

IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS❖ **The British Commonwealth: Its past, present, and post-Queen Elizabeth future**

❖ **CONTEXT:** The passing of Queen Elizabeth II is a delicate moment for the British Commonwealth, 14 countries out of which continue to recognise the monarch as their Head of State, a position that is explicitly stated in the constitutions and laws of some of these countries. In these cases, changes to the law or statute might be required and could trigger calls for a referendum in jurisdictions where there is significant opposition to the current situation. Jamaica is one example, and it could well follow its regional neighbour Barbados, which left the Commonwealth after becoming a republic in 2021.

- Developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are constitutional monarchies, and their political systems are oriented in a way that the new monarch of the United Kingdom will as part of the usual process become their head of state. However, in June, Australia's new government headed by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese appointed Matt Thistlewaite as the country's first minister tasked with overseeing a transition to a republic, which triggered talk that a referendum to remove the Queen as head of state could follow.

❖ **Commonwealth of Nations**

- The Commonwealth of Nations, or simply the Commonwealth, is a group of 56 member countries, the vast majority of which are former British colonies. They are mostly in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific. Three European nations are part of the Commonwealth: Cyprus, Malta, and the UK itself.
- Fourteen of these 56 countries — along with the UK — constitute the “Commonwealth realms”. They 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, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. The British monarch — now King Charles III, the eldest son of Queen Elizabeth II — is the head of state of these countries.
- Of the remaining 41 member states of the Commonwealth, 36 are republics — this group includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The other five — Brunei Darussalam, Lesotho, Malaysia, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) and Tonga — have their own monarchs.
- For the wider Commonwealth, the most visible uniting feature is the Commonwealth Games, the multi-sport international competition that is held every four years in one of the member countries. The Commonwealth Games — which were hosted by India in 2010 and the latest edition of which was completed in Birmingham, England in August 2022 — are the only association that ordinary Indians make with the Commonwealth, even though there are wider aspects of intergovernmental cooperation within the grouping.

❖ **History of the Commonwealth**

- The Commonwealth is home to 2.5 billion people, a third of the world's population, the bulk of whom live in the Indian subcontinent. The smaller Commonwealth realms represent the last vestiges of Britain's colonial empire, a thread that binds the British monarch to about 150 million people outside of the UK. Most living residents of the Commonwealth realms have never experienced a direct relationship with Britain.
- The Commonwealth was born out of an attempt by Queen Victoria to maintain control over the colonies as movements for independence grew stronger. In 1867, after Canada made its frustrations with imperial oversight known, the Queen agreed to grant the territory dominion status, which meant that it would have self-rule, but that Britain could veto policies at the monarch's discretion.
- In subsequent decades other, primarily white, British colonies also became dominions — including Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.
- After World War I, rising tides of nationalist sentiment in the dominions forced more changes and, in 1926, Britain and the dominions agreed that they would be equal in status. That declaration, formalised through the Statute of Westminster in 1931, marked the founding of the British Commonwealth of Nations.
- Although India was present at those talks, leaders of the Indian National Movement pushed for full independence. In 1949, newly independent India was invited to join the Commonwealth, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed with a pivotal caveat. India asked that it should be given membership without the requirement of having to swear allegiance to the Crown. The member

nations agreed — and later that year, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) joined the Commonwealth.

- Four countries in the Commonwealth — Mozambique (1995), Rwanda (2009), Togo (2022), and Gabon (2022) had no colonial ties with Britain.
- Mozambique was a Portuguese colony, Rwanda was ruled by the Belgians and Germans, and Togo and Gabon by the French.
- All these countries, however, recognise shared values and ties to the British Empire and, according to an analysis, “they see the organisation as a useful network of diplomatic and cultural influence, and for exercising ‘soft power’ on the world stage”. Also, the analysis said, their membership “testifies to the importance of English as a language of business, science and international politics and the necessity of building a range of connections to support economic development and get diplomatic messages heard”.

❖ **Elizabeth and Commonwealth**

- The deceased Queen cemented her dedication to the Commonwealth on her 21st birthday on April 21, 1947, when she issued a broadcast from South Africa addressing “the youth of the British family of nations” and promised to pledge her life to the service of the union.
- After her coronation on June 2, 1953 (she had ascended the throne on February 6, 1952, the day her father, King George VI, passed away), the Queen embarked on a tour of the Commonwealth and was greeted with much ceremony and enthusiasm. Through her long reign, she visited well over a hundred countries and was likely among the most travelled heads of state in history.
- Her many tours became symbols of Britain’s diplomacy, and while she rarely spoke publicly about her social views, many of her visits placed a clear accent on racial equality and ties between nations. In 1995, she visited South Africa to commemorate the end of apartheid, and to induct the nation into the Commonwealth.
- Historian suggested that the Queen needed the Commonwealth more than it needed her. “The monarchy, with its imperial memory, keenly sought a Commonwealth role, partly to justify itself, but also because it had taken its supra-national role seriously, and in a way that was never quite understood by politicians it continued to relate to distant communities which showed their loyalty in ways that did not necessarily come to the attention of Whitehall.
- The Queen had no influence on the governance of either the member states of the Commonwealth of Nations or those of the Commonwealth realms, of which she was head of state. In the latter group of countries, she had some constitutional duties notably, the approval of new governments and, sometimes, legislation; and the grant of state honours or the appointment of certain officials.
- But all these roles were always largely ceremonial with only one significant exception.
- In 1975, Sir John Kerr, the Governor General of Australia, who was the Queen’s representative to the country, unilaterally dismissed the sitting Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam of the Labour Party, to break a parliamentary deadlock, and then commissioned the Leader of Opposition, Malcolm Fraser of the Liberal Party, to succeed him. This triggered what has been billed as the greatest constitutional crisis in the history of Australia.

❖ **Leaving the Commonwealth**

- In the 1970s, a host of countries chose to leave the Commonwealth realm, including Dominica, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, effectively removing the Queen as their head of state.
- In 2021, as Barbados left the realm, its Governor General argued that “the time has come fully to leave our colonial past behind”. The exit was timed with the 55th anniversary of Barbados’s independence from the UK.
- Another reason for leaving is that the priorities of Britain may not align with those of member states. Although in recent years, those divides may be cultural, in the past they have also concerned matters of foreign policy.
- In 1939, when the UK declared war against Nazi Germany, the Union of South Africa and Canada waited over a week to do the same. During that period, King George VI, as king of the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Canada, was both at war and at peace with Germany.
- Such stark contrasts are rare today, but the Black Lives Matter protests have created a rift between the crown and its black Commonwealth subjects. Jamaica, a member of the realm, was particularly vocal in this regard, even petitioning the Queen for reparations for the Crown’s role in the transatlantic slave trade.

- Analysts have wondered whether, with Elizabeth no more, the new monarch would be able to lawfully appoint Governors-General in countries of the Commonwealth realm if those countries do not first change their Constitutions to refer to the “King” as their head of state instead of the Queen.
- If Canada were to consider leaving the realm, an amendment to its constitution would be required. In the case of Australia, it would have to be a referendum.
- In 1999, a referendum to give the Australian Parliament the power to choose the nation’s head of state was defeated by 45 per cent to 55 per cent, but a fresh referendum may be called by the current government.
- In the end, though, the immense popularity and goodwill the Queen enjoyed, both in the UK and in the Commonwealth, was a binding glue. It is doubtful whether Charles and Queen Consort Camilla are seen with similar affection, and that could in the end determine the future of the Commonwealth.
- It has, indeed, been argued that with the end of the reign of Elizabeth II, a union that was essentially forged on the basis of subordination and which is tainted by its association with racism and the colonial rule should also be allowed to fade away.

PRELIMS

1. Dolphin, porpoise: First time, avian flu is seen in cetaceans

❖ **CONTEXT: A bottlenose dolphin found dead in a Florida canal in the spring tested positive for a highly virulent strain of bird flu.**

- The announcement came a week after Swedish officials reported that they had found the same type of avian influenza in a stranded porpoise.
- This version of the virus, which has spread widely among North American and European birds, has affected an unusually broad array of species. But these findings represent the first two documented cases in cetaceans, a group of marine mammals that includes dolphins, porpoises and whales.
- its discovery in two different species on two different continents suggests that there have “almost certainly” been other cases
- This strain of bird flu is known as Eurasian H5N1.
- While experts emphasise that the risk to humans remains low, the spread of the virus to new species poses potential risks to wildlife and provides the virus with new chances to mutate and adapt to mammalian hosts. Besides birds, the virus has earlier turned up in foxes, bobcats, skunks, and seals.

2. Dara Shikoh

❖ **Context: Vice President calls Dara Shikoh as torchbearer of social harmony**

- Dara Shikoh was the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan.
- In 1657, the illness of emperor Shah Jahan triggered a fierce battle for power among the four Mughal princes -Dara Shikoh, Shuja Muhammad, Aurangzeb, and Murad Baksh
- Only Dara and Aurangzeb had a chance to emerge victorious.
- Dara was defeated by Aurangzeb at the battlefield of Samogarh on 8 June 1658.

❖ **His policy:**

- Dara Shikoh was a gentle and pious Sufi intellectual.
- He favored religious tolerance, and coexistence between Hindus and Muslims.
- Dara Shikoh was a follower of Lahore's famous Qadiri Sufi Saint Mian Mir.

❖ **His works:**

- Shikoh devoted much effort towards finding a common mystical language between Islam and Hinduism.
- Towards this goal he translated the Upanishads from its original Sanskrit into Persian so it could be read by Muslim scholars.
- His translation is often called "Sirre Akbar" or The Greatest Mystery while in Arabic, the Upanishads are referred to as "Kitab al-maknun" or the hidden book.
- His most famous work, Majma ul-Bahrain ("The Mingling of the Two Oceans") was also devoted to finding the commonalities between Sufism and Hindu Monotheism.
- He was also a patron of fine arts, music and dancing, a trait frowned upon by his sibling Aurangzeb.

3. Operation Gear Box

❖ **Context: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) detects 72 hidden packets weighing 39.5 kg of suspected narcotic substance Heroin in Operation "Gear Box".**

- Acting on intelligence jointly developed by DRI and ATS Gujarat, operation 'Gear Box' was launched.
- Why it was named Operation Gear Box?
 - Bill of Entry was not filed for this container and the goods were found to be Metallic Scrap and machine parts like Gear Boxes.
 - During detailed examination, i.e. dismantling of gear boxes and other metallic scrap, 72 packets having a total weight of 39.5 kg of powder in bags, suspected to be narcotic substance, has been recovered.
 - The gears from the old and used gearboxes were removed after opening them and the plastic packets containing the narcotic substances were placed in the created cavity and the gearboxes were then refitted to avoid detection.
 - These packets were shipped concealing inside the metal scrap along with other metal scraps so that it would go unnoticed by the authorities.

4. India's Sex Ratio Improves

- Over nine million girls have gone 'missing' to female foeticide over the last two decades in India, even as the country has gradually moved toward a balanced sex ratio.
- An analysis of the 5th National Family Health Survey 2019-2021 (NFHS-5) showed that the sex ratio is **108 boys per 100 girls**.
- This is an improvement from 111 boys in 2011, where it had been for two decades.
- However, the study prepared by the Pew Research Centre has revealed that there is still some room for improvement as the ratio was 105 boys per 100 girls in 1950.
- India's sex ratio has been skewed since the opening of prenatal diagnostic technology in the 1970s, facilitating sex-selective abortions.
- The betterment followed years of government-initiated efforts, like the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, to bring down sex-selective abortions and promote having a girl child.
- Between 2000 and 2019, some 9 million girls went "missing" to sex-selective abortion.
- **Religion-wise break up** - Hindus - who also make up 80% of India's population - accounted for the missing girls, at 7.8 million or 86.7%
- Sikhs have reported the steepest drop in a bias towards having a boy.
- In 1998-1999, 30% Sikh women wanted a son. This has now come down to 9% in 2019-2021.
- A similar trend has been recorded among other religious groups as well in the same time period.
- Some 34% Hindu and Muslim women each wanted a son, which has come down to 15% and 19%, respectively.
- Only 20% Christian women wanted a son, which has come down to 12%.
- **Factors - Wealth, education and fertility** are the key factors behind this, including the decision to conduct sex-selective abortions.
- NFHS-5 data revealed that wealthier and more educated women are less likely to favour having a son.
- In India, undergoing such a test during pregnancy is correlated with a higher probability of giving birth to a son.
- Caste also plays an active role here not just because it is an important indicator of socioeconomic status, but also because caste entails cultural norms that may limit women's autonomy in different ways.
- India has the sixth most skewed sex ratio at birth in this century, succeeded only by Azerbaijan, China, Armenia, Vietnam and Albania.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. How does Indian society maintain continuity in traditional social values? Enumerate the changes taking place in it.

The essence of Indian society lies in harbouring diverse and distinct identities, ethnicities, languages, religions, and culinary preferences. History stands witness to the fact that the societies that have struggled to hold differences were shattered in such an attempt.

The supreme social-cultural traditional values of Indian life have been the values of:

- **A Cosmic Vision:** The framework of Indian culture places human beings in the centre of the universe, as a divine creation-which celebrates individuality and differences of opinion in society.
- **Tolerance:** In India, tolerance and liberalism are found for all religions, castes, communities, etc. Indian society accepted and respected various religions and ensured that there is a peaceful co-existence of religions.
- **Sense of Harmony:** Indian philosophy and culture try to achieve innate harmony and order in society.
- **Continuity and Stability:** The light of ancient Indian culture life is yet glowing. Many invasions occurred, many rulers changed, many laws were passed but even today, the traditional institutions, religion, epics, literature, philosophy, traditions, etc. are alive.
- **Adaptability:** It is the process of changing according to time, place, and period. Indian society has shown fluidity and has adjusted itself with changing times.
- **Caste System and Hierarchy:** Indian Society has evolved systems of social stratification, which in the past helped in accommodating outsiders, but concomitantly it has also been the reason for discrimination and prejudice.
- **Unity in Diversity:** Despite inherent differences, Indian society celebrates unity in diversity which reflects in modern India's founding principles and constitutional ideals.

In recent times, Indian society has seen a surge in multiple divisive issues like:

- **Casteism:** Caste-based discrimination leads society to divide into artificial groups which sometimes even led to violence.
- **Communalism:** The aggressive attitude of one community towards the other creates tension and clashes between the two. It poses a great challenge to democracy and the unity of our country.
- **Nuclear Families:** The new trend of nuclear families with one or a maximum of two children has emerged in India. Due to this children are not able to get the presence of the elderly who plays a major role in instilling values among the younger ones.
- **Gender Discrimination:** There is a need for India to closely examine the norms that allow violence and a broader pattern of gender discrimination to continue. A society that does not value women as much as men fail to reach its full potential.

Despite all these reasons, India remains a diverse country, a bewildering mosaic of communities of all kinds. Our peculiar societal genius is to fashion a form of coexistence where diversity can flourish and find its place. The principle of "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" (equal respect for all religions) is rooted in India's tradition and culture.

MCQs

1. World EV Day is marked internationally on which of the following date every year in celebration of e-mobility?
 - a) 8th September
 - b) 9th September**
 - c) 10th September
 - d) 11th September
2. Recently Disaster emergency declared in New York after polio virus found in wastewater, with reference to Polio consider the following statements?
 1. There is no known cure for the polio virus
 2. It can be prevented by vaccine which provide nearly 100% immunity against the disease
 3. India is not yet declared polio-free.
 Select the correct statement/s using the codes given below
 - a) 1 only
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only
 - d) 1 and 2 only**
3. Consider the following statements about the commonwealth:
 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.
 3. The most recent departure country is Barbados
 4. The newest member country is Togo and Gabon.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 2 and 3 only
 - c) 3 and 4 only**
 - d) 1 and 4 only
4. Consider the following statements about Bird Flu.
1. Bird Flu is caused by avian influenza bacteria.
 2. This flue does not infect mammals.
 3. Bird Flu was observed in Hong Kong in 1997.
- Choose correct statement/s.
- a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 2 and 3 only
 - c) 1 and 3 only
 - d) 3 only**
5. With reference to Gangetic dolphins, consider the following statements.
1. It's the only species of freshwater dolphin in the world.
 2. It is classified under Schedule 1, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
 3. Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur district is India's only sanctuary for Gangetic Dolphins.
- Which of the above-given statements is/are correct?
- a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only**
 - d) 1, 2 and 3
6. Consider the following statements about Dara Shikoh.
1. Dara Shikoh was the son of Shah Jahan and brother of Aurangzeb.
 2. His best known work was a study of Sufi and Vedanta philosophy.
 3. He also translated the Upanishads into Persian in 1657.
 4. He was killed in the fight for the throne between him and his brother Aurangzeb.
- Which of the statements given is/are correct?
- a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 2 and 3 only
 - c) 1, 2 and 4 only
 - d) All of the above**
7. Which of the following country recently passed a law allowing itself to carry out a preventive nuclear strike?
- a) North Korea**
 - b) India
 - c) South Korea
 - d) Ukraine
8. The Gender SNAPSHOT 2022 Report released by which of the following?
- a) UNDP
 - b) UN Women**
 - c) World Bank
 - d) International Women Commission
9. Recently which of the following state decided to roll out Urban Employment Guaranty Scheme?
- a) Rajasthan**
 - b) Punjab
 - c) Odisha
 - d) Chhattisgarh
10. "PM SVANidhi" is associated with which of the following?
- a) SHGs
 - b) Artisans and Craftsmen
 - c) Street vendors**
 - d) Farmers