

# Montagu-Chelmsford Report: This Day in History – Jul 08

Montagu-Chelmsford Report, which formed the basis of the Government of India Act 1919, was published on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1918.

The Montagu Chelmsford reforms and the ensuing Government of India Act of 1919 are important chapters in the history of the Raj. They form an integral part of the UPSC syllabus and aspirants must know the fine print of the act and the reforms for the history section of the IAS exam.

## Montagu Chelmsford Reforms



- Edwin Montagu was appointed the Secretary of State for India in 1917 and remained in that office till 1922. He was critical of the manner in which India was governed.
- On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1917, Montagu presented the historic **Montagu Declaration** (August Declaration) in the British Parliament. This declaration proposed the increased participation of Indians in the administration and the development of self-governing institutions in India.
- In 1917, Montagu visited India and held talks with the various representatives of Indian polity including Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah.
- He, along with the Governor-General of India Lord Chelmsford, brought out a detailed report titled **Constitutional Reforms in India**, also called the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. This report was published on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1918.
- This report became the basis for the **Government of India Act 1919** (alternatively called the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms or Montford Reforms).
- The report was rejected by most Indian leaders. Annie Besant (Born on October 1st, 1847) referred to it as 'unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India'.
- Principal provisions of the GOI Act 1919:

- Diarchy was introduced in the form of two classes of administrators namely, the Executive Councillors and the Ministers.
- The governor was the executive head of the provincial government.
- The subjects were classified into two lists – reserved and transferred. The reserved list was under the governor and the councillors and the transferred list was under the ministers.
- The former list consisted of subjects like finance, law and order, irrigation, etc. and the transferred list consisted of items like education, health, public works, religious endowments, etc.
- The ministers were nominated from the elected members of the Legislative Council. They were responsible to the legislature whereas the councillors were not answerable to the legislature.
- The size of the legislative assemblies was expanded with about 70% of the members being elected. The Act provided for class and communal electorates also. Even some women could vote.
- The governor had the veto power over the council. He could also issue ordinances.
- At the central government level, the Governor-General was the chief executive authority.
- This report introduced the **bicameral legislature with 2 houses** - Legislative Assembly (forerunner of the Lok Sabha) and the Council of State (forerunner of the Rajya Sabha).
- The viceroy's executive council had 6 members out of which 3 were to be Indians.
- The viceroy could issue ordinances and also certify bills that were rejected by the legislature. The Viceroy had sweeping powers as he could prevent any bill from becoming law if he thought the bill would hamper law and order in the country.
- He could also prevent any question, debate or adjournment motion in the House.
- Even though elections were introduced, the franchise was partial in nature, not universal. Only certain people who were propertied or had titles or held office could vote.
- Detailed provisions of the Government of India Act 1919 are given in the BYJU'S NCERT Notes segment.
- The act provided for the establishment of a public service commission for the first time.
- It also produced an office of the High Commissioner for India in London.

### **What were the results of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms?**

- The report was important in that for the first time, concrete steps were taken to include more Indians in the administration of their own country. Elections were introduced which no doubt brought about a political consciousness among educated Indians at least.

- But the reforms fell short of satisfying the grievances and legitimate demands of Indian nationalists. The Viceroy still had vast powers to undermine the effectiveness of the legislatures. Also, the franchise was very limited and narrow.

The Montagu-Chelmsford report stated that there should be a review after 10 years. Sir John Simon headed the committee (Simon Commission) responsible for the review, which recommended further constitutional change. Three round table conferences were held in London in 1930, 1931 and 1932. But Jinnah's attitude was a hindrance to any decision being taken.

The major disagreement between the Indian National Congress and the British was separate electorates for each community which Congress opposed but which were retained in Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award. A new Government of India Act 1935 was passed continuing the move towards self-government first made in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report.