

## UNIT 61 – UPSC - The Pitt's Act

### India's History : Modern India : Pitt's India Act - 1784

#### The Pitt's Act



After the Regulating Act of 1773 to regulate the affairs of the Company in India, the second important step taken by the British Parliament was the appointment of a Board of Control under Pitt's India Bill of 1784. It provided for a joint government of the Company (represented by the Directors), and the Crown (represented by the Board of Control).

A Board of six members was constituted with two members of the British Cabinet and four of the Privy Council. One of who was the President and who soon became, in effect, the minister for the affairs of the East India Company. The Board had all the powers and control over all the acts and operations, which related to the civil, military and revenues of the Company.

The Council was reduced to three members and the Governor-General was empowered to overrule the majority. The Governors of Bombay and Madras were also deprived of their independent powers. Calcutta was given greater powers in matters of war, revenue, and diplomacy, thus becoming in effect the capital of Company possessions in India.

By a supplementary the Bill passed in 1786, Lord Cornwallis was appointed as the first Governor-General, and he then became the effective ruler of British India under the authority of the Board of Control and the Court of Directors. The constitution set up by the Pitt's India Act did not undergo any major changes during the existence of the Company's rule in India.

The Charter Act of 1813 abolished the trading activities of the Company and henceforth became purely an administrative body under the Crown. Thereafter, with

few exceptions, the Governor-General and the Council could make all the laws and regulations for people (Indians and British).

The salient features relating to the governance of the kingdom of Bengal were:

1. There shall be a Board of Control consisting of maximum six parliamentarians headed by a senior cabinet member to direct, superintend and control the affairs of the company's territorial possessions in the East Indies.
2. The Court of Directors shall establish a Secret Committee to work as a link between the Board and the Court.
3. The Governor General's council shall consist of three members one of whom shall be the commander-in-chief of the King's army in India. In case the members present in a meeting of the council shall any time be equally divided in opinion, the Governor General shall have two votes (one his own and another casting vote).
4. The government must stop further experiments in the revenue administration and proceed to make a permanent settlement with zamindars at moderate rate of revenue demand. The government must establish permanent judicial and administrative systems for the governance of the new kingdom.
5. All civilians and military officers must provide the Court of Directors a full inventory of their property in India and in Britain within two months of their joining their posts.
6. Severe punishment including confiscation of property, dismissal and jail, shall be inflicted on any civilian or military officer found guilty of corruption.
7. Receiving gifts, rewards, presents in kind or cash from the rajas, zamindars and other Indians are strictly prohibited and people found guilty of these offences shall be tried charged with corruption.

Parliament directly appointed Lord Charles Cornwallis to implement the Act. Immediately after his joining as Governor General in 1786, Cornwallis embarked upon the responsibility of reform works reposed on him by parliament. In 1793 he completed his mission. He introduced permanent settlement, announced a judicial code, established administrative and police systems and then left for home in the same year.



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