



British Indian Round Table Conference

BACKGROUND GUIDE



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Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to DPS Eldeco MUN 2023. As we convene to discuss the historic agenda of the "British Indian Round Table Conference" we anticipate a dynamic and engaging debate on this significant chapter in India's struggle for self-governance.

We are aware that most of you must be beginners, or some may have attended MUN conferences before but take it from me, none of that matters except your dedication and your will to actively participate in the discussions that we will have during these two days. To dismiss your anxieties away, we tell you not to worry at all about what procedures we will be following as that is only secondary and will also be explained in the first session of the committee. Your first priority should be research. This guide is only intended to be the starting point of your research.

The British Indian Round Table Conference(s) (hereinafter "RTC") were a series of three conferences held between 1930 and 1932 in London. They aimed to bring together Indian political leaders and representatives to discuss constitutional reforms and India's future political setup. The conferences were marked by diverse perspectives, fervent discussions, and efforts to address the complexities of India's multi-faceted socio-political landscape. While these were held as 3 separate conferences, for the purposes of this simulation, we shall be having them together in the 2 days of the conference.

As delegates, you are tasked with assuming the roles of various historical figures, representing different political parties, communities, and ideologies. Your challenge is to delve into the minds and motivations of these leaders, considering the historical context and the prevailing dynamics, as you navigate the intricacies of the Round Table Conferences. While the discussions will undoubtedly be passionate, we urge you to uphold the principles of diplomacy, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity.

To ensure a productive conference experience, we encourage you to:

1. Thoroughly research the historical context, political stances, and key objectives of your assigned character.
2. Engage in active debate and contribute to the formulation of comprehensive solutions that reflect your character's interests while also addressing the broader needs of the Indian/British population. All delegates are encouraged to think creatively and critically during the simulation, consider hypothetical scenarios or alternative historical outcomes to enhance the discussions.



3. Engage in caucuses and informal consultations to build alliances, negotiate effectively, and explore potential compromises. Delegates are encouraged to make a common Google Drive to share resources and research.
4. Collaborate with fellow delegates to draft comprehensive and actionable resolutions that reflect the collective efforts of the Round Table Conferences.
5. As the Executive Board, we are committed to providing a conducive and inclusive environment for your deliberations. Should you have any questions or concerns during the conference, do not hesitate to approach us for guidance and support.

We are confident that your participation will be instrumental in shaping the course of history in this simulation of the British India Round Table Conferences. May your insights, debates, and resolutions inspire a future marked by unity, understanding, and progress.

Wishing you an engaging and rewarding conference.

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Procedures

1. General:

- a. While the RTCs were held as 3 separate conferences, for the purposes of this simulation, we shall be having them together in the 2 days of the conference.
- b. The Round-Robin Speaking Format is designed to allow all delegates to express their views on the agenda in an organized and efficient manner.

2. Speaking Order:

- The speaking order will follow a predetermined sequence decided by the Chair.
- The sequence will rotate after each round-robin cycle to ensure equal opportunities for all delegates to speak first, second, and so on.
- The Chair will announce the speaking order before the round-robin session begins.

3. Opening statements:

In the first round each delegate can deliver their opening statements.

4. Time Management:

- Time Limit of Speeches: To be decided by the committee by consensus.
- Yields: Delegates are not permitted to yield their remaining time to other delegates.
- The total time allocated for the round-robin session will depend on the number of delegates and the overall schedule. The Chair will ensure that each delegate receives an equal and fair opportunity to speak within the allocated time.

5. After the initial round of opening statements, delegates may decide to allocate time to discuss specific sub-topics (i.e 'moderated caucuses'). These sessions will comprise of speeches of shorter time limits and the speaker is allowed to take questions. We can also consider having additional rounds of speeches on the same topic if time permits.

6. Delegates may also decide to suspend the formal session for a definite period of time for informal discussions, lobbying and negotiations.

7. Towards the end of the conference, delegates will be expected to have closing statements that can either offer closing remarks or introduce/discuss any tabled documents.

8. If the committee presents any documents, the committee shall vote on the documents before closing the conference.



Portfolio Guide

The Executive Board has decided to include the portfolios that will be present in the committee in this guide so as to expand the horizon of research. Use this committee matrix to thoroughly research the historical context, political stances, and key objectives of various different representatives and the causes they represent. Delegates are advised to understand the ideologies, allies, opponents, influence, powers and limitations of their portfolios properly and apply them in the committee considering the geopolitical situation in 1930-32 and not current day 2023.

British Delegation:

1. Ramsay MacDonald- Prime Minister.
2. Samuel Hoare- Secretary of State for India
3. Lord Irwin- Viceroy of India
4. Lord Sankey-Lord high Chancellor of Britain
5. Lord Lothian- British Statesman
6. Lord William Peel
7. Rufus Daniel Isaacs

Indian Delegation:

1. Muhammad Ali Jinnah- Representative Indian Muslim League
2. Tej Bahadur Sapru- Liberal Party Member
3. Dr. B.R Ambedkar- Representative of the Depressed Classes.
4. Sardar Ujjal Singh- Member of Punjab Legislative Council, Sikh Representative.
5. Aga Khan III- President of All India Muslim League.
6. B. S. Moonje- Hindu Mahasabha President.
7. K. T. Paul- Representative of Indian Christians All India Conference of Indian Christians (AICIC)
8. Mahatma Gandhi- Representative INC
9. Sarojini Naidu- INC.
10. Madan Mohan Malaviya- INC.
11. Srinivasa Iyengar-INC.
12. Cowasji Jehangir- Parsi and business representative.

Princely States Delegation:

1. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.
2. Hamidullah Khan- Nawab of Bhopal.
3. Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir.
4. Kameshwar Singh- Maharaja of Darbhanga.
5. Muhammad Saleh Akbar Hydari - Governor of Hyderabad.
6. Sir Mirza Ismail - Dewan of Mysore



Themes and Suggestive Topics

Representation of the Community

In order to defend their interests and assure fair political participation, several religious and minority groups demanded separate electorates, which received a lot of attention. The conference discussed the advantages and disadvantages of community representation as well as its potential role in promoting harmony and cooperation among Indians.

Representation of Women

The issue of women's representation in legislative bodies was also raised during the conference. Some leaders advocated for better representation and political rights for women.

Separate Electorates

The concept of separate electorates was proposed during the British India Round Table Conferences as a way to ensure representation for specific religious and minority groups. Separate electorates meant that members of certain communities would vote only for candidates belonging to their own community, rather than competing with candidates from other communities in general elections. This system was introduced to address the concerns and protect the political interests of two specific groups: the Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and the Muslims.

Protection of Minority Interests: Separate electorates were seen as a measure to protect the political rights and interests of religious and minority communities. There was a fear that some communities might be marginalized in a democratic system dominated by the majority.

Enhanced Representation: Separate electorates aimed to provide enhanced political representation for marginalized communities. It ensured that candidates from these communities could win seats in legislative bodies without having to compete against candidates from larger and more dominant groups.

Importance for Dalits: Dalits (Scheduled Castes) were historically oppressed and faced severe discrimination. The separate electorate system was intended to give them a political voice and representation in the legislative bodies, enabling them to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for their rights. Dalits feared that in a joint electorate system, their interests might be overshadowed or ignored by dominant caste groups. Separate electorates provided them with a platform to elect representatives who would specifically address their social and economic concerns.

Importance for Muslims: The Muslim community in British India was concerned about being a minority in a predominantly Hindu country. Separate electorates were seen as a way to ensure that Muslims had their own political representation and a say in legislative bodies without being outnumbered by the Hindu majority. Separate electorates would allow them to elect representatives who could effectively voice their community's distinct interests and protect their religious and cultural rights.

Despite the social justice intentions behind separate electorates, the system was criticized on the ground that it further divided the nation along religious and communal lines, promoting sectarian interests over national unity.



Report of the Simon Commission

The Simon Commission Report played a significant role in shaping the discussions at the Round Table Conferences. The British government established the Simon Commission in 1927 to evaluate the success of India's constitutional changes. However, the Commission was heavily criticized in India because it consisted entirely of British members and had no Indian representation. The lack of Indian members in the Commission led to widespread protests and boycotts by various political parties and organizations, who saw it as an affront to Indian aspirations for self-governance.

The Simon Commission's report recommended the continuation of separate electorates for religious minorities, which further added to the communal tensions in India. This issue became a crucial point of discussion during the Round Table Conferences, with different groups debating the merits and drawbacks of separate electorates.

Dominion Status

The Simon report also fell short of granting full dominion status or complete self-governance to India. Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, demanded that India be granted the same status as other self-governing dominions within the British Empire, like Canada and Australia. Leaders in Indian politics, especially those connected to the Indian National Congress, particularly those associated with the Indian National Congress, demanded a shift from colonial rule towards self-governance within the British Commonwealth, similar to the status of Canada, Australia, and other dominions. The conference was expected to discuss the feasibility and conditions for granting Dominion Status to India.

The British argued that granting dominion status to India would be a step-by-step process towards eventual independence. They believed that India needed to be gradually prepared for self-governance, and dominion status would serve as an intermediate stage in that transition. Retaining India as a dominion would provide the British with a strategic advantage, especially in terms of defense and security in the region. They believed that a united India within the Commonwealth would help protect British interests in the region. On the other hand, the Indian leaders demanded complete independence or "Purna Swaraj." They saw dominion status as insufficient and considered it a continuation of British control in a different form. These differing stances on the future political setup of India were a major point of contention during the Round Table Conferences.

Provincial governments and autonomy

There have been conversations about giving provincial governments more authority so that municipal governments may operate more independently. In order to fulfill regional desires and guarantee Indian involvement in the management of their territories, this subject was essential. Despite the debates at the first Round Table Conference, a concrete resolution on provincial autonomy was not achieved.

The main point of debate was the legislative authority of the provinces. Some leaders argued for a federal structure, with strong provincial legislatures having the power to make laws on subjects within their jurisdiction. Leaders argued that provincial governments should have the ability to appoint their own executive bodies and manage day-to-day governance without significant intervention from the central government. There were discussions about the division of powers between the central government and provincial governments. Certain subjects, like defense and foreign affairs, were proposed to be reserved for the central government, while others, like education and health, would fall under the purview of the provinces.



Unitary versus Federated Government

During the Round Table Conferences, the question of whether India should be run as a unitary state with a centralized government or as a federated state with power devolved to regional entities was a significant point of debate. Both the British and Indian sides presented their respective arguments for their preferred model of governance.

A unitary state would ensure that the British government retained more control over the governance of India. It would provide a mechanism to safeguard British economic, strategic, and imperial interests in the subcontinent. The British argued that a unitary state with a centralized government would lead to a more efficient and coordinated administration. They believed that a strong central authority would enable swift decision-making and uniform policies across the entire country.

The Indian leaders advocated for a federated state to grant greater autonomy to provinces, enabling them to manage their internal affairs according to their unique circumstances and priorities. A federated state was seen as a means to distribute power more equitably among different regions, avoiding the concentration of authority solely at the center. It was believed that such a structure would foster a sense of ownership and participation in governance among the provinces.

The Gandhi–Irwin Pact : was a political agreement signed by Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, on 5 March 1931 before the Second Round Table Conference in London. Before this, Irwin, the Viceroy, had announced in October 1929 a vague offer of 'dominion status' for India in an unspecified future and a Round Table Conference to discuss a future constitution. Gandhi demanded an end to repression and the release of political prisoners arrested during the Civil Disobedience Movement. He also sought guarantees of fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful protest and assembly. As a part of the agreement, Gandhi agreed to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhi agreed to represent the Indian National Congress as a full participant in the third Round Table Conference.

Ambedkar's dissatisfaction:

Ambedkar expressed disappointment with the Gandhi–Irwin Pact because it did not address the specific concerns and demands of the Dalit community. He believed that the pact primarily focused on the interests of the Congress and did not adequately address the issue of social and political empowerment of the marginalized communities, including the Dalits.

Ambedkar strongly advocated for separate electorates for the Dalits, which would allow them to elect their own representatives in legislative bodies. He saw separate electorates as a means to protect the political interests of the Dalit community and provide them with a platform to voice their concerns.

Ambedkar's dissatisfaction with the Gandhi–Irwin Pact ultimately led to his decision to reject the Poona Pact, which was a compromise reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar on September 24, 1932. The Poona Pact abandoned separate electorates for Dalits but provided for reserved seats in legislatures, ensuring representation through joint electorates with a system of reserved seats.



Election and Franchise Reforms

The purpose of the conference was to debate electoral changes to ensure fair and representative elections, address the problem of the right to vote, and expand voting rights to a greater proportion of the Indian people. Indian leaders pushed for the introduction of universal adult suffrage, where all adult citizens, regardless of caste, religion, or gender, would have the right to vote. They saw this as a democratic and inclusive approach that would empower all citizens equally. Discussions on franchise reforms included debates on the eligibility criteria for voters and the age of voting. Some leaders argued for lowering the voting age to enable greater youth participation in the political process.

Civil liberties: The importance of preserving fundamental rights and civil freedoms for all Indian people, regardless of their socioeconomic or religious background. The right to protest freely was discussed.

Crowned States: It was important to examine how the princely states would fit into the new constitutional system and what their position would be. discussions over their inclusion in and representation under a possible federal system.

Agrarian problems and land reform: discussions about land ownership, agricultural reform, and farmer and peasant rights.

Economic and Financial Matters: negotiations over India's taxation, economic development, and fiscal policy.



Further Reading and Useful Links

- Many of the discussions from the RTCs led to the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935. What alternative scenarios and propositions could have been possible? What kind of compromises would both parties have to make given the rapidly changing political scenario and unrest in British India at the time?

See Government of India Act 1935, available at -

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical-constitution/government-of-india-act-1935/>

- The Round Table Conferences held between 1930 and 1932 played a crucial role in setting the context for the Poona Pact. The Congress boycott of the second Round Table Conference and the subsequent negotiations between Gandhi and Ambedkar in the context of the Poona Pact reflected the complexity of finding a balance between protecting interests of Dalits and the broader principles of national unity and representation.
 - See 'Why did Ambedkar accept the Poona Pact' (CLPR Trust, 2022, YouTube) <https://youtu.be/v3mEXOnPJ1U>
 - For a constitutional history of the Poona Pact and reservations see also- Prof. Anurag Bhaskar, Setting the Record Straight on the Myth of Ten-year Limit Reservations and Dr Ambedkar's Stance (November 23, 2021). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3970168> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3970168>
- Other useful Links:
 - See Univ. of Nottingham's research group on the RTCs- <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/conferencing-the-international/index.aspx>
 - Dr. Ambedkar's speech at the Plenary Session, First Sitting of the Round Table Conference Nov. 1930 - <https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/need-for-political-power-for-depressed-classes/>

AP Archive - India Round Table Conference- Short Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-y1MwgckE>