UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Pitt's India Act 1784 - Features & Drawbacks [Modern Indian History Notes for UPSC]

The Pitt's India Act, 1784 also called the East India Company Act, 1784 was passed by the British Parliament to correct the defects of the Regulating Act of 1773. This act resulted in dual control of British possessions in India by the British government and the Company with the final authority resting with the government. This act continued in effect until 1858. This topic is very important for Civil Services Exam

The act is named after William Pitt the Younger, Britain's Prime Minister when the act was passed.

To know more about the Governor Generals of Bengal and India, visit the linked article.

Provisions of the Act

For political matters, the Board of Control was created and for commercial affairs, the Court of Directors was appointed.

- The Board of Control took care of civil and military affairs. It comprised of 6 people:
  - Secretary of State (Board President)
  - Chancellor of the Exchequer
  - Four Privy Councillors
- In this dual system of control, the company was represented by the Court of Directors and the British government by the Board of Control.
- The act mandated that all civil and military officers disclose their property in India and Britain within two months of their joining.
- The Governor-General's council's strength was reduced to three members. One of the three would be the Commander-in-Chief of the British Crown's army in India.
- The Governor-General was given the right of veto.
- The Presidencies of Madras and Bombay became subordinate to the Bengal Presidency. In effect, Calcutta became the capital of the British possessions in India.

Features of the Act

- This act made a distinction between the commercial and political activities of the East India Company.
- For the first time, the term ‘British possessions in India’ was used.
- This act gave the British government direct control over Indian administration.
- The Company became subordinate to the British government unlike as in the previous Regulating Act of 1773, where the government only sought to ‘regulate’ matters and not take over.
- This act established the British Crown’s authority in the civil and military administration of its Indian territories. Commercial activities were still a monopoly of the Company.

Drawbacks of the Act

The act was deemed a failure because there was no clarity on the boundaries between the company’s powers and the government’s authority.

- The Governor-General had to serve two masters i.e. East India Company and the British Crown
- There were **no clear boundaries between the responsibilities** of the Board of Control and the Court of Directors of the company. The Governor-General had to take on the spot decisions exercising his discretion.

To know more about the legislation passed in British India, click on the linked article.