

new unicameral, 300-member National Assembly. It is further provided that the National Assembly shall hold at least one session each year in Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan.

Besides the sectional divergencies within the country, there has been, since independence, a massive refugee problem caused by the passing of hundreds of thousands of refugees back and forth between India and Pakistan after Partition. This problem, among others, was considerably aggravated in its initial stages by a severe shortage of trained administrators.

The choice of an official language was one of the most difficult problems facing the framers of the constitution. Bengali is the predominant language in East Pakistan and Urdu in West Pakistan, with English still being used for the transaction of much official business. The problem has been temporarily shelved by the constitution, which provides that both Bengali and Urdu will be considered official languages for the next twenty years but that English will be used for the transaction of most official business for the next ten years.

Basis of Constitution

The constitution is based upon a draft which was placed before the Constituent Assembly on January 9, 1956, by the Minister of Law, Mr. I. I. Chundrigar. The Awami League, which has its political strength in East Pakistan, led the opposition to the adoption of the constitution. Its criticism of the draft charged that its Islamic nature was discriminatory and that it would put the East Pakistanis perpetually at a disadvantage. The opposition contended that the clauses which decreed that the President and Vice-President must be Muslims would discriminate against all minorities in the country, and especially against the Hindus, who make up 14 per cent (some eleven millions) of the population. This criticism has been largely met by that section of the constitution dealing with fundamental rights. This section provides that all citizens are equal before the law and shall have the right of freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, association, and the right to practice and propagate their own religion. The likelihood of communal controversies over the constitution has been further reduced by avoiding the question of whether there should be joint or separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims. It is merely provided that the National Assembly will legislate on the subject after the provinces have been consulted. Untouchability has been abolished outright. Another opposition criticism was that the draft put East Pakistan perpetually at an economic disadvantage in relation to West Pakistan. However, this objection was met by the provision of a Standing Economic Commission, which is to ensure equal treatment for East and West Pakistan.

The constitution provides for a President, who will be elected for a five-year term by an electoral college, consisting of all members of the National Assembly and the two provincial assemblies, making a total of some 900 persons. The President will then appoint as Prime Minister the man whom he considers most likely to command a majority in the National Assembly. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet he chooses are collectively responsible to the National Assembly. The President may refuse to assent to any bill, except a money bill, but if the bill is again passed by the Assembly by a simple majority, with or without amendment, he may no longer withhold his assent.