

The Basic Democracies System

Introduction

The Basic Democracies System was introduced by Ayub Khan in 1959. He ended the 1956 Constitution and brought this system, claiming it was more suitable for Pakistan. Instead of people directly electing their leaders, 80,000 “Basic Democrats” were elected, who then voted for President and assemblies. This gave Ayub more control while keeping democracy only in name.

Structure

The system was divided into levels: Union, Thana, District, and Divisional councils. People directly elected members of Union Councils, who worked on village-level issues. However, real power was not in their hands, as the President and bureaucracy controlled the higher levels.

Functions

These councils worked on local development like roads, schools, water, and health centers. They also acted as the Electoral College to elect the President and legislatures. This made them important politically, but also a tool for Ayub Khan’s control.

Achievements

The system created a foundation for local government in Pakistan. It helped build some infrastructure and trained new leaders. Internationally, it was presented as democratic reform. But the system mainly benefitted elites and bureaucrats, not ordinary people.

Criticism and Decline

The Basic Democracies System was criticized for being undemocratic and elitist. Landlords dominated, political parties were weakened, and poor people had little voice. It became clear that Ayub used it to strengthen his rule. With growing opposition, the system collapsed after Ayub’s resignation in 1969.