

Cabinet Mission, Background, Proposals, Reaction, Failure

August 10, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



The Cabinet Mission of 1946 was a turning point in India's struggle for independence. The mission aimed to devise a plan for the peaceful transfer of power while addressing the competing demands of the **Indian National Congress** and the **Muslim League**. Headed by **Lord Pethick-Lawrence**, **Stafford Cripps**, and **A.V. Alexander**, it sought to maintain the unity of India, while offering a constitutional framework for self-governance.

The mission proposed the creation of a **Constituent Assembly**, a federal union with autonomy for provinces, and a complex grouping of provinces. Despite its efforts, the mission failed to reconcile the conflicting visions of the Congress and the Muslim League, setting the stage for India's eventual partition and independence in 1947.

Cabinet Mission Background

By 1946, political pressure for Indian independence had reached its peak. It was evident that British rule in India was nearing its end. Following the failure of the **Cripps Mission 1942**, there was little left to offer in terms of conciliation, except full freedom.

- The growing discontent within the military (as evident in the **Royal Indian Navy Mutiny**) with soldiers showing solidarity with nationalist movements, created fears of the unreliability of the armed forces in suppressing another large-scale rebellion like the **Quit India Movement of 1942**.
- The British government recognized the urgent need for a political settlement to avoid another mass uprising and ensure favorable future relations with an independent India.

Keeping these things in mind, the Cabinet Mission was sent to India with the primary aim of ensuring a **united India**. This desire stemmed from the British authorities' pride in their historical role in politically unifying the subcontinent and their skepticism regarding the viability of Pakistan.

Members of Cabinet Mission

Members of the cabinet mission were Lord Penthick-Lawrence (Secretary of State for India), Sir Stafford Cripps (President of the Board of Trade), A V Alexander (First Lord of Admiralty).

Cabinet Mission Proposals

The Cabinet Mission arrived in Delhi on March 24, 1946, and engaged in extended discussions with leaders of various political groups, focusing on two key issues: the formation of an **interim government** and the principles for drafting a new constitution to grant India independence. Since the Congress and the Muslim League could not agree on the critical question of whether India should remain united or be partitioned, the mission eventually proposed its own solution to the constitutional deadlock in May 1946. The main points of the plan are:

- **Rejection of Pakistan:** The Cabinet Mission outright rejected the Muslim League's demand for a separate, full-fledged Pakistan. The mission believed that partition would lead to serious economic, political, and administrative challenges.
- **Grouping of Provincial Assemblies:** The existing provincial assemblies were to be organized into three sections:
 - **Section A:** Hindu-majority provinces (Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, United Provinces, Bihar, and Orissa).
 - **Section B:** Muslim-majority provinces (Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, and Sindh).
 - **Section C:** Bengal and Assam, which also had significant Muslim populations.
- **Three-Tier Government Structure:** A three-tier executive and legislative framework was proposed at the provincial, section, and union levels.
- **Constituent Assembly Formation:** A constituent assembly would be elected by the provincial assemblies using proportional representation, with voting in three groups: General, Muslims, and Sikhs.
 - This assembly would consist of 389 members—292 from provincial assemblies, 4 from chief commissioner's provinces, and 93 from princely states.
 - In the Constituent Assembly, representatives from groups A, B, and C would convene separately to discuss provincial constitutions.
 - Later all the groups will meet collectively to frame the Union Constitution.
- **Common Centre Authority:** A central authority would manage defence, communication, and external affairs within a federal framework for India.

- **Decision-Making in Central Legislature:** Communal issues in the central legislature would be resolved by a simple majority vote from both communities present.
- **Provincial Autonomy:** Provinces were to enjoy full autonomy and retain residual powers.
- **Princely State Independence:** Princely states would no longer be under British paramountcy and could negotiate arrangements with successor governments or the British government.
- **Formation of Interim Government:** Meanwhile, an interim government was to be established from the constituent assembly.

Cabinet Mission Reactions

The proposals put forth by the Cabinet Mission were met with a mixed response from Indian political leaders and parties. The lack of consensus between the Indian National Congress and the **Muslim League** further complicated the situation, as both parties had differing views on the mission's recommendations.

- **Indian National Congress:** The Congress initially welcomed the idea of a Constituent Assembly and a unified India. However, it objected to the proposal of grouping provinces, especially when it seemed to grant Muslim-majority areas significant autonomy.
- **Muslim League:** The League initially accepted the plan, particularly because it allowed for Muslim-majority provinces to group together.
 - However, they later rejected the mission after Congress opposed the idea of mandatory grouping, seeing it as a betrayal of Muslim interests and their demand for Pakistan.

Cabinet Mission Failure

The Cabinet Mission ultimately failed due to the inability of the Congress and the Muslim League to reconcile their differences. The major points of contention were the compulsory grouping of provinces and the lack of clarity on whether the provinces could later opt out of the groups.

As tensions escalated, both sides hardened their stances, with the Muslim League announcing **Direct Action Day** on August 16, 1946, to push for the creation of Pakistan. This day marked the beginning of widespread communal violence.

Formation of Interim Government

Amid concerns over potential mass mobilization by the Congress, an Interim Government dominated by Congress was established, with **Jawaharlal Nehru** sworn in as its head on September 2, 1946. Despite his leadership role, Nehru maintained his party's strong opposition to the mandatory grouping of provinces proposed by the Cabinet Mission. On October 26, 1946, **Lord Wavell** discreetly integrated the Muslim League into the Interim Government, attempting to foster a sense of collaboration among the major political factions in India.

Other Related Posts	
Cripps Mission	Quit India Movement
Communist Party of India	August Offer

Meerut Conspiracy Case	Individual Satyagraha
Kanpur Conspiracy Case	C R Formula
Congress Socialist Party	Wavell Plan
All India Trade Union Congress	Cabinet Mission
Mountbatten Plan	RIN Mutiny
Partition of India	

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/cabinet-mission/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.