

What is Rowlatt Act 1919?

The Rowlatt Act (famously known as the Black Act) refers to the draconian law passed by the British government in March 1919. It is officially called the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act and gave enormous power to the British government and police to arrest anyone suspected of seditious activities. It was meant to replace the emergency law called the Defence of India Act 1915. The Black Act was drafted by a committee headed by a British Judge, Sir Sydney Rowlatt to curb the growing movement of nationalism in India.

Rowlatt Act and its Impact

- The act gave the government authority to arrest any suspected person without a warrant and detain him/her for up to 2 years without a trial.
- The act took away people's right to legal discourse and suspended the constitutional [right to habeas corpus](#).
- The Rowlatt act as an extension of the emergency law in the aftermath of the first world war.
- The act also meant severe limitations on free press and gave the police undue right to search public and private spaces without a warrant.
- An indefinite ban on public gatherings of any nature.

Despite a massive opposition by the unofficial Indian members to the Act, the legislative assembly made the notorious bill into law in March 1919. Many Indian leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah resigned from the legislative assembly and criticised the dictatorship of the British Power and the lack of constitutional rights for the Indian citizens. The act further alienated Indian citizens, especially people of Punjab who had gallantly fought along with the British army in the first World War (1914 to 1918).

In protest, Mahatma Gandhi launched a nationwide satyagraha (peaceful civil disobedience movement) against the Rowlatt Act on 6th April 1919. Millions of Indians supported the movement. In various parts of India, the movement turned violent and riots broke out. The situation in Punjab province was the worst, the British government declared martial law in the province and Mahatma Gandhi called off the movement. As the protest turned violent, many prominent Congress leaders were arrested like Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew. In Punjab, martial law dictated that no more than 4 people were allowed to assemble in the province.

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre took place on 13th April 1919 on the day of Baisakhi when a large group of men, women and children unaware of the martial law decided to assemble in the park. The peaceful protest was organised against the Rowlatt Act and the wrongful arrest of Congress leaders in India. Without any warning, General Dyer ordered its men to block all

entrances and to open fire on the peaceful gathering. This massacre took 400 civilian lives and injured 1200.

The incident created a rift between the Indian people and the British government. Despite a massive outcry, no action was taken against the perpetrators of the heinous crime. The massacre at Amritsar was a turning point in the Indian national movement as the moderate leaders lost faith in the fairness of the British regime. The Hunter Commission was set up to investigate the event and condemned the actions of General Dyer yet no concrete punishment was issued against the General behind the most brutal killings in modern India.

Timeline of Rowlatt Act

Date	Event
1917	The Government of India appointed a committee headed by Justice Sydney Rowlatt to investigate 'seditious activities' in India and bring out measures to curb the revolution.
1919	In March 1919, the British government passed the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, popularly called the Rowlatt Bill despite popular opposition.
1919	In April 1919, in opposition to the draconian law that threatened the civil liberties of the Indians, Mahatma Gandhi launched nationwide satyagraha.
1919	Mahatma Gandhi cancelled the nationwide hartal as the movement grew violent. Riots broke out in India and Punjab was the worst hit, it was put under Martial Law. On 13th April 1919, the traumatic Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place, a group of peaceful protestors gathered in the park and Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Michael O'Dwyer opened fire and killed hundreds and injured thousands of people.
October 1919	The Hunter Commission was appointed by the Government of India to investigate the Jallianwala bagh incident.
1922	Rowlatt Act was repealed by Lord Reading

Non- Cooperation Movement

The non-cooperation movement was launched in 1920 on 5th September. It was led by Mahatma Gandhi & focused on abolishing the use of British products, declining or resigning from British posts, educational institutions, prohibiting government regulations, courts, etc. The movement was non-violent & launched to withdraw the nation's cooperation after the

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre & [Rowlatt Act](#). Mahatma Gandhi stated India could achieve independence within a year if this movement was a success. It was the transition of individuals to a mass movement. Non-cooperation was focused to get full independence also known as Purna Swaraj. To know more, read our blog on [Non-Cooperation Movement](#).

Khilafat Movement

Two movements that were initiated to oppose British rule in India during the fight for India Independence were Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement. Both of the movements followed non-violence acts. While there were many reasons behind the movements, one major reason behind the Khilafat movement was when the religious head of Muslims who was the sultan of turkey was killed by Britishers. Khilafat movement led by Maulana Mohammed Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, Maulana Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Hasrat Mohani. This movement united Hindus and Muslims as the leaders of the khilafat movement joined the non-cooperation movement.

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Rowlatt Act UPSC Questions

Which year was the Rowlatt Act introduced?

The Rowlatt Act was introduced in the year 1919 by the British government and on the recommendation of the Rowlatt Committee formed in 1917.

Which act passed by the British government is also known as the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919?

In March 1919, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act was passed. It was more popularly known as the Rowlatt Act or the Black Act in India.

When was Rowlatt act passed?

The Rowlatt Act was introduced at the Imperial Legislative Council of Delhi on 10th March 1919.

When did Mahatma Gandhi announce the nationwide satyagraha in India?

Mahatma Gandhi in opposition to the notorious Rowlatt Act declared a nationwide satyagraha on 6th April 1919. Soon, the movement was called off as riots broke out in India.

What is the significance of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a watershed moment in the Indian national movement as several moderate Indian leaders lost all faith in the British establishment and began to demand

absolute independence. The massacre stunned Indians and showed them how callously the British had treated Indian lives.

Write a short note on Rowlatt act.

The Rowlatt Act (famously known as the Black Act) refers to the draconian law passed by the British government in March 1919. It is officially called the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act and gave enormous power to the British government and police to arrest anyone suspected of seditious activities. It was meant to replace the emergency law called the Defence of India Act 1915. The act gave the government authority to arrest any suspected person without a warrant and detain him/her for up to 2 years without a trial.

Rowlatt act was based on which committee?

It was based on Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt's committee of 1918.