

Lord Cornwallis becomes Governor General: This Day in History – Sep 12

On 12 September 1786, Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquess Cornwallis took charge as the Governor-General of Fort William (Bengal) and as the Commander-in-Chief of British India. This edition of This Day in History gives a brief introduction about Lord Cornwallis, the major reforms introduced by him and will highlight the Third Anglo Mysore War that took place in his tenure.

Aspirants would find this article very helpful while preparing for the IAS Exam.

Lord Cornwallis was believed to have laid the foundation of British rule throughout India and various reforms into the court, revenue and services prevailed till the end of the British era in India.

Who was Lord Cornwallis?



1. Lord Cornwallis was a British army officer, administrator and diplomat who had previously served his country during the War of American Independence. He had surrendered along with his troops to the Americans at Yorktown.
2. In 1786, he accepted the offer to take up the post of Governor-General of Bengal on a condition that he be given the supreme military command as well.
3. He was the First person to be the parliamentary governors-general in India.
4. He arrived at Calcutta on 12 September and took charge.
5. Under his guidance, the Cornwallis Code was developed which contained provisions for governing the civil, policing and judiciary administration in British India.

6. He founded a Sanskrit College at Benaras for Hindus and this is today the Government Sanskrit College in Benares.
7. He also established a mint at Calcutta.

Major Reforms Introduced by Lord Cornwallis

Permanent Settlement

1. Cornwallis introduced the **Permanent Settlement** of land revenue in Bengal and other parts of India.
2. Under this system, Zamindars or landlords were made the owners of the land, and the farmers were reduced to the status of tenants. The Zamindars had the right to evict the farmers any time.
3. The Zamindars had to pay 89% of the land revenue to the British and the remaining was for him.
4. Under this system, land revenue was fixed for a term of ten years.
5. This system accelerated the drain of wealth from India to Britain.

Service Reforms

1. To reduce corruption in the country, Cornwallis was given the authority related to services offered by the East India company.
2. He established rules which allowed only qualified persons to get into the services irrespective of their connections with higher authorities.
3. Top posts were reserved for the Europeans whereas Indians were offered lower grade posts such as Peons and clerks.
4. Private trade of the company was abolished completely

Judiciary Reforms

1. Cornwallis established courts in the districts, provinces and states. The highest court was the Supreme Court of Calcutta.
2. There were separate courts for civil and criminal cases.
3. Cornwallis abolished court fees and then lawyers were to prescribe their fees.
4. Government servants could be sued by people for their mistakes.
5. He also banned torturous punishments like the chopping off of limbs, nose and ears.

Police Reforms

1. He took the control of the police from the hands of the landlords to the District Superintendent of Police.
2. He established *thanas* to maintain law and order.

3. In 1789, he proclaimed that people practising slavery would be prosecuted by law.

Third Anglo-Mysore War

1. In 1790, Cornwallis declared war on Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore when the latter attacked Travancore, a British-friendly province. Tipu had also refused to release English prisoners taken during the second Anglo-Mysore War.
2. After this war, Tipu Sultan had to cede large parts of his kingdom to the British. As a result, the British won Malabar, Dindigul, Baramahal and Coorg.

Second Term

1. Cornwallis returned to England in 1793 and was replaced by Sir John Shore.
2. He returned for a second term as Governor-General in 1805 but this time his stay was uneventful.
3. Lord Cornwallis died of an illness at Ghazipur in 1805 and was buried there.

Important Events on this day

1919 - Adolf Hitler joined the German Workers' Party, later the Nazi Party

1988 - India and Malaysia signed an agreement in Kuala Lumpur for cooperation on science and technology