



THE COMMONWEALTH

Why in News?

75 years since the creation of the modern Commonwealth with the signing of the London Declaration

About Commonwealth

Voluntary Association

- Comprises mostly former British colonies
- Collaborates on democracy, trade, and climate change

Genesis

British Commonwealth of Nations (1926)

- At the 1926 imperial conference, Britain and the Dominions agreed as equal members of a community within the British Empire
- They owed allegiance to the British monarch, but the UK didn't rule over them

India's Independence (1947)

India wanted to become a republic while remaining a member

London Declaration (1949)

- Republics and other countries could be part of the Commonwealth
- Initially comprised eight members including India

Current Members

56 members (including India)

Working

Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) meet every two years (latest being in Rwanda in 2022) to discuss pertinent issues and release a summit communiqué

Major Initiatives of the Commonwealth

1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles

1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration

Commonwealth Charter (2012)

16 core shared principles such as Rule of Law

Role in Ending Apartheid

Advocacy and support in ending apartheid in South Africa

Empowering Youths

Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)

Commonwealth Cyber Declaration (2018)

Conclusion

Leveraging the Commonwealth network for climate change, business, trade, and people-to-people connections is essential for long-term growth and prosperity

Is the Commonwealth relevant in the present times?

Arguments in Favour

Election Observation Missions

140 missions since 1967 promoting democracy

Evolving Membership

New members like Togo and Gabon

Advocacy for SDGs

Committed to SDG implementation, particularly Goal 16

Trade

Bilateral trade costs 21% less among Commonwealth countries

Unity through Shared Experiences

Common language, history, and people-to-people connections

Arguments Against

Legitimizing Colonization

Criticized for legitimizing historical colonization

Host Country Controversy

Rwanda's human rights record as CHOGM host

Lack of Cohesion Among Members

Funding Constraints

Limited funding hampers effectiveness

India's Relations with the Commonwealth

Largest member state with 60% of the total population

Fourth largest contributor

Contributions to CFTC, CF, CYP, and COL

Hosted Commonwealth Summit (1983) and Commonwealth Games (2010)

Commonwealth Sub Window (US\$ 50 Million over 5 years) for SDG and Climate Action projects



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Why in News?

The year 2024 marks 75 years since the creation of the modern Commonwealth with the signing of the London Declaration in 1949, which redefined the association to include republics and non-British monarchies.

About the Commonwealth

Key Features:

- 1. Nature:** A voluntary association of 56 member countries, most of which are former British colonies, collaborating on democracy, trade, climate change, and development.
- 2. Genesis:**
 - 1926: Formation of the British Commonwealth of Nations at the Imperial Conference.
 - 1947: India sought to remain a Commonwealth member after becoming a republic.
 - 1949: Adoption of the London Declaration, formalizing the modern Commonwealth.
- 3. Organizational Structure:**
 - Commonwealth Secretariat (London): Supports members in achieving shared goals.
 - Commonwealth Foundation (London): Focuses on democracy and development participation.
 - Commonwealth of Learning (Canada): Advocates for open and distance education.

Major Initiatives

- 1. Democracy and Human Rights:**
 - 1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles and 1991 Harare Declaration: Commitment to democracy and human rights.
 - Election observation missions in over 40 countries since 1967.
- 2. Youth Empowerment:** The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) focuses on building capacity for youth leadership.
- 3. Climate Change and Sustainability:**
 - Commonwealth Blue Charter and Climate Finance Access Hub: Focus on sustainable development and addressing climate change.
 - Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance: Tackles plastic pollution in oceans.
- 4. Trade and Development:**
 - Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and scholarships.
 - Trade within the Commonwealth is 21% cheaper than with non-member countries.

India's Role in the Commonwealth

- 1. Largest Member:** India accounts for nearly 60% of the Commonwealth's population.



2. Contributions:

- India is the 4th largest contributor to Commonwealth funds.
- Commonwealth Sub-Window (2018): \$50 million for SDG and climate-related projects.

3. **Events Hosted:** 1983 CHOGM and 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi.

4. **Engagement:** Actively supports initiatives such as CFTC, CF, CYP, and COL.

Relevance in Contemporary Times

Arguments in Favour:

1. **Democracy and Good Governance:** Election observation missions and support for democratic institutions strengthen governance.
2. **Economic Benefits:** Reduced trade costs among members foster economic collaboration.
3. **Youth and Climate Advocacy:** Dedicated programs for youth empowerment and sustainability highlight its contemporary focus.
4. **Expanding Membership:** Inclusion of non-former British colonies like Togo and Gabon demonstrates its adaptability.

Arguments Against:

1. **Colonial Legacy:** Critics argue it legitimizes colonialism rather than addressing historical injustices.
2. **Ineffectiveness:** Limited response during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **Human Rights Concerns:** Hosting CHOGM in countries with poor human rights records (e.g., Rwanda) raises credibility issues.
4. **Lack of Cohesion:** Divergent member stances on global issues, such as abstentions on the Russia-Ukraine war, weaken its influence.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth remains a valuable platform for fostering cooperation on democracy, trade, and climate change. To enhance its relevance:

- It must leverage its network for climate action, economic growth, and youth development.
- Addressing funding constraints and ensuring stronger cohesion among members will help it remain effective in addressing global challenges.



Do you know?

Unique Characteristics of Commonwealth:

- No charter, treaty, or constitution.
- All members are equal, with decisions made by consensus.
- The Head of the Commonwealth is chosen by member countries.

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