

Even though the Roy – Sinha pact on merger of West Bengal and Bihar was welcomed by the central leadership of the Congress, it was met with vehement opposition from the provincial politicians of both the states. The Bengalis felt that they would be swamped by the Hindi speaking majority of Bihar. They also felt that as the per capita GDP of West Bengal was double that of Bihar, they would be at a loss when the state is merged. On the other hand, the those in Bihar felt that the ‘Bengalis’ would re-emerge as the ‘intermediary ruling class’ and dominate the political, commercial and cultural life of the new state . They were also concerned about the possible of migration of the 9 million refugees from East Bengal, which would alter demographics of the new state. An excerpt from a report in Times of India on February 7, 1956 read: The mounting exodus from East Pakistan has made the authorities in West Bengal aware of the threat of a bulk, if not all, of the nine million members of the minority community in East Bengal ultimately migrating to India as victims of circumstances. The stress on the Islamic nature of the Pakistani constitution, as well as the deteriorating economic conditions in the country has aggravated these fears.

In any case the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) did not comment on, or record any suggestion on the Roy - Sinha proposals as they were never formally submitted to the Commission. Meanwhile given the spate

of protest marches, dharnas and hartals, followed by a series of electoral losses in municipal and Parliamentary bye –elections and the failure of the local Congress committees to convince their workers about the merit of this proposal, Dr Roy (reluctantly) withdrew his support to the merger plan on May 3. 1956. As such the final territory of Bengal was largely on the basis of territorial readjustments with respect to the districts of Purnea and Puruliya. These proposals were not entirely based on the linguistic principle. They were intended to meet imperative administrative needs, and ensure that there was geographical continuity amongst the districts of West Bengal. As such, the state of West Bengal become a geographically compact area, with a direct link between the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Bihar and the rest of the State – a link which was snapped by the partition of India.

As per the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act, 1956: from the appointed day (October 1, 1956), there shall be added to the State of West Bengal the territories which on the 1st day of March, 1956, were comprised in: a) that portion of Kishanganj sub-division of Purnea district which lies to the east of the Mahananda and that portion of Gopalpur thana of the said district which lies to the east or north, as the case may be, of the said boundary line; and, b) Puruliya sub-division of Manbhum district, excluding Chas Thana, Chandil Thana and Patamda police station of Barabhum Thana; and the said territories shall thereupon cease to form part of the State of Bihar.

It was clarified that the boundary line shall be so demarcated as to be generally two hundred yards to the west of the highway in Purnea district connecting Dalkola, Kishanganj and Chopra with Siliguri in Darjeeling district and two hundred yards to the south or south-west of the highway in Purnea district connecting Dalkola and Karandighi with Raiganj in West Dinajpur district. The part of the Puruliya sub-division going to West Bengal became the Puruliya district in the Burdwan division, and the portion of Purnea district going to WB became part of the West Dinajpur district in Jalpaiguri Division.

Consequential changes in the representation of West Bengal and Bihar in the Lok Sabha and the adjustment of the number of seats in the legislatures of the two States was also provided for in the Act. Thus, West Bengal's representation in the Lok Sabha increased to 36 members from the present 34. In the Rajya Sabha West Bengal's representation will be raised from 14 to 16. The State Assembly will have 252 members instead of 241 as at present. There was no reduction in the numbers of seats to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha from Bihar or in Bihar Assembly.

As far as the Kishanganj sub-division is concerned, the States Reorganisation Commission recommended that the West Bengal Government should give an assurance about its readiness to continue with the teaching of Urdu in schools in that area. An assurance was also given by WB that as the area was already, cramped and congested; no refugees will be allowed to settle there.

It is also interesting to note that Mr Jaipal Singh of the Jharkhand party was rather keen on the merger of the two states as that would have ensured that there would be consolidation of the large number of tribals in Midnapore, Bankura and Birbhum districts of West Bengal. In fact, Jaipal Singh wanted to include Orissa in the proposed Purva Pradesh, as all the tribals would have become the dominant numerical force 'under a single state'.