calcutta moved to and from their native villages onboard these same river-craft. Jute also moved to and from markets on country boats, as did paddy and rice. The fishermen of Bengal, the largest producers of foodstuffs other than rice, also depended on these boats, both for netting in the rivers and bayous, as well as for voyaging out to sea. In short, country boats were an unequivocally essential component of the economy of Bengal.

On April 2nd, after plans for "rice denial" had been leaked in the press, Governor Herbert stood before the Bengal Legislative Assembly and announced: "The other form of denial to the enemy that is intended is to prevent any means of transport from falling into his hands."¹⁸⁵ A Press Note was released the following day informing district officials that all country boats capable of carrying ten or more persons should be registered in the coastal districts of Midnapore, Hooghly, Howrah, 24-Parganas, Jessore, Khulna, Bakargunj, Faridpur, Tippera, Dacca, Noakhali and Chittagong - all districts where water-conveyance constituted, by far, the most important means of travel and trade. In the subsequent weeks 66,563 watercraft were registered. The active implementation of "boat denial" was announced on May 1st, and though the plan was to be executed only in the event that "the invasion of any district in Bengal [was] imminent,"¹⁸⁶ the confiscation and/or destruction of thousands of country boats began in Bengal almost immediately.

The "denial" of country boats was the specific job of Special Officer, L. G. Pinnell. His license of autocracy again drew quick protest. In a letter to Herbert, Fazlul

Huq complained that in relation to "boat denial," the Governor "seem[ed] to have been consulting with Military authorities in secret and discussing plans with permanent officials... without taking Ministers into confidence."¹⁸⁷ Military authorities, meanwhile, had expressed it necessary to "reduce the boats to the absolute minimum required for the subsistence of the people."¹⁸⁸ By what matrix military authorities were able to gauge the subsistence requirements of an already impoverished Bengali population is impossible to guess, but "what was definitely and openly allowed [was] about 6,800 boats."¹⁸⁹ In the coming weeks 46,146 country boats were confiscated; some were sunk, others burnt, and still others warehoused in military compounds where they rotted in the open air.¹⁹⁰ Some 20,000 boats, Pinnell admitted "were hidden and could not be traced."¹⁹¹ Had this not been the case, things may have been even worse for Bengal.

However, if the initial objective of denial - as was officially stated - was the "complete destruction of internal economy, trade and administration,"¹⁹² nothing could have furthered that goal more effectively than the removal and destruction of Bengal's country boats. From the beginning, the Famine Enquiry Commission reported, "it was recognized that the removal of a large number of boats from the delta, in which communications [means of transport] are almost entirely by river and not by rail or road, would cause considerable hardship and difficulties."¹⁹³ And that it did. "In the districts of Khulna, 24 Parganas, Bakargunj and Tippera, it completely broke the economy of the fishing class."¹⁹⁴ In districts where people were involved in pottery making, an important and substantial industry that required large inland shipments of clay, many people "were put out of trade and... their families became destitute."¹⁹⁵ The productive and important paddy fields at the mouth of the delta in several districts could not be cultivated, and the primary means of transportation of people, as well as goods and services, was almost entirely crippled.

Compensation was initially only given to the owners of boats, which meant little to those who made a living from these same boats. Owners were often from the wealthier strata of society and boats were leased to those whose livelihoods depended on them (fishermen, *khalasis*, potters, cultivators, *paikars*, etc.) These workers at first received nothing. After protests from several quarters, however, it was decided to give them three months compensation. For this segment of the population, already living on the margins

of bare subsistence, three months compensation meant little. The livelihood of generations was lost in a matter of weeks, and for that loss, three months of wages were received - wages that even before they were dispersed had lost considerable value against a continually increasing cost of living - and many began to starve. Apart from the catastrophic consequences of such a policy on the existing economic and social structures of Bengal, the enormity of the undertaking also brought home to residents of the countryside the extent of British fears - as well as their ruthlessness. For now, it looked to many, as if it were the British - not the Japanese - who were launching an attack on the Bengal countryside.

Territory:

At the same time the military was entrenching itself in and around the commercial and strategic centers of the province - even while administrative workers were removing their kin from "non-family areas" and non-essential government employees were receiving "exodus allowances" to relocate.¹⁹⁶ Aerodromes, army encampments and supply dumps were carved out of the heavily populated countryside south of Calcutta - the same area from which rice had been "getting away" by the boat-load. The Minister of Commerce received directions from the Governor that a total of 47 areas had to be cleared in as little as 24 hours.¹⁹⁷ In Chittagong District a sub-divisional officer received a similar order: he was to evacuate 20 villages within 48 hours. In Diamond Harbor an order for military appropriation of land resulted in the summary eviction of at least 36,000 people. In Noakhali another 70,000 were dislocated.¹⁹⁸ The total number of mostly poor tenants evicted from their lands in relation to such measures, however, is not possible to determine.¹⁹⁹ The impact on those dislocated, according to the Famine Commission, was more easily assessed: "compensation was off course paid, but there is little doubt that the members of many of these families became famine victims in 1943."²⁰⁰

Uneasy about the military's image in the country side, Government issued an order in May to appoint police guides and interpreters "to facilitate the work of troops and at the same time to reassure villagers against any apprehension or panic."²⁰¹ In addition, Herbert sent out a memorandum to all District Magistrates reminding them that

"everything possible should be done by propaganda...to instill into the general public the lesson that troops are their friends and that they have nothing to fear from them."²⁰²

However, the circular went on, the public should also be warned that troops would not be confined to "evacuated" areas, and in this regard, when and where military exercises were underway: "it would be far more satisfactory for [the public] and everyone else concerned if they remain in their houses, as otherwise they might only get in the way and suffer unnecessary inconvenience."²⁰³ The Bengal Home Guard was also being organized just at this time, and arrangements for the guards were creating tension between the representatives of the provincial government and the King's representative, John Herbert. Fazlul Huq complained of "the mischief of officialisation of Home Guards" as yet another example of the Imperial Government making a "mockery of Provincial Autonomy."²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, national politics were also becoming ever more embroiled in controversies emerging from "denial." Resentment simmered in the wake of the failed Cripps Mission and relations between the Indian National Congress and the colonial government were strained to the breaking point. Even before the official announcement of denial policies, Gandhi was warning against the intended measures in his weekly *Harijan*. In the March 22nd edition, sub-titled "Scorched Earth," he reminded his readers, "India is not fighting. Her conquerors are."²⁰⁵ He continued crossly, "are we to contemplate with equanimity, or feel the glow of bravery and sacrifice in destroying life or property at the prospect of India's earth being scorched and everything destroyed in order that the enemy's march be hampered?"²⁰⁶ Three weeks later, again in *Harijan*, Gandhi warned that the people of Bengal were already "suffering from famine," and explained that military evacuations taking place in eastern Bengal were being "left in the hands of many and petty officials," creating local acrimony and severe hardship.²⁰⁷ By May 3rd the consequences and scope of "denial" were becoming ever clearer, and Gandhi wrote with increasing alarm: "No promise of compensation can be any comfort for the dispossession of...tenements. To the poor people it is like taking away their bodies. The dispossession of the country boats is almost like that of tenements. To deprive the people of East Bengal of their boats is like cutting off a vital limb."²⁰⁸ Similarly, the "denial" of rice, Gandhi wrote, could not be countenanced: "people cannot be asked or advised to

starve or die of thirst for fear of the Japanese helping themselves to the people's provisions or water."²⁰⁹

"Denial," however, continued unabated. Instructions were given in May for the confiscation, destruction or removal of all mechanical transport; private cars, bicycles, carriages and bullock carts "not required for Military or Civil Defense purposes."²¹⁰ The iconic Victoria Memorial was "camouflaged" in cow dung, and plans were hatched to blow up as many as 17 bridges in and around Calcutta.²¹¹

The Denial Resolution

It is a point that has received little historical notice, but the colonial government's "denial" policy also played a very central role in the dynamics of the fiercest conflict between the Indian population and colonial rule since the rebellion of 1857. Following Gandhi's cue, the leadership of the Indian National Congress took direct aim at the scorched earth campaign in Bengal, and their protests had a profound impact on the way that the "Quit India" movement played out. Though the All-India Congress Working Committee's resolutions of July 14th and August 8th of 1942 are most often cited as the signal events that led to the "Open Rebellion," the repressive and absolutist strategies of the colonial state, which were an over-determining force, were forged in reference to an earlier resolution - that of July 10th, known in official circles as the "denial resolution."²¹²

After the failure of the Cripps Mission in April, the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery and Viceroy Linlithgow, waited apprehensively for Congress's next move. On the 10th of July the Working Committee met at Wardha, and on the same day passed a resolution that was subsequently published in the nationalist media. The resolution, echoing Gandhi's earlier publications in *Harijan*, began with "denial:"

Whereas various complaints have been received regarding Governments orders for evacuation of villages, lands and buildings without due notice and proper compensation, seizure and destruction of country-boats, even where life is impossible without them, requisition of vehicles without proper compensation and regard for needs of civil population, Working Committee issue following instructions for guidance of the people concerned...with regard to evacuation and other orders involving temporary or permanent loss of landed property full compensation should be demanded...there should be no interference with use or disposal of private property except with consent of owner or on adequate payment

of compensation. In case of requisition of boats full compensation should be demanded and no boats should be surrendered until question of compensation is settled. In areas surrounded by water where boats are indispensable for normal everyday life they should not be surrendered at all.²¹³

When Amery received the draft of this resolution in London, he wrote to Linlithgow in alarm. Such a resolution by Congress, he warned the Viceroy, amounted to the declaration of a "parallel authority acting in defiance of established Government in respect of measures necessary for the prosecution of war."²¹⁴ Amery, while anticipating a "more general" resolution from Wardha, urged Linlithgow to take "drastic action with Gandhi and the Working Committee - such as immediate arrest pending prosecution - and with Press - in any case it would seem necessary to impound so far as possible all copies of papers carrying the Resolution."²¹⁵ On the same day, he quickly penned a minute to Winston Churchill warning the Prime Minister: "we are dealing with men who are now definitely our *enemies*...to appease them or delay in striking at them can only discourage the army and all other loyal elements."²¹⁶ The Secretary of State also personally authorized extending the Viceroy de facto emergency powers to deal with the situation immediately and forcefully. In the meantime, he brought the question of such authority before the War Cabinet in London for advice. The War Cabinet convened on the 13th of July and supported Amery's authorization of Linlithgow's emergency powers, agreeing that the "denial resolution" amounted to treason.²¹⁷

Fearing that the immediate arrest of Congress leadership would precipitate (perhaps violent) mass movements, the Viceroy argued for restraint, while promising prompt action in the event that the directions to resist denial given in the resolution were actually executed.²¹⁸ Amery reminded the Viceroy that "feeling may inevitably run high among ignorant villagers and people on whom hardship will *necessarily* be inflicted,"²¹⁹ and he urged Linlithgow to adopt harsher measures with Gandhi and the Working Committee rather than "merely punish[ing] the wretched villager who refuses to hand over his boat or his bullock cart."²²⁰ Linlithgow, in response, noted the "regrettable spirit of defeatism" that had gripped the country, and again argued that a militant response to the July 10th resolution would only inflame anti-colonial sentiment further. The policy should be to wait and see. Amery deferred to Linlithgow for the time being, but the July 10th resolution would remain central to the colonial response to Congress initiatives.

On the 14th of July the "general resolution" came out.²²¹ This main resolution did not deal directly with "denial," but was, instead, a plea for Indian independence, deeply couched in the prevailing rhetoric of "defense." In the wake of colonial intransigence, the Working Committee warned, "a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms" was sweeping the nation. In this context, the resolution continued, "Congress is anxious to avoid the experience of Malaya, Singapore and Burma." The only means of defending India, Congress concluded, was for Britain to agree to grant the nation complete independence, at which time a treaty could be struck with the Allies for the continuance of war against Japan. Without such an agreement there could be no partnership, the defense of India would remain an impossibility, and India would fall to the Axis. Finally, Congress warned rather vaguely of a "widespread struggle...under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi" if Britain refused to come to terms. An additional meeting was scheduled for August 7th.

In a telegram to Linlithgow on the 16th of July, Amery adopted a dismissive attitude toward this "main resolution." It might be the case, he wrote, that the main resolution would necessitate no immediate action, but that of July 10th, he again insisted, could easily be understood to be in direct breach of Defense of India Rules 38 (1) (a), dealing with acts "prejudicial" to the authority of His Majesty's Government. Amery again advised Linlithgow that he "already [had] ground for action if and when expedient."²²² Linlithgow continued to argue for restraint, finding some encouragement in the "conciliatory" tone of the July 14th resolution.²²³ He also saw a possibility that the July 14th resolution could be used to drive a wedge between religious communities. He assured Amery that he was doing everything possible to "energize propaganda" against Congress in the hopes of "stimulating" open denunciations of the main resolution amongst "Muslims, Depressed Classes & co.," who were assumed to be more loyal to the war-effort.²²⁴ The Viceroy sent a special telegram to Bengal Governor, John Herbert, enlisting him to encourage Fazlul Huq to issue a public condemnation of the Congress resolution.²²⁵ Huq declined, preferring to maintain his pluralist position in Bengal, and resisting Government bait to publicly cross Congress.²²⁶

With his propaganda campaign showing mixed results, Linlithgow was, meanwhile, making less rhetorical preparations against Congress. Consulting with his

own legal council, the Viceroy confirmed Amery's opinion that the Defense of India Rules could be invoked against Gandhi and the Working Committee in response to both resolutions. The "denial resolution," however, represented a more clearly actionable offence in that it contained "direct and authoritative instruction to the people to interfere with the administration of law."²²⁷ As such, the resolution of July 10th fell foul not only of the Defense of India Rules, but also of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which gave the colonial government grounds to declare the Congress *as a whole*, not merely the Working Committee, an unlawful association, greatly expanding the emergency powers with which to suppress any eventual popular movement.

The resolution of July 10th was thus central to the three-staged plan that Linlithgow developed to deal with the "open rebellion," and the proposed resistance to "denial" central to the brutality with which the "Quit India" movement would be dealt. The first stage, the propaganda campaign against Congress, was gaining little traction. The second stage would involve not only the arrest of Gandhi and the Working Committee, but also the arrest of the leaders of Provincial Congress Committees under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The third stage would be to promulgate the Emergency Powers Ordinance, which would allow broad impunity to suppress any movement that followed the second stage.²²⁸ Secretary of State Amery brought Linlithgow's plan of action before the War Cabinet in London on the 5th of August and won approval the next day. The course of action that government would take against Congress and anti-colonial protest was thus established even before the Working Committee had convened to issue their much more famous August 8th declaration.

Quit India

Winston Churchill needed little convincing that the hard line proposed by the Government of India was warranted. The Prime Minister had been a long time and particularly staunch advocate of Empire. "India," he had said some years earlier, "is a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the equator."²²⁹ The Cripps Mission had been salt in Churchill's wounds after losing Singapore. Cripps, a political opponent of Churchill's, had become Speaker of the House of Commons and a member of the War Cabinet only after the defeats in Southeast Asia. His appointment as emissary to

negotiate a political settlement in India in March of 1942 was further evidence of a lack of parliamentary confidence in Churchill's own imperial acumen. During the mission, Churchill worked behind the scenes directly with Linlithgow to undermine Cripps' positions.²³⁰

The "denial resolution" had prompted the Secretary of State to warn the Prime Minister that the leaders of Congress were dangerous, but it is likely that Churchill understood freedom fighters in India as "enemies" even without further advice. Already entrenched in pitched battles on three continents, the unrest in India struck Churchill as yet another front in a "Total War" that Britain had yet to master. On the 11th of August he chastised Amery for using the word "independence" in a broadcast from London, and on the 2nd of September, while preparing a statement for the House of Commons on the worsening situation in Quit India, he exploded to his Secretary of State, "I hate Indians. They are beastly people with a beastly religion."²³¹

What became known as the 'Quit India' resolution was passed in Bombay by the All-India Congress Working Committee on the night of August 8th, 1942. The terms of the resolution were very similar to those put forward in the July 14th resolution and the nature of the movement that would follow if Congress demands were not met remained vague.²³² Early the next morning, the leadership of Congress was rounded up and summarily jailed and the Congress organization, as a whole, was declared illegal. Maulana Azad, President of the Working Committee, admitted that this swift move by the British had caught the leadership on their back foot. "If the Government," he wrote, "had at least shown a conciliatory attitude there would have been scope for further discussions."²³³ The sudden over-determining response by the colonial state came as a surprise. Of the August 8th resolution historian Sumit Sarkar too has argued, "far from ruling out further negotiations, the whole thing may conceivably have been an exercise in brinkmanship and a bargaining counter which was followed by an explosion only because the British had decided on a policy of wholesale repression."²³⁴ But the fact of the matter is that even before this resolution had been issued, in response to the "denial resolution," the die had already been cast.

Without leadership, nationalist and anti-colonial elements across the country were left to their own devices and interpretations. Gandhi's appeals to non-violence had been recently attenuated by his increasingly and uncharacteristically extreme rhetoric throughout 1942. Even since the spring Gandhi had been urging Britain to "leave India to God or anarchy," expressing a final willingness to risk "complete lawlessness" if such would be the price of freedom.²³⁵ On the 8th of August he gave his now famous "Do or Die" speech, which, while still advocating non-violence, expressed a tone of finality that would energize the intensity of the movement.²³⁶ With the arrest of Gandhi and both national and provincial Congress leadership, the masses of India proceeded with their own interpretation of "Do or Die." Disruptions of transport, communication lines, factory operations, and open challenges to police and governmental authority began in most urban centers immediately. Violence moved into the countryside subsequently, with peasants participating in open rebellion in large numbers. In rural districts of Bihar and the United Provinces railway tracks were cut, telegraph poles were downed, goods-sheds were looted and police stations ransacked. By the 15th of August things had spiraled out of control to the extent that Linlithgow had authorized the military, in aid of civil power, to begin machine-gunning saboteurs from the air.²³⁷ But the movement only continued to gain strength, and on the 31st of August Linlithgow telegraphed Winston Churchill and confided, "I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security."²³⁸

In Bengal, the pattern of disturbances followed the all-India model, with disturbances breaking out in Calcutta and Dacca shortly after the arrest of Congress leaders, and violence spreading to the countryside subsequently. Student demonstrations began on August 10th in both cities, and picked up momentum in the following days. The police and the Civic Guards were mobilized to deal with widespread transportation disruptions and vocal demonstrations. Military reinforcements were requested as the violence escalated. Scuffles broke out between the public and the police, and on the 14th police firings killed two in Calcutta.²³⁹ Marwari industrialists, led by Gandhi's staunch ally in Calcutta, G.D. Birla, organized strikes at jute mills and steel works in and around the city. At the Kesoram Cotton Mills, Birla's own textile mill in Metiabruz, striking

workers clashed with police on the 24th, and other serious incidents were reported from the jute mills at Cossipore and Chitpur. The Imperial Tobacco Company was also attacked by a mob of at least 1000, and five were killed in police firings. In Calcutta alone, by the beginning of September, 20 protesters had been killed by the police, and 229 injured, including 74 police.²⁴⁰

By the end of the month, urban demonstrations had petered out but were gaining strength in the countryside. In Midnapore, a district just south-west of Calcutta, the "open rebellion" took firm root. Local activists organized attacks on police stations, post offices, transportation facilities and other symbols of imperial rule, and under the remnants of Congress leadership, an alternative "national government" (the Tamluk Jatiya Sarkar) was founded. A weekly journal, *Biplabi*, was also established to report on socio-political events in the district. With 57 army battalions mobilized across India, the 'Quit India' movement was suppressed in many rural areas of the country by main force, but due to organizational sophistication in Midnapore, the movement held together and proved an enduring problem for colonial authorities for years to come. Rebellion had a strong foothold in Midnapore, and denial policies, increasing scarcity of essential commodities, and outrage at military heavy-handedness, created conditions for a sustained movement under dedicated leadership.²⁴¹ In other parts of the province many of these same factors blunted overt political expressions among the peasantry, as the hardships of material scarcity began to unravel social networks and undermine political solidarity.

Economic Warfare

In the districts rice and paddy prices continued to rise precipitously as the lean season fast approached. A statutory ceiling on rice and paddy prices was established on July 1st and exports from the province banned later in the month. But prices were moving too fast for government to keep step. The controlled price announced on July 1st was already below prevailing market rates, which drew protests from stockists who would be operating at a loss for recent purchases if they sold their grains. The price was adjusted accordingly, but black markets had already begun functioning on a large scale.²⁴² By August official stocks of rice in Calcutta were exceedingly low, and

Government began worrying in earnest about feeding labor in war-production factories.²⁴³ About 100 control shops were established in the city to feed a large number of industrial employees and a Directorate of Civil Supplies was haphazardly set-up. "Denial" mastermind, L. G. Pinnell, was appointed Director of Civil Supplies and large purchases were made on government account from Birbhum district, north of Calcutta, at prices well above the price ceiling fixed by Government in July.²⁴⁴ Rumors spread. The fact that the government itself was buying at highly inflated prices led to increased panic in rice markets across the province and furthered proliferation of black markets, which again fueled inflation.

At the time the Directorate of Civil Supplies had little real organizational capability to manage even its own affairs. Established under the authority of the Department of Commerce and Labor, it had no Minister of its own, only Pinnell as Director, D. L. Mazumdar as Deputy Director, one Assistant Director, and two trained clerks. "Briefly speaking," Pinnell admitted, "the department never even had 'the staff to ask for the staff' for months."²⁴⁵ Recruitment was further handicapped by Pinnell's reluctance to comply with communal ratios, which would have necessitated hiring an equal proportion of Muslims to staff the directorate.²⁴⁶ Pinnell's attitude drew ire from the Muslim League, which further complicated administrative execution. Moreover, the very establishment of the Directorate spurred alarm. "Civil Supplies," it was well understood by now, meant only supply to "essential" industrial labor in and around Calcutta. The rest would be left to fate. Government alarm was read as inside information - if the government can't even feed Calcutta, what of the remaining 56 million in the province? Many of the big industrial firms had been granting "dearness allowances" and opening control shops since the beginning of 1942. Now, with prices failing to stabilize - and Japan within striking distance - anxieties proliferated.

The Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, representing all the major jute mills, the Paper Makers Association, the Engineering Association, the Tramways, and other industries, initiated its "Chambers Foodstuff Scheme" in late August 1942. According to this scheme, the Chamber itself began making large purchases of rice and paddy from districts and supplying it to its members directly. Constituent firms, meanwhile, continued bulk purchases on their own accounts, doubling down on the most essential

commodity in the province. Some months earlier the Central Government had imposed an Excess Profit Tax (E.P.T.) to raise revenue from industrial firms recording record profits in war industries. Now, with developing difficulties in the food supply, the Labor Department notified employers in August that expenditures on foodstuffs for "essential" employees could be written off against the E.P.T. And so, with the provincial government showing an "extremely panicky mentality themselves,"²⁴⁷ high prices were freely paid on bulk purchases by industrial interests with priority access to transportation facilities²⁴⁸ - and the expenditures were subsidized in the form of tax credits. Speculation in increasingly volatile commodity markets fueled the fire still further.

Between July 7th and August 21st alone, the price of rice rose 65%²⁴⁹ - and the "starvation season" in Bengal was about to begin.

In its first issue of *Biplabi* the Tamuk Congress Committee reported the attack and attempted sinking of a boat trying to carry rice away from the Danipur rice mill by a group of villagers on September 9th. Police, backed by armed soldiers, had been making arrests in the sub-division for a week past. The villagers were fired on by troops and three were killed.²⁵⁰ On September 14th, in Dinajpur, north Bengal, a crowd of as many as 10,000 villagers armed with lathis and other weapons, attacked government buildings and looted hoards of rice and paddy from stockists in the countryside.²⁵¹ Two weeks later a similar crowd gathered in Jalpaiguri, the chief grievance being a scarcity of paddy in the locality.²⁵² Local officials requisitioned paddy from large stockists and released it on local markets, pacifying the restive mob. In a weekly report during the same quarter the Deputy Inspector General of Police noted a sharp rise in 'dacoity cases.' "It is a very significant sign of the times," he wrote, "that in not less than 33 cases utensils and/or cloth are specifically mentioned amongst the stolen property and in seven cases foodstuffs were either the sole objective or were taken along with other things. It is many years since dacoits bothered themselves with such items."²⁵³

Faced with increasing disorder in Bengal, the Government of India adopted novel measures in accordance with the Defence of India Rules, and on September 8th, 1942 the Collective Fines Ordinance was executed for the first time in India. A fine of Rupees 10,000 was imposed on inhabitants of Bolpur in Bengal for unspecified "Congress-

inspired disturbances." ²⁵⁴ A similar fine was imposed on inhabitants of Birbhum district a week later, and collective fines were subsequently levied in Malda, Burdwan, Midnapore, Tippera, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Murshidabad, Hooghly and Dacca. The concept of the collective fine was to create a backlash against political agitators, who were known to be in a minority in most districts, at the (literal) expense of the already impoverished masses. ²⁵⁵ In this way a wedge could be driven between the poor and the "political."

Other measures were adopted for those with better resources. In September a secret memorandum was sent out by the central government to all provincial Governors outlining general guidelines for "economic warfare" against all corporate entities with anti-colonial leanings. ²⁵⁶ Provincial governments were requested to black-list companies associated with the nationalist movement, confiscate the funds of "unlawful associations," prosecute all contributors to the same, withhold advertisement from newspapers printing "anti-government reports," and otherwise seek to economically disadvantage sectors of the population in non-compliance with wartime authority. It was noted, furthermore, that "no public notice or warning of the action [to be taken] should be given in advance...and economic sanction [should] be enacted without publication of intent to do economic damage." ²⁵⁷ This makes it difficult to determine to what extent such orders were executed, but certainly the landscape of Bengal began to look more and more like a battlefield of "economic warfare" in the months and years to come.

At the same time, the more overt economics of warfare were undermining the financial system of India still further. Since the beginning of the war, India had been providing Britain with a large number of troops and supplies for its campaigns in the Middle-East, North Africa and Southeast Asia. Because India was recognized as a sovereign state, Britain was under obligation to pay for the Indian resources (both human and material) that it was utilizing across the globe. The Exchequer in London, however, was reluctant to part with the money that such exports from India entailed, knowing that the outlay of so much cash to India could spur inflation back home. Britain opted, instead, to float a massive I.O.U. to India in the form of "sterling balances" held on account by the Exchequer in London. In the meantime the Indian Government paid out large sums in relation to the war on Britain's (frozen) account. In order to cover these

expenses, the Reserve Bank of India printed money at an accelerating pace and by the end of the war the currency in circulation in India had increased six-fold.²⁵⁸

With inflation whittling away at the security of the sub-continent, Amery pressed the issue of sterling balances owed to India in the War Cabinet. Churchill, however, could not be convinced that anything at all was owed to India, but rather "burbled away endlessly" that Britain was India's *protector* not its debtor!²⁵⁹ India should simply be grateful that Britain was there to defend her. "It is an awful thing," wrote Churchill's Secretary of State for India,

dealing with a man like Winston who is at the same moment dictatorial, eloquent and muddleheaded. I am not sure that I ever got into his mind that India pays for the whole of her defense including British forces in India, or that there is no other possible way of reducing these accumulating balances except by stopping to buy Indian goods or employing Indian soldiers outside India.²⁶⁰

As for the rest of the Cabinet, Amery noted, "none of them ever really have the courage to stand up to Winston and tell him when he is making a fool of himself."²⁶¹ Needless to say, sterling balances on India's account continued accumulating in London, while rupee notes continued flying off the presses in India.

In the last week of September large demonstrations against colonial rule rocked Midnapore. Thousands of villagers marched on police stations and government offices in Tamluk, Nandigram, and Contai sub-divisions. Troops stationed in the area responded with overwhelming force, killing at least 44 in Tamluk alone, including Matangini Hazra, a 73 year old woman who would become an icon of the anti-British movement.²⁶² Villagers fought running battles with police and soldiers, blocking roads, burning down police *thanas*, and raising nationalist flags over government offices. The violence spread and was also directed against big landholders. The rent-collecting offices of the *zamindar* of Mahisadal were gutted, and the granary looted. Rice and paddy were distributed amongst the crowd and the grain bin was burnt to the ground.²⁶³ *Chowkidars'* tax record offices and Debt Conciliation Boards were attacked and documents destroyed, and uniforms of local police agents were burnt in effigy in many places across the district.²⁶⁴ Indiscriminate police firings were widely reported and evidence of military atrocities multiplied. In the pages of *Biplabi* there were stories of rape, looting, arson and

cold-blooded murder perpetrated by military troops. The situation was spiraling out of control.

Storm

On October 16th a strong wind was blowing and un-seasonal rains were falling in Calcutta. On the same day, Midnapore went silent. Not a word of news about prevailing conditions there reached Calcutta for the next several weeks to come. Even the Chief Editor of Calcutta's premier newspaper, *The Statesman*, heard neither fact nor rumor about what was happening in the rebellious region.²⁶⁵

It was only some weeks later revealed that on the 16th of October a massive cyclone and accompanying tidal wave had swept through the district of Midnapore, destroying paddy, houses, cattle, and communications.²⁶⁶ The Bengal Government later estimated the death toll to be 14,443, but accurate information was difficult to gather. Corpses lay scattered over several thousand square miles of devastated land, 7,400 villages were partly or wholly destroyed, and standing flood waters remained for weeks in at least 1,600 villages. Cholera, dysentery and other water-borne diseases flourished. 527,000 houses and 1,900 schools were lost, over 1000 square miles of the most fertile paddy land in the province was entirely destroyed, and the standing crop over an additional 3000 square miles was damaged.²⁶⁷ Amongst the worst hit sub-divisions were Tamluk and Contai, the same areas where revolutionary activities had been most violent: 786 villages in the two sub-divisions had disappeared without a trace.²⁶⁸ In all as many as 2.5 million people were killed, displaced or otherwise dispossessed by the cyclone.

When the devastation was finally announced, the Secretary of the Revenue Department, B. R. Sen, was put in charge of relief operations. The most pressing issue of concern was getting food into the cyclone-struck area. Sen approached the newly inaugurated Directorate of Civil Supplies for help, but was told that "since the Department of Civil Supplies found it impossible to cope with the demands made on them by different authorities, I should myself go into the market and buy what I could."²⁶⁹ The idea of simply going to the market in relation to a catastrophe of that magnitude was a patent absurdity, and many began to starve. In his *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, the only full length scholarly work on the Bengal famine, Paul

Greenough argues that the cyclone that struck Midnapore might be understood as the "first stage" of the famine. The question of the beginning and end of famine in Bengal, however, is an extremely complex one, and one that defies the fixing of any particular event as a sign post.

On October 28th, even before the Midnapore cyclone had been reported, the American Economic Warfare Board sent a communiqué to the Indian Government expressing deep concern about the "critical" food situation in India. The Government of India, however, and despite acute British concern about American perceptions, remained entrenched in denial. At the Sixth Price Control Conference, it was admitted that Central Government needed to concern itself with the civilian food supply and a "Basic Plan" was outlined to government control of inter-provincial trade, but no real measure towards feeding an increasingly hungry population were enacted. "Such food shortages as occur," the External Affairs Department responded to American Economic Warfare Board, "are local and mainly experienced by relatively small *urban* populations."²⁷⁰

Three days later, however, and a full three years after the war had begun, the Viceroy approved the establishment of a separate Government of India, Department of Food. No independent Food Member was, as of yet installed, instead, the Food Department portfolio was assigned to the Commerce Member of the Government of India, Nalini Sarkar. Sarkar, earlier in life, had been President of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce as well as Commissioner of the Calcutta Port. The War Transport Member of the Government of India, Sir Edward Benthall, was, similarly, a Calcutta based industrialist, whose firm Bird & Co. on the Hooghly River was a major player in war production. As such, the Government of India did appear to be staffed with crucial personnel who had both the resources and incentive to keep the industrial population of Calcutta fed at all cost. The question of the Bengal countryside was another matter.

Reports of death from starvation, quite outside the cyclone decimated area, were being reported from several districts.²⁷¹ In fact; every indicator outlined in the Bengal Famine Code, by October 1942, had already been met. The impact of disaster, war and want had dislocated several hundreds of thousands who wandered the rural districts looking for shelter, work, food and safety. Credit in rural districts had contracted to the extent that the poor were selling off their household possessions in large numbers.

Speculation, black-marketing, and a general atmosphere of uncertainty and fear had rendered rice markets increasingly volatile. There had been a high spike in crime, including the theft of foodstuffs. Looting of food stores and transportation facilities had been reported widely across several districts, and "test works," the final measure of prevailing distress had been opened in several places as early as 1941 and had drawn large numbers, indicating, according to the Bengal Famine Code, that famine should have officially been declared and appropriate steps taken to alleviate its predations - even by early 1942.

On December 3rd the same year the Viceroy cabled the Secretary of State to relay a "serious deterioration in the food situation in India."²⁷² Amongst the causes of the "acute difficulty" Linlithgow listed prominently "the tendency on the part of small subsistence farmers to keep back more of his grain than usual for his own consumption, a course rendered possible by enhanced prices realized by such part of his produce he sells."²⁷³ "The food situation is so acute," he went on, "that immediate substantial assistance is essential if war work in India is not to be seriously disorganized and law and order gravely menaced."²⁷⁴ This pairing of the "food situation" with both "law and order" and the prosecution of war, became the only *working* "famine code" in India during this time. According to this code, the threat to war industries and internal security that scarcity might entail were extremely serious matters that demanded imperial attention and immediate action. In contrast, as long as war work was progressing smoothly, and threats to law and order remained in-check, the country could push on with the status quo, even if that meant abject destitution and eventually starvation.

On December 12th "an acute scarcity of rice" was reported in Burdwan, just north of the city.²⁷⁵ On December 15th, at a meeting of the Calcutta Corporation a recommendation for rationing the city was tabled.²⁷⁶ On the 16th of December, the Bengal Government admitted to "large scale un-coordinated buying all over the province," as well as "widespread speculative buying in both Calcutta and the rice-growing districts."²⁷⁷ On the 18th of December the Employers' Federation of India met in Calcutta and recommended that employers adopt a policy of paying dearness allowances in kind rather than cash, as access to food was becoming highly contingent.²⁷⁸ "Akin to the problem of foodstuffs," it was noted, "and second only to it in urgency, was that of

cloth, the prices of which had risen to an abnormal extent."²⁷⁹ A cloth famine had begun. On the 19th of December a joint meeting of all Chambers of Commerce operating in Bengal was convened. "Grave alarm" was expressed at the "unprecedented and unnatural" rise in the price of foodstuffs.²⁸⁰ A few days earlier, the British Indian Association had sent an urgent memorandum to the Government of India in Delhi warning of a "grave situation that threatens the Province of Bengal in the matter of steep rise in price of rice and apprehended famine conditions."²⁸¹ The following day the Viceroy left for Calcutta.

Christmas in Calcutta

"When Lord Linlithgow traveled from Delhi in the cold weather as he always did to Calcutta around Christmas," wrote his Reforms Commissioner, Harry Hodson:

he used the famous white train, preceded for security's sake by another locomotive and guarded by armed policemen stationed at short intervals along the route. The vice-regal establishment occupying the train on these journeys was reputed to number 500. When you consider that His Excellency's entourage included official staff from private secretary to typists and cipher clerks, the Viceroy's Bodyguard of cavalry with all their appurtenances, chaprassis, syces and servants domestic and personal, together with servants of the servants in the caste-bound Indian tradition, five hundred begins to seem too few... in 1941-42 the Viceroy was still a great potentate, successor to the Mogul throne, surrounded by a court whom his unfortunate hosts had to entertain, as aforetime grandees in England were obliged to lodge the train of a medieval or Tudor monarch.²⁸²

In December of 1942, Linlithgow found Calcutta "in very good trim... the streets" he wrote to Amery, "were full of British soldiers and airmen, there was any quantity of military transport, jeeps & c. about; and in the center of Calcutta one of the principal avenues has been made into a runway."²⁸³ The city was well prepared for war, the Viceroy thought. However, Linlithgow noted in the same correspondence, he continued to be "greatly exercised about the food position...we are terribly hampered by the absence of personnel with expert experience in this line... I hope very much that you may be able to borrow me man from the Ministry of Food."²⁸⁴ No man was sent.

The admirable preparedness of Calcutta was severely tested the very day after the Viceroy left the city. On December 20th Air Raid sirens began to sound throughout the

city and industrial areas, but residents of the city had become inured to false alarms, and largely went about their business unperturbed.²⁸⁵ An hour later, however, the air filled with the rumble of Japanese fighter planes and bombs fell in several parts of the city and the industrial suburbs. An hour later the "all-clear" signal sounded. News about damage from the raids was censored from Delhi, with official reports denying any significant destruction or dislocation.²⁸⁶ After the first air raid it was reported only that "the number of casualties was very small."²⁸⁷ Night time air-raids followed on the 21st, 23rd, 24th, and 28th. The third air raid, on Christmas Eve, was heavier, coming in two waves of attack, with "sticks" of heavy explosive bombs falling "slap across the middle of the city."²⁸⁸

"Fear of the unknown seized the industrial labor in and around Calcutta, the members of essential services including A.R.P. organizations, the members of public utilities services like Tramways Corporation, and even the constabulary and warders in Jails."²⁸⁹ An exodus from the city was again underway with people packing their belongings and setting out on foot, traveling trunk roads out of the city and getting away. By the 23rd "every imaginable vehicle seemed to be in use."²⁹⁰ The Bengal Chamber of Commerce called the exodus "immense," estimating that between six and seven hundred thousand people left the Calcutta area.²⁹¹ Sir Edward Benthall, War Transport Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, had given a figure of 300,000 fleeing by rail.²⁹² With the exodus of "sweepers" as well, the depopulated city had been left to "crows, kites and pi-dogs squabbling over the debris amidst much smell."²⁹³

Linlithgow, however, congratulated the citizens of Calcutta for their fortitude: "Well done Calcutta!"²⁹⁴ On the 23rd of December a press release was issued from Delhi commending the fact that there had been "no evacuation" from the city.²⁹⁵ Ian Stephens, editor of *The Statesman* took Government denials to task over the next several days. "We do not know what the term 'evacuation' officially means," an editorial of the next day read, "but large numbers of people could be seen leaving the city."²⁹⁶ On the 27th a second editorial was published, roundly condemning Government's air-raid publicity. After the heavy raids of the 24th, no information about damage had been released for a full 12 hours and the announcement that eventually came was "of the most meager sort."²⁹⁷ Photographic evidence was censored and claims about the lack of exodus from

Calcutta continued to be circulated. "When authority fails to put forth reliable information promptly or in adequate amount about outstanding local happenings," *Statesman* reporters argued, "it is inevitable that rumors should gain currency... the population would have been less suddenly depleted had rumor been less."²⁹⁸

Lurking behind governmental denials were simmering anxieties that were about to explode. Though, by all contemporary accounts, material damage from this first series of Japanese bombings was "slight," the ramifications of Japanese attacks on Calcutta in December of 1942 were extremely profound. In some sense, it could be argued, these air-raids were among the most devastating of World War II, and can be implicated in the death of as many as 3 million residents of Bengal.

¹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, "Air Raid Precaution," 24 December 1940

² *Ibid*

³ WBSA, Intelligence Branch, W-72/41

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Baker, p.2

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 280

¹² Quoted in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, p. 16

¹³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska quoting Board of Trade, *Report*, 1937, p. 14

¹⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, p. 14

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, p. 16

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 33

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12 (emphasis mine)

²¹ Quoted in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, p. 44

²² *Ibid*, p. 36 (from 22 million to 11 million tons)

²³ *Ibid*, p. 53

²⁴ See Brahma Nand's appendix "Famines in Colonial India, 1750-1947" in *Famines in Colonial India*, p.60-4

²⁵ Brewis, Georgina. "'Fill Full the Mouth of Famine': Voluntary Action in Famine Relief in India 1896-1901." *Modern Asian Studies* Volume 44, Issue 04, 2010.

²⁶ Bengal Famine Code, Revised Edition of 1905, p. 54

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12

²⁸ MLA - Member of the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly in New Delhi was the national Indian governmental body. It worked in consultation with the Viceroy of India, the king's representative, whose authority necessarily accedes that of the Legislative Assembly. Neogy was in representation of the

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- ²⁹ Testimony of K.C. Neogy in *Nanavati Papers*, p. 1287
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid. The Government of India Act of 1935 had - ostensibly - established a devolution of the central (colonial) government's power in a policy known as Provincial Autonomy
- ³² Explain
- ³³ Footnote on structure - districts, division and sub-divisions.
- ³⁴ The administrative body of "self-rule" in the city, established by the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1923.
- ³⁵ Chatterjee, Pranab Kumar, p. 104
- ³⁶ Ibid
- ³⁷ Sen, P.K., p. 4
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ Ibid
- ⁴⁰ Casey Diaries, Feb 9th, 1944
- ⁴¹ WBSA, Home Confidential, Confidential Fortnightly Report on Bengal, Second Half December, 1945
- ⁴² Bayly and Harper, p. 72
- ⁴³ All information following is taken from WBSA, Home Confidential, W-551/41
- ⁴⁴ WBSA, Home Confidential, W-351/46
- ⁴⁵ *A.R.P. Handbook*, WBSA, Home Political, W-551/41
- ⁴⁶ Ibid
- ⁴⁷ WBSA, Home Confidential W-477/42
- ⁴⁸ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November 1, 1940
- ⁴⁹ Ibid
- ⁵⁰ Ibid
- ⁵¹ Ibid
- ⁵² WBSA, Home Confidential, W-77/42 (italics mine)
- ⁵³ Casey Diaries, May 7th, 1944
- ⁵⁴ From this "infinite variety" Sugata Bose is able, however, to construct a working typology of agrarian patterns of land use in his *Agrarian Bengal*.
- ⁵⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Rule of Property*, p. 13. Guha traces the difficulties that company revenue officials had in sorting out the heterogeneous nature of Bengal's rural land relations based on "tradition recorded only in memory and customs embedded in a variety of local usages [which] wielded an authority equal to that of any written code."
- ⁵⁶ WBSA, Home Confidential, W-477/42
- ⁵⁷ Ibid
- ⁵⁸ Ibid
- ⁵⁹ *The Leo Amery Diaries*, p. 606
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 605-6
- ⁶¹ Ibid, p. 621
- ⁶² Henry Hodson's Autobiography at: <http://www.athelstane.co.uk/hvhodson/hvhbiogr/biogr09.htm> (last accessed 1/20/10, 1:02 PM), Chapter IX, p. 1
- ⁶³ Middle-class, educated "gentlefolk"
- ⁶⁴ Menials
- ⁶⁵ Ibid
- ⁶⁶ WBSA, Home Confidential, W-477/42
- ⁶⁷ All the following from WBSA, Intelligence Branch, file #250-40. Translated from Bengali in file.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid
- ⁶⁹ See Kamtekar's "State and Class in India, 1939-1945," p. 199 "The Indian public showed no desire whatsoever to contribute to the state's finances."
- ⁷⁰ Of the many Bengali people surviving from these times that I have interviewed, all remember this rhyme gleefully. It is interesting, moreover, that the *next* generation, those born after the war, also know this rhyme and can recite it - with similar satisfaction.
- ⁷¹ Mitter, Preface by Tagore
- ⁷² Mitter, p. 42
- ⁷³ Ibid, p. 5
- ⁷⁴ Ibid

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- ⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 23
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 13
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 31
- ⁷⁸ Bose (1986), p. 102
- ⁷⁹ Bose (1986), p. 111
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 125
- ⁸¹ Ibid, p. 140
- ⁸² Ibid., p. 88
- ⁸³ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, October 27th, 1940
- ⁸⁴ Ibid
- ⁸⁵ Bose (1986), p. 214
- ⁸⁶ "War Diary, Aug. - Oct. 1941," WBSA, Home Confidential, W-60/41
- ⁸⁷ Quoted in Bose (1986), p. 214. A "Goonda" is something like a "thug," "goondaism" is something of a code word during the entire period to refer to demonstrations and/or violence perpetrated against government, local authority, or military.
- ⁸⁸ Bose (1986), p. 215
- ⁸⁹ Ibid
- ⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 261
- ⁹¹ "War Diary, Aug. - Oct. 1941," WBSA, Home Confidential, W-60/41
- ⁹² Ibid
- ⁹³ Ibid
- ⁹⁴ Bhattacharya, Sanjoy, p. 75
- ⁹⁵ Casey Diary, Jan. 27th, 1944
- ⁹⁶ Quoted by Bose (1986), p. 262
- ⁹⁷ "Distant Thunder"
- ⁹⁸ Midnapore is a district 100 miles east of Calcutta, often and again, the center of anti-British "terrorist" activity in Bengal.
- ⁹⁹ Government subsidized shops for rice and other essential commodities.
- ¹⁰⁰ Chakrabarty (1989), p. 105. Actual numbers for jute mill workers place of origin, 1940: 11.6% Bengal, 43.1% Bihar, 36.4% U.P., 3.4% Orissa, 2.4% other.
- ¹⁰¹ As operations got underway in the Middle East and North Africa, India was supplying as much as 1.2 billion yards of cloth per year. See: Kamtekar, (2002a), p. 195
- ¹⁰² Chakrabarty (1989) p. 9
- ¹⁰³ Chatterjee, Pranab Kumar, p. 84
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid p. 77
- ¹⁰⁵ Bhattacharya, Sanjoy, p. 85
- ¹⁰⁶ Quoted from Home Political Files, GOI 218/42 in Sanjoy Bhattacharya,, p. 41
- ¹⁰⁷ Note on "priority" - find! Maybe in Propaganda?
- ¹⁰⁸ *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War*, p. 145
- ¹⁰⁹ Bhattacharya, Sanjoy, p. 19
- ¹¹⁰ Bayly and Harper, p. 72
- ¹¹¹ Bayly and Harper, p. 106
- ¹¹² Ibid
- ¹¹³ *The Leo Amery Diaries*, p. 722
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹¹⁵ Bayly and Harper, p. 116
- ¹¹⁶ Winston Churchill, *Complete Speeches*, p. 6532
- ¹¹⁷ Bayly and Harper, p. 120
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 142
- ¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 143
- ¹²¹ From Dorman-Smith Memoirs, quoted in Bayly and Harper, p. 86
- ¹²² Ibid. With colonialism had come a large immigrant population of Indians, who served at the lowest and highest levels of society. From Bengal and Orissa, waves of mostly Muslim immigrants had come to find work as sweepers and "coolie" laborers. Upper caste Hindu Bengalis were imported to serve as

functionaries in the colonial bureaucracy. And from trading communities in the Punjab and Gujarat, Marwari and Chetiar businessmen had come to turn profits in lucrative agricultural and piece goods markets. The success of these immigrant populations created considerable resentment among the Burmese population. Throughout the 1930s Burma had seen anti-Indian riots and pogroms that left simmering ethnic tensions in their wake.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 158

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ From Dorman-Smith Memoirs, quoted in Bayly and Harper, p. 163

¹²⁶ 'Report on the Burma Campaign' in Dorman-Smith Papers, quoted by Bayly and Harper, p. 162

¹²⁷ Tinker, p. 1-15

¹²⁸ Bayly and Harper, p. 183

¹²⁹ Tinker, p. 12

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 13-14

¹³¹ Between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth, the population of Calcutta had grown from approximately 400,000 to over 2,000,000. Economic pressure and lack of opportunity in the vast hinterland had driven waves of immigrants into the city in search of the means of survival. Laborers from Bengal itself provided the bulk of the industrial workforce early in the 19th century, but by late-century cheaper, semi-transient laborers from Bihar, Orissa and the U.P. began to outnumber Bengalis. In the jute mills, by 1941, Bengalis comprised less than 25% of the labor force, and in textile mills and other factories the demographics were similar.¹³¹ By the 40s the Bengali population of Calcutta consisted primarily of Bengali *bhadralok* (the "middle-class") who had left the countryside in search of education and white collar employment. They too, as such, were semi-transient, migrant workers themselves. As the saying went, Calcutta was their *basa* ("nest" - temporary dwelling) but in their districts of origin were their *barhi* (homes.) Marwari traders, with roots in Rajasthan, had also come to the city in increasing numbers late in the 19th century, and by the mid-twentieth were the primary Indian capitalist class in Calcutta. By the outbreak of war they dominated the jute and textile industries, and were deeply entrenched in the grain trade as well. Their speculations in commodity markets – known as *fatka* - were legendary and could influence prices sharply.

¹³² Chatterjee, Pranab Kumar, p. 105

¹³³ *Forgotten Armies*, p. 193

¹³⁴ Chatterjee, Pranab Kumar, p. 105

¹³⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L.G. Pinnell, p. 547

¹³⁶ Kar, p. 94-95 (translation mine.)

¹³⁷ Appendix IV of the Famine Enquiry Commission's *Report n Bengal*, p. 217, indicates that the price index for rice, pegged at 100 for the week ending August 19th, 1939, reached 172 in December of 1941.

¹³⁸ *Report on Bengal*, p. 28

¹³⁹ Knight, p. 47

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 49

¹⁴¹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Major General E. Wood, p. 503

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Mr. Barman of the Calcutta Corporation, p. 1276

¹⁴⁴ See: Chatterjee, P.K., p. 84

¹⁴⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Representatives of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, p. 1404

¹⁴⁶ Nanavati Paper, Memo of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, p. 197

¹⁴⁷ Nanavati Papers, Memo of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, p. 197

¹⁴⁸ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Azizul Haque, p. 435

¹⁴⁹ Greenough (1982), p. 102

¹⁵⁰ Congress demanded immediate concessions towards self-government in exchange for backing the war effort, and colonial representatives promised independence only after the war - if Congress agreed to cooperate in the meantime.

¹⁵¹ Henry Hodson's Autobiography at: <http://www.athelstane.co.uk/hvhodson/hvhbiogr/biogr09.htm> (Last accessed 1/20/10, 1:15 PM) Chapter IX, p. 3

¹⁵² Ibid, Chapter XII, p. 5

¹⁵³ Ibid, Chapter IX, p. 4

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- ¹⁵⁴ In his testimony before the Famine Enquiry Commission Special Officer L.G. Pinnell, in charge of denial policy, suggests: "I don't think anybody has been able to explain why the Japanese did not invade us...there was nothing whatsoever to prevent the Japanese from coming whenever they wanted." Nanavati Papers, p. 544
- ¹⁵⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of M. K. Kirpalani, p. 779
- ¹⁵⁶ M.A. Ispahani's testimony: "When I met the Commerce Secretary he said that they found it difficult to remove rice and paddy from the coastal area to about 200 to 300 miles in the interior." Nanavati Papers, p. 631
- ¹⁵⁷ Both Mirza Ahem (M. A.) Ispahani and his brother and partner at Ispahani Limited, Mirza Abol Hassan (M. A. H.) Ispahani, were established members and staunch defenders of the All-India Muslim League, with intimate ties to its leader, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. M. A. H. Ispahani and Jinnah carried on a long and genial correspondence throughout the period, with Ispahani reporting to Jinnah on the divisive, and at times fractious, workings of the provincial Bengal Muslim League.¹⁵⁷ The firm itself, M. M. Ispahani Limited, was a well established trading company, with extensive connections to sub-agents and purchasers across the Eastern Region.
- ¹⁵⁸ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of M.A. Ispahani, p. 631
- ¹⁵⁹ In his letter of August 2nd, 1942 to Governor Herbert, Fazlul Huq writes: "The Joint Secretary says that when he was arranging to carry out your orders, you grew impatient and gave him definite directions to arrange for removal of excess rice from three districts within 24 hours...The Joint Secretary, in his haste and hurry to oblige you, advanced twenty lakhs of rupees to a nominee of a friend to begin the work." Huq's letter was widely circulated and the allegations here never denied by either Herbert or Kirpalani, which tends to lend them credence. The letter itself is reprinted in the Nanavati Papers, p. 743.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid
- ¹⁶¹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of M. K. Kirpalani, p. 780
- ¹⁶² Ibid
- ¹⁶³ Three of the agents (Poddar, Dutta, and Khan) had no experience at all in the rice business. See: Nanavati Papers, Testimony of representative of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 1211
- ¹⁶⁴ Harris-White, p. 5
- ¹⁶⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of M.A. Ispahani, p. 639
- ¹⁶⁶ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 179
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁹ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 179
- ¹⁷⁰ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L.G. Pinnell, p. 545
- ¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 566
- ¹⁷² Ibid, p. 569
- ¹⁷³ Pinnell notes elsewhere: "We told the Government of India in one of our messages that people were reluctant to move rice because there was looting." Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L.G. Pinnell, p. 569
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁷⁵ *Report on Bengal*, p. 25
- ¹⁷⁶ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, p. 35
- ¹⁷⁷ In his analysis of charges of corruption during "rice denial" Paul Greenough, for instance, in his *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, concludes that the nature of the appointments and the government cover granted to agents, make it seem "more than likely that the popular suspicion of fraud and rapacity was correct." p. 95
- ¹⁷⁸ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Nawab Habibullah Bahadur of Dacca, p. 914
- ¹⁷⁹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of representatives of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 1211
- ¹⁸⁰ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, p. 44
- ¹⁸¹ *Report on Bengal*, p. 25
- ¹⁸² Pinnell, in his testimony before the Famine Enquiry Commission: "while I was touring the denial districts, the steamer agent at Chanpur in East Bengal told me that some big Bombay firm had just bought up a whole lot of rice at Chanpur, and significantly added that somehow the Bombay firm had managed to get transport to move the whole lot of rice to Bombay - and that in the middle of a war situation!" Nanavati Papers, p. 551
- ¹⁸³ WBSA, Home Confidential, file W-493/42

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- ¹⁸⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Kali Charan Ghosh, p. 52
- ¹⁸⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁸⁷ Huq's letter to Herbert of August 2nd, 1942. Nanavati Papers, p. 742
- ¹⁸⁸ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L. G. Pinnell, p. 545
- ¹⁸⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁹⁰ Ibid
- ¹⁹¹ Ibid
- ¹⁹² "Army Proposal of 23 April submitted to Chief Civil Defense Commissioner, Bengal" in *Pinnell Papers*, p. 5. Quoted in Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, p. 89
- ¹⁹³ *Report on Bengal*, p. 26
- ¹⁹⁴ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L. G. Pinnell, p. 543
- ¹⁹⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Lieut. Col. Cotter, Public Health Commissioner of the Government of India. p. 382
- ¹⁹⁶ WBSA, Hone Confidential, "War Diary for May-June 1942," file W-77/42
- ¹⁹⁷ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of P. N. Banerjee, p. 868
- ¹⁹⁸ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of P. N. Banerjee, p. 868
- ¹⁹⁹ In the Famine Enquiry Commission, after its extensive work, was unable to determine the "complete number of the numbers of persons affected..." *Report on Bengal*, p. 27
- ²⁰⁰ *Report on Bengal*, p. 27
- ²⁰¹ WBSA, Home Political, "The Movement of Troops and Behavior of the Public," file W-249/42
- ²⁰² Ibid
- ²⁰³ Ibid
- ²⁰⁴ Nanavati Papers, Letter from Huq to Herbert, p. 743
- ²⁰⁵ *Harijan*, March 22, 1942, p. 3
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid
- ²⁰⁷ *Harijan*, April 19, 1942, p. 1
- ²⁰⁸ *Harijan*, May 3, 1942, p. 4
- ²⁰⁹ Ibid
- ²¹⁰ WBSA, Home Political, "War Diary: May-June 1942," file W-77/42
- ²¹¹ WBSA, Home Political, "War Diary: May-June 1942," file W-77/42
- ²¹² Linlithgow adopted this terminology to refer to the July 10th resolution. See, for instance, Linlithgow to Amery, T.O.P. Volume II, p. 382
- ²¹³ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 363
- ²¹⁴ T.O.P. Volume II, Amery to Linlithgow, p. 374
- ²¹⁵ Ibid
- ²¹⁶ T.O.P. Volume II, Amery to Churchill, p. 376 (emphasis mine)
- ²¹⁷ T.O.P. Volume II, War Cabinet 91st Conclusions, p. 377-378
- ²¹⁸ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 382
- ²¹⁹ T.O.P. Volume II, Amery to Linlithgow, p. 390
- ²²⁰ Ibid
- ²²¹ The text of this resolution is reprinted in T.O.P. Volume II, p. 385-387. All quotes are from this reprinting.
- ²²² T.O.P. Volume II, Amery to Linlithgow, p. 393.
- ²²³ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 394
- ²²⁴ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 398
- ²²⁵ Linlithgow to Herbert, July 16, 1942. Telegram 2109-S, MSS.EUR.F. 125/42
- ²²⁶ T.O.P. Volume II, Herbert to Linlithgow, p. 440
- ²²⁷ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 448
- ²²⁸ This plan is outlined in: Government of India, Home Department to Secretary of State, July 24, 1942. T.O.P. Volume II, p. 447-450
- ²²⁹ Churchill's Complete Speeches, March 18, 1931. (Winston Churchill (1874-1965), British statesman, writer. Speech, March 18, 1931, Royal Albert Hall, London. "On India," *Maxims and Reflections*, ed. Colin Coote (1947).)
- ²³⁰ *The Leo Amery Diaries*, p. 734

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- ²³¹ Ibid, p. 832
- ²³² Azad calls the July 14th resolution a "first draft" of the August 8th resolution, Ibid, p. 78
- ²³³ Azad, p. 84
- ²³⁴ Sumit Sarkar, p. 391 For a more complete treatment of the extent, spread, and nature of the Quit India movement, see the same, pp. 388-404
- ²³⁵ T.O.P. Volume II, p. 96
- ²³⁶ In his book *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, Shahid Amin, traces the interesting and innovative manner in which Gandhi, as national icon, came to influence the popular uprising of 1922 in contradictory, contingent and colorful ways. A similar argument could be made for the ways that Gandhi as a socio-political *symbol* shaped the 'Quit India' movement of 1942.
- ²³⁷ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 708
- ²³⁸ T.O.P. Volume II, Linlithgow to Churchill, p. 853
- ²³⁹ Chatterjee, P.K., p. 115
- ²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 125
- ²⁴¹ In his introduction to *Biplabi: A Journal of the 1942 Open Rebellion*, Bidyut Chakrabarty argues that local leaders of the movement in Midnapore were particularly adept at converting "suffering into political support." Introduction to *Biplabi* p. 2
- ²⁴² Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 182
- ²⁴³ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of D. L. Mazumdar, p. 522
- ²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 523
- ²⁴⁵ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of L. G. Pinnell, p. 549
- ²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 549
- ²⁴⁷ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 182
- ²⁴⁸ Source needed
- ²⁴⁹ WBSA, Govt. of Bengal Record of War Activities, File # W-77/42
- ²⁵⁰ *Biplabi*, p. 27
- ²⁵¹ Bose (1986), p. 262
- ²⁵² Ibid. Bose quotes from the District Officer's Chronicles: "the chief grievance of the mob appeared to be the scarcity of paddy in this locality."
- ²⁵³ Nanavati Papers, included in Testimony of C. J. Minister, p. 1092
- ²⁵⁴ WBSA, Hone Confidential, "Action Under Ordinances other than Defense of India Act," file W-77/42
- ²⁵⁵ Apart from the economic hardship that such fines entailed, they also created further communal disharmony. Muslims appealed to the government to be relieved of collective fines, arguing that 'Quit India' was a Hindu phenomenon, and were granted reprieve. Source needed
- ²⁵⁶ WBSA, Intelligence Branch, file # 573/42
- ²⁵⁷ Ibid
- ²⁵⁸ See Indivar Kamtekar's "War Dance." p. 199-201. Also, M.N. Roy's *Poverty or Plenty*, p. 24-35,
- ²⁵⁹ *The Leo Amery's Diaries*, p. 833
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 836
- ²⁶¹ Ibid
- ²⁶² *Biplabi*, p. 33
- ²⁶³ Ibid, p. 35
- ²⁶⁴ Ibid,
- ²⁶⁵ Stephens,, p. 71
- ²⁶⁶ All numbers used here, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Paul Greenough's *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal*, p. 92-97
- ²⁶⁷ Nanavati Papers, Memorandum of the Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 182
- ²⁶⁸ Greenough (1982), p. 93
- ²⁶⁹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of B. R. Sen, p. 441
- ²⁷⁰ India Office, L/I/1/1106, Telegram no. 8953 (emphasis added)
- ²⁷¹ See, for instance, the Communist Party's weekly, *Janayuddha*, October 28, 1942, "Sara Banglay Khadda Sanket" (trans.: "Food Crisis Grips All of Bengal") This article, alone (printed before news of the cyclone leaked out), reports cases of death by starvation in Faridpur, Mymensingh and Jalpaiguri.
- ²⁷² T.O.P. Volume III, Linlithgow to Amery, p.
- ²⁷³ Ibid

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- ²⁷⁴ T.O.P. Volume III, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 358
- ²⁷⁵ *The Statesman*, December 13, 1942 "Rice Scarcity"
- ²⁷⁶ *The Statesman*, December 15, 1942 "Food Shortage in Calcutta"
- ²⁷⁷ *The Statesman*, December 17, 1942 "Rise in Price of Rice"
- ²⁷⁸ *The Statesman*, December 19, 1942 "Employers in Conference"
- ²⁷⁹ *Ibid*
- ²⁸⁰ *The Statesman*, December 21, 1942
- ²⁸¹ *The Statesman*, December 13, 1942 "Rice Position"
- ²⁸² Harry Hodson's Autobiography, Chapter VIII, p. 4 at
(<http://www.athelstane.co.uk/hvhodson/hvhbiogr/biogr08.htm>)
- ²⁸³ T.O.P. Volume III, Linlithgow to Amery, p. 410
- ²⁸⁴ *Ibid*
- ²⁸⁵ It was reported in *The Statesman* December 22, 1942 that "many lights" were not extinguished and that police would take "drastic measures" in the future to deal with non-compliance to "black-outs."
- ²⁸⁶ Stephens, p. 82
- ²⁸⁷ *The Statesman*, December 22, 1942 "Calcutta's First Raid"
- ²⁸⁸ Stephens, p. 82
- ²⁸⁹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of P. N. Banerjee, p. 285
- ²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p 80
- ²⁹¹ Nanavati Papers, Testimony of Reps. of the BCC, p. 1404
- ²⁹² *Ibid*
- ²⁹³ Stephens, p. 83
- ²⁹⁴ *The Statesman*, December, 22, 1942 "Viceroy's Message to Calcutta"
- ²⁹⁵ Stephens, p. 82
- ²⁹⁶ Stephens, p. 82
- ²⁹⁷ *The Statesman*, December 27, 1942 "Remedy Needed"
- ²⁹⁸ *Ibid*