

The 1956 Constitution

Introduction

The 1956 Constitution was Pakistan's first proper Constitution, enforced on 23 March 1956. It declared Pakistan an Islamic Republic and ended the dominion status under Britain. This was the first time Pakistan had a complete framework of laws for governance.

Main Features

The Constitution created a parliamentary system where the Prime Minister was the head of government. The President was head of state but with limited authority. It also gave equal representation to East and West Pakistan in the assembly, despite East's larger population. Citizens were given fundamental rights, and the judiciary was made independent.

Islamic Provisions

Islam was declared the state religion, and no law could go against the Quran and Sunnah. The Objectives Resolution was included in the Constitution. The President had to be a Muslim, and an Islamic Advisory Board was set up. The state was responsible for promoting Islamic values and education.

Political and Administrative Provisions

The Constitution introduced a federal system with strong central authority. Urdu and Bengali were declared official languages. Provinces had assemblies and governors, but provincial autonomy was limited. The Prime Minister was the executive authority, chosen by the assembly, while the President was elected for five years with only symbolic powers.

Weaknesses and Fall

The Constitution took nine years to be made, showing political weakness. Equal representation ignored population realities, creating discontent in East Pakistan. Central dominance reduced provincial harmony. Political instability, constant dismissal of governments, and growing military influence weakened the system. In 1958, Iskander Mirza abrogated the Constitution and imposed Martial Law, ending the experiment of parliamentary democracy.