



Future of the Commonwealth

For Prelims: Commonwealth Nations, British Monarchy, Republic

For mains: Relevance of Commonwealth today and its Future

Why in News?

The death of [Queen Elizabeth II](#) of the United Kingdom, marks not only the end of an era for the British monarchy but also a turning point for the 14 Commonwealth realms of which she was the Head of State.

What is the Background?

- There has been a significant transformation of the socio-economic environment in the 14 realms countries since the death of Queen Elizabeth II.
- Several countries out of these 14 called to **establish a [republic](#) and break free of historical ties to the British monarchy.**
 - A republic is a form of government in which "**supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives**".
- Thus, it is likely that during the reign of the **incumbent King Charles III**, the Queen's successor, more nations will follow in the **footsteps of Barbados.**
 - **In 2021**, Barbados became the **18th country to remove the British monarch from the role of head of state** and substitute them with a national government functionary.

What is the Commonwealth?

- **About:**
 - The Commonwealth of Nations is a group of **56 countries composed mostly of former British colonies.**
 - It was established by the **London Declaration in 1949.**
 - While members of the Commonwealth are predominantly located in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, with many of them emerging economies, the three European members of the group are Cyprus, Malta, and the U.K.
 - The developed nations of the Commonwealth are Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.
- **Republics and Realms:**
 - The Commonwealth **consists of both Republics and Realms.**
 - The British monarch is the **Head of State for the realms, whereas the republics are ruled by elected governments** except in the case of five countries — **Brunei Darussalam, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malaysia, and Tonga** — each a self-governed monarchy.
 - The **realms** are Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu.

What is the Commonwealth's Relevance in Today's World?

- Although the Commonwealth may seem like an outdated forum after the death of the queen, yet it retains a **suitable relevance which has sustained it over time even after the decolonization of the British Empire.**
- In the age of multilateral diplomacy, where states want a forum to express their views, advance their interests and shape global norms, the **Commonwealth provides precisely such a forum.**
- The monarch is **only the symbolic head**, the leaders of the free world make the Commonwealth work.
- Throughout her reign, Queen Elizabeth played a critical role in championing the organisation and maintaining the group's relevance, regularly travelling to meet with leaders of Commonwealth nations across the world.

What is the Future of Commonwealth?

- Australia, Newzealand, and the Bahamas are likely to become Republics in future.
- Governments in five other Caribbean nations — Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Kitts and Nevis — have **signalled their intention to act similarly.**
- Thus, it is not beyond imagination that following the death of Queen Elizabeth, **the Commonwealth realms might fade into being a relic of the past**, and nations that suffered a history of colonialism — along with its attendant violence and resource extraction — will move **forward to establish themselves as republics.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. The plan of Sir Stafford Cripps envisaged that after the Second World War (2016)

- (a) India should be granted complete independence
- (b) India should be partitioned into two before granting independence
- (c) India should be made a republic with the condition that she will join the Commonwealth
- (d) India should be given Dominion status

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- Cripps Mission headed by Stafford Cripps was sent by the British Government in 1942 to secure the cooperation of India in the Second World War.
- The proposal of the Cripps Mission was that India would be given a Dominion status associated with the United Kingdom. Further, it also suggested for setting up of a Constituent Assembly for framing the Constitution for Dominion of India post-World War II.
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru were the official negotiators of the Indian National Congress. The talks at the Cripps proposal failed ultimately leading to the launch of the Quit India Movement.
- **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.**

Q. Consider the following statements: (2010)

1. The Commonwealth has no charter, treaty or constitution.
2. All the territories/countries once under the British empire (jurisdiction/rule/mandate) automatically joined the Commonwealth as its members.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (a)

Exp:

- Commonwealth, also called the Commonwealth of Nations, is an association of Sovereign States comprising the United Kingdom and 53 of its former dependencies who have chosen to maintain ties of friendship and practical cooperation.
- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of member States and has no charter, treaty or constitution. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- For becoming a member of the Commonwealth, a country needs to apply for its membership. Further, not all the former British colonies are the member of Commonwealth like the USA. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- **Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.**

[Source: TH](#)

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