

Why the Act was enacted?

- In January 1897, Council member J Woodburn tabled the Epidemic Diseases Bill during bubonic plague outbreak in Bombay.
- The Bill was tabled as a measure to contain the plague before it attains large proportions elsewhere in the country.
- It noted that the powers of the municipal bodies and other local governments were inadequate to deal with such situations.
- It called for special powers for governments of Indian provinces and local bodies, including to check passengers of trains and sea routes.
- It said existing laws were insufficient to enable municipal officers to deal with matters related to overcrowded houses, sanitation, etc.

How was it passed?

- The Bill was referred to a Select Committee, which submitted its report on 4th February 1897.
- The Bill was passed the same day, after a brief discussion.
- It was passed amid concerns of the disease spreading, with crowds from Bombay having reached places all over India.
- The government was particularly worried about Calcutta, then the Indian capital.
- Among the members, Rahimtula Muhammad Sayani and Maharaja of Darbhanga said that the Bill was passed hurriedly.

What were the challenges discussed?

- Babu Joy Gobind Law suggested that steps be taken with regard to **Muslims'** pilgrimage to Mecca.
- But Alexander Mackenzie, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, clarified that his government was unwilling to interfere with religious practices.
- Sayani said that the persons desirous of performing the pilgrimage could be persuaded to put off their intention until the danger has passed.
- It was discussed that isolating **women** was particularly difficult.
- Woodburn told that the whole town could not run the risk of plague infection merely because its source is a woman.

2.2 Relaxing Labour Laws

What is the issue?

- Some state governments have recently decided to make significant changes in the application of labour laws.