

The PITT's India Act of 1784: An In-depth Overview
(23 November, 2021)

Background of Pitt's India Act of 1784

1. To remove the defects of the Regulating Act of 1773. Its essential plan was the same i.e under British.

Provisions of Pitt's India Act of 1784

1. **A clear hierarchy of command and a more direct parliamentary control** over the Indian administration **was established.**
2. The **distinction between Political (Territories) and Commercial functions** was to be **maintained.**
 1. **Political functions** under A **Board of Control (BoC)** that was created in London
 1. It was a representative body of British Parliament. Its **President** was to be **in-charge all matters of Indian affairs.**
 2. It had **6 commissioners** = 4 members from Privy Council and 2 cabinet ministers.
 3. It was **to guide and control** the work of **CoD and Gol.**
 4. The Gol would still be run in the name of EIC but **political civil, military, political and revenue matters** would be **subject to control and supervision of the BoC.**
 5. The **orders** of this Board were to be **binding on the CoD** of the company.
 2. **Commercial functions** was to be carried out by **Court of Directors/ EIC**
 1. A **secret committee** consisting of 3 Directors was appointed to take the place of the CoD in **political and military matters.**
 2. CoD **retained its monopoly** over the trade and the right to nominate its officials.
 3. **But the appointment of the key officials like GG, governors, and**

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commander in chief it had to **obtain the crown approval.**

3. This **led to the establishment of Dual Control/ Double Govt.** It ended **in 1858.**

3. *Executive*

1. The GG and Governors were given the authority to override their councils.

2. The **Supreme Council was reduced from 4 to 3.** That means GGiC (earlier 5) now were 4. This was done to increase the authority of GG in GGiC. Even if 1 supported, then GG wins.

3. The **GGiC** in turn was **subordinated to CoD and BoC.** They were forbidden to declare war and enter into any treaty without the sanction of the directors or the secret committee.

4. Bombay and Madras (BoMad) Presidencies

1. The GG's powers expanded to BoMad on the matters of **diplomacy, revenue, and war.**

2. **Now, BoMad was placed firmly and clearly under Calcutta's control.**

5. The right of the Company to territorial possessions was however **not touched**, so it essentially meant a compromise.

6. It forbade the company from making wars / offensive-defensive alliances and stipulated for it to **focus purely on commercial activities**, there was a parliamentary prohibition on imperial expansion. But it was **only for a short period.** But **this was more a result of the heavy expenses incurred in the war** and the need to protect and consolidate the company's possession when the £ empire was passing through its lowest ebb. The **idea was to maintain a balance of power** (use of Oudh, Hyderabad and Carnatic) **between the Indian states** and thus **to protect the company's gains at minimum military expenditure.**

Significance of Pitts India Act of 1784

1. **A clear hierarchy of command** and a **more direct parliamentary control** over the Indian administration **was established.**

2. The Pitt's India Act 1784 established an effective structure of British admin which worked till 1858 with slight alterations.

3. The Pitt's India Act of 1784 laid the **foundation towards Centralization** which reached its climax towards the end of 19th C.

4. The Pitt's India Act 1784 strengthened GG's position in the Council.

5. Its Prez and the Board = the Future SoS and his council.

6. The Pitt's India Act 1784 **helped in uniting India** by giving supreme power to GG over the Governors of Presidencies.

7. The possessions of the Company in India came under the supremacy of the British Parliament.

8. The Transfer of Power in 1858 was just a formality **coz through BoC, Parliament already started controlling Indian Affairs.**

Limitations of Pitts India Act 1784

1. **The Dual Govt was not effective.** It had **divided authority and responsibility.** The provision of **2 masters of the GG - CoD, and BoC** gave **a lot of autonomy to the GG** as he could and did on many occasions play the 2 masters against each other. **Cornwallis** accordingly stretched his authority to the widest possible limit.
 2. The actual state of affairs was not known to the Home Government. This gave GG an opportunity to act at his discretion even on matters of importance.
 3. Similarly, a factious council could render the GG ineffective. An **amending act in 1786 gave GG veto powers in extraord situations.**
 4. There were separate civilian and army commands which created situations of conflict. The **act of 1786 combined the offices of GG and commander in chief** resulting in Warren Hasting becoming the two positions simultaneously.
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The Amending Act (1786) - Cornwallis

1. Cornwallis was appointed as the GG. He insisted on having the power to override GGiC in important matters of **safety, peace or interests of the crown.**
2. The **Offices of GG and CiC were to be united in the same person.**

Significance

1. This was a **step towards transfer of powers of the Company to the Crown.**