

After assuming charge as Prime Minister, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali along with his team worked day and night to formulate a constitution for Pakistan. His efforts led to the first constitution that was enforced in the country on March 23, 1956. Pakistan's status as a dominion ended and the country was declared an Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Thereupon the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan became the interim National Assembly and Governor General Iskander Mirza was sworn in as the first President of Pakistan.

The Constitution of 1956 consisted of 234 articles, which were divided into 13 parts and 6 schedules. One of the main features of the Constitution was its Islamic character. Along with other Islamic provisions in the Constitution, the president, who was required to be a Muslim of at least 40 years of age, was to set up an organization for Islamic research with the aim of establishing a true Islamic society. The Objectives Resolution was, however, only made the preamble of the Constitution and not included in its main text.

The Constitution vested the executive authority of the President in the Federation. Among many powers that president had, He also had the power to appoint the Prime Minister from amongst the members of the National Assembly. However, his appointee had to take a vote of confidence from the Assembly within two months of his appointment. The President also had the power to remove the Prime Minister if he felt that the Prime Minister had lost the confidence of the majority of the National Assembly members.

The Constitution of 1956 provided for parliamentary form of government with a unicameral legislature. The only house of parliament, the National Assembly, was to consist of 300 members. The Constitution recognized the concept of One Unit, and the seats were divided equally between the two wings of the country. Thus the principle of parity was introduced. For the first ten years, five additional seats were reserved for women for each wing. National Assembly was to meet at least twice a year with at least one session at Dhaka. The Constitution offered direct elections under adult franchise. Every citizen of Pakistan with minimum age of 21 was allowed to vote in the elections.

The Constitution provided for federal form of government in the country. The provincial structure was similar to the one in the center. The pattern for the center-province relations was the same as it was in the Government of India Act, 1935. There were federal, provincial and concurrent lists of subjects. There were 30 items in the federal list, 94 items in the provincial list and 19 items in the concurrent list. The federal legislation was to get precedence over provincial legislation regarding the concurrent list. Residuary powers were vested in the provinces. In case of a conflict between center and provinces or between the two provinces, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was to act as the mediator.

The Constitution of 1956 was a written and flexible constitution. It advocated the fundamental rights of the individual. However, the President had the power to suspend these rights in case of an emergency. Judiciary was to remain independent. Urdu and Bengali were both accepted as state languages, while English was to remain the official language for the first 25 years. After ten years' passage of the Constitution, the President was to appoint a commission with the task to make recommendation for the replacement of English as the official language.

The Constitution of 1956 proved to be short lived as on October 7, 1958, Martial Law was promulgated and the constitution was abrogated.