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The University of Dhaka and Nawab Salimullah

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THE University of Dhaka was established in July 1921. The proposal for a University at Dhaka was first made in January 1912 by Lord Hardinge as a compensation for the annulment of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam created in 1905 by partitioning Bengal. The province of Eastern Bengal with its headquarters at Dhaka aroused new hopes and aspirations for the people of the area as a consequence of development in almost all spheres of life. The province lasted for little over six years but the enthusiasm it created among the minds of the people was tremendous. The partition was revoked in the face of growing agitation of the Bengali-Hindus led by the Indian National Congress.

When the partition was annulled the Government was fully aware that they unsettled a "settled fact." The majority people of this province were Muslims and it was they who derived more benefit and the other major community (mostly Calcutta based) had to lose from the partition in many ways. They, therefore, opposed the partition and started

movement and agitations to undo it. The Muslims of Eastern Bengal had reasons to welcome the partition as they rightly realised that it would facilitate their social and educational progress as well as material advancement. The Government initiative to partition Bengal and the creation of a new province was supported by Nawab Salimullah, one of the most prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal during the early years of the present century.

Salimullah was born in the Nawab family of Dhaka. His family was already well-known for its philanthropic works in the Dhaka city and elsewhere. From his childhood Salimullah sympathised with the demand of the Muslims who were more backward than the other community. When he became the Nawab he showed great interest in the development of Muslim education and established schools, madrasahs in different parts of the city. He was also a founder of the Ahsanullah Engineering School (later En-

gineering College and now BUET), Mitford Hospital, and Salimullah Orphanage. Salimullah Hall of the Dhaka University also bears his name. Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India during his visit to Dhaka on the eve of Bengal partition in 1905 stayed at Ahsan Manzil, the residence of the Nawabs of Dhaka. When a full-fledged province was created, the Nawab was indeed happy as he saw in it a better prospect for the people of his own community. He was, therefore, equally shocked when this new arrangement was undone. Soon after the dissolution of the partition he retired from active life and died a couple of years later. The contributions of Nawab Salimullah and his family to the cause of Muslim education and to their political awakening were great.

It may be mentioned that the initiative for the establishment of a University at Dhaka was taken by Nawab Salimullah. Immediately af-

ter the reversal of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam the Muslim concern for their educational and material development was represented to Lord Hardinge who in turn assured that to safeguard Muslim educational interest a University would be created in Dhaka. The Viceroy's proposal was endorsed by the education member for the sake of improved educational administration and extension of educational facilities to a backward area.

On the other hand protests were also lodged against this decision. It was feared that the creation of a separate University at Dhaka would be in "the nature of an internal partition—a break-up of the national life of the people" so recently re-united. Those who opposed the creation of a new University had the general impression that it was primarily intended for the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. Hence they termed it as 'Mecca University'. It was also argued by them that the vast major-

ity of the people of Eastern Bengal were Muslim agriculturists who would hardly benefit from the University.

Thanks to the insistence of a number of Muslim leaders of East Bengal and efforts of the government, the University of Dhaka came into being in 1921 about a decade of its first announcement despite opposition from influential quarters and adverse propaganda. So a demand for further facilities and stimulation of educational progress of the Muslim population of Eastern Bengal was fulfilled—so also the government desire to create a new type of residential and teaching University "in the model of modern British Universities as opposed to affiliating ones." The University of Dhaka is now one of the highest seats of learning in South Asia and plays a prominent role in the socio-economic development and political awakening of the people of Bangladesh.