

One Unit System

Introduction

The One Unit system was introduced in 1955 when Iskander Mirza was Governor General of Pakistan. At that time, Pakistan was divided into East Pakistan on one side and four provinces in the West — Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Balochistan tribal areas. East Pakistan had a larger population, which meant it had more political power in the assembly. Leaders in West Pakistan feared that East Pakistan would dominate the government. To solve this, they decided to merge all four western provinces into a single province called *West Pakistan*. The idea was that if West Pakistan was one big province, then East and West would be equal in political power.

Aims and Objectives

The main purpose of the One Unit system was to create political balance between East and West Pakistan. By merging the provinces, both wings of the country would have the same number of seats in the central assembly, despite East Pakistan's larger population. Another aim was to reduce rivalry between Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, and Balochistan, because these provinces often disagreed and competed for resources. The government also argued that One Unit would make administration cheaper and easier, since there would be just one governor and one assembly instead of four. Finally, it was hoped that the system would help build national unity by encouraging people to think of themselves as Pakistanis first, rather than Punjabis, Sindhis, Baloch, or Pathans.

Implementation

The One Unit system officially came into force on 14 October 1955. The four provinces of West Pakistan were abolished, and instead, one new province was created with Lahore as its capital. A single governor was appointed to rule over West Pakistan, and the provincial assemblies were dissolved. All laws, administration, and finances were controlled by one central authority. Iskander Mirza, along with Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, strongly supported this decision. Interestingly, East Pakistan also accepted the plan because it gave them equal representation with West Pakistan in the assembly, even though they had more people. In the beginning, the system was presented as a practical way to bring order and fairness to Pakistan's politics.

Reactions and Criticism

Although the government thought the One Unit system would strengthen Pakistan, in reality, it created many problems. Smaller provinces like Sindh, NWFP, and Balochistan felt that they lost their identity and culture because everything was controlled by Lahore and the central government. Punjab, being the largest province, was seen as the real winner of this system because it gained more power over the smaller provinces. People in Sindh were upset that their

language and traditions were ignored, while Baloch leaders felt that their resources were being taken away. Even East Pakistan, which first supported the system, later realized that equal seats in the assembly did not mean fair treatment in practice. These issues led to protests by students, politicians, and intellectuals across Pakistan, and resentment against the system grew stronger with time.

End and Legacy

The One Unit system continued until 1970, when General Yahya Khan finally dissolved it. By then, opposition to the system had become very strong, and people in all provinces were demanding the return of their identities. When the provinces were restored, it was clear that the experiment of centralization had failed. Just a year later, in 1971, East Pakistan separated from Pakistan and became Bangladesh, showing how badly unity had been damaged. Historians believe that One Unit was a mistake because instead of creating harmony, it created more mistrust and bitterness between provinces. Its legacy is remembered as a warning that forced unity without respecting cultural and regional diversity can never succeed in keeping a federation strong.