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Topic: The Government of India Act 1858

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### **The Government of India Act 1858**

- Also known as 'An act for the better Government of India'.
- It is an act enacted by the parliament of Britain .The Sepoy Mutiny /Revolt of 1857 gave a severe jolt to the British government .The policies of the British East India company was criticized as it was felt that the company's misrule had ignited the revolt.
- It was then decided to transfer the rule of the company to Queen Victoria and the company itself to be dissolved .Queen Victoria ,the monarch of Britain ,thus became the sovereign of British territories in India and she took over the rule with the title "Empress of India".
- The Act was passed by the British Parliament on 2nd August 1858.

#### **Provisions of the Act:**

1. East India Company was liquidated.
2. Indian territories in Britain were to be governed in the name of the British queen
3. The act made India a direct British Colony.
4. The Indian civil services were to be instituted to assist the smooth functioning of the administration of the country. There were provisions for Indians to be admitted into service.
5. The act put an end to the doctrine of lapse <sup>1</sup>The act also abolished the dual government of the Pitt's India Act <sup>2</sup>.
6. The court of directors and the Board of Control of the British East India company was scrapped .The power of the company's Court of directors were shifted to and vested with the secretary of state for India.
7. The secretary of state was to be a British MP and a member of the Prime Ministers cabinet. He was a member of the British cabinet and was responsible ultimately to the

British Parliament. He was to be assisted by a Council of 15 members .The council had only an advisory role. The Secretary of State for India was made chairman of the Council.

8. The Secretary of State would act as a channel of communication between the British government and Indian Administration. The Secretary of State for India had complete authority and control over the Indian Administration .He was also vested with the power to send secret dispatches to India without consulting his council.
9. The British Parliament could question the secretary of state in the Parliament regarding the state of affairs in India.
10. The representative of the British government in India was the Governor General/ Viceroy.
11. Lord Stanley was appointed as the first Secretary of State for India .The first Governor General /Viceroy of India was Lord Canning.
12. The Viceroy and the Governors of the various presidencies were appointed by the Crown. The Viceroys were to be assisted by an Executive Council.
13. It was also decided that the remaining Indian Princes would have their independent status provided they accept British rule and British suzerainty.
14. Pardon would be issued to all the Indians who participated in the mutiny except those who had killed British subjects.

The Government of India Act 1858 was a landmark event in the history of British rule in India.

END NOTES:

1. **Pitt's India Act** 1784 or the East India Company Act 1784 was an act passed in the British Parliament. It resulted in the dual control/ joint government in India by the Crown in Great Britain and the British East India Company, with Crown having ultimate authority.
2. **The Doctrine of Lapse** was an annexation policy followed widely by Lord Dalhousie when he was India's Governor-General from 1848 to 1856. It was used as an administrative policy for the extension of British supremacy. According to Hindu law, an individual or a ruler without natural heirs could adopt a person who would then have all the personal and political rights of a son. Dalhousie asserted the British governments right of approving such adoptions and of acting at discretion in their absence in the case of dependent states.