

Pakistan : New Republic in the Commonwealth

ON March 23, 1956, in its federal capital of Karachi, Pakistan was formally proclaimed the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and special envoys for the occasion from Commonwealth and foreign countries presented their Letters to the new President, Major-General Iskander Mirza. The representative of Canada was the Hon. Mr. Justice T. C. Davis, Q.C. Canadian Ambassador to Japan.

Pakistan became an independent nation, retaining its membership in the Commonwealth, on August 15, 1947. The recent ceremony in Karachi and the promulgation of the Constitution which made it possible, thus represented the successful culmination of eight and a half years of unremitting effort to create for the new nation of Pakistan a constitutional form of government. It is notable that while the Commonwealth is not mentioned in the constitution, the Constituent Assembly has passed, by a large majority, a resolution stating that it is the intention of Pakistan to remain in the Commonwealth and to accept the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth. In this respect the action of Pakistan parallels that taken by India in 1950.

Difficulties Overcome

The obstacles to the formulation of a constitution and the achievement of parliamentary government for Pakistan have been formidable but have been successfully overcome. Not the least of these obstacles have been the deaths of Mr. M. A. Jinnah, the Qaid-i-Azam or founder of the new state and its first Governor General, in 1948, and of Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, its first Prime Minister, in 1951. These difficulties are reflected in the emergency powers which the new constitution accords to the President. He is empowered, when faced by external aggression or by internal disturbances which he deems threatening to the security of Pakistan, to issue a proclamation of emergency under which he can take over the executive authority of the provincial governments and suspend fundamental rights. Such a proclamation is valid for two months, and may be extended for another four months by the National Assembly.

Perhaps the most easily discernible difficulty in framing a constitution for Pakistan was to find a set of principles which would be acceptable to both East Pakistan and West Pakistan and which would do equal justice to both areas. East and West Pakistan are physically separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory, as well as by race, language and culture. They are united principally by their common allegiance to Islam. East Pakistan is populated by 42 million Bengalis, who have dwelt for centuries in the lower Ganges valley. In West Pakistan live some 37 million Punjabis, Sindis and representatives of tribal areas whose principal language is Urdu. The seven component parts of West Pakistan (the Punjab, Northwest Frontier Province, Sind, Karachi, Baluchistan, Bahawalpur and Khairpur) were united during the past year to form one administrative unit. In order to meet the sectional claims of both provinces (i.e. East and West Pakistan) each is now accorded equal representation in the