

**Ministry of External Affairs
(UNP Division)**

India and the Commonwealth

The London Declaration of 1949 established the modern Commonwealth. In 1965, the Commonwealth Secretariat was established in London, which became the association's independent civil service, headed by a Secretary-General.

2. India is the largest member state of the Commonwealth, with nearly 60% of the total population of the association. It is the fourth largest contributor to the Commonwealth budget and programmes. It provides the largest number of technical experts engaged by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation extending assistance to developing Commonwealth countries after the UK. India is a member of key Commonwealth bodies, including the Steering Committee on Commonwealth Connects (earlier Commonwealth Action Programme for the Digital Divide), the Standing Committee on Terrorism, the Commonwealth Advisory Board on Sports, the Grants Committee of the Commonwealth Foundation as well as the Executive and Accreditation Committees of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Board of Governors.

3. India hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1983 in New Delhi. India hosted the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in 1957, 1975, 1991 and 2007. India also hosted the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers in January, 2010. In the arena of sports, India hosted the Commonwealth Youth Games in Pune in October 2008 and the XIX Commonwealth Games in October 2010 in New Delhi. In the 2010 Commonwealth Games which marked the first time the Games were hosted by India, about 7000 athletes from 71 Commonwealth nations and territories participated. India, by winning 101 medals, including 38 gold medals, gave its strongest performance ever in the history of the Commonwealth Games to emerge as the second highest medal winner behind Australia.

4. The present Commonwealth Secretary General, Shri Kamalesh Sharma assumed office on April 1, 2008. He is the first Indian to be elected as Secretary General of the Commonwealth. His first term will be coming to an end in March 2012 and accordingly, Heads of Government will consider his candidature for a second term at the CHOGM in Perth, Australia in October 2011.

CHOGM 2011

5. The next CHOGM will be held in Perth, Australia from 28-30 October, 2011. The special theme of CHOGM 2011 is 'Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience'. In addition to the special theme, Heads of Government are expected to discuss a whole gamut of issues ranging from the global economic situation and food security to climate change, sustainable development, trade, poverty alleviation and reform of the Commonwealth.

Significance of the Commonwealth to India

6. India has a natural partnership with the Commonwealth. It is a community of English speaking countries having a common law system. It has a preponderance of developing countries which want to promote South-South cooperation. It is an association which puts a premium on democracy, rule of law and good governance, where India has much to share with others. It provides a platform to interact and build consensus within a very diverse group of countries, including developed and developing countries and a number of Small States.

7. A large number of Commonwealth countries also have a sizeable population of persons of Indian origin. The promotion, maintenance and strengthening of healthy democratic institutions and rule of law in these countries is relevant to India.

8. Though the UN remains the principal forum for multilateral action, the Commonwealth is eminently placed to address many issues through its unique style of functioning which is based on consensus-building, informality and goodwill. The informal ways in which dialogue is conducted and decisions arrived at in the Commonwealth bodies provide a very good basis for addressing common concerns on relevant international issues. The Commonwealth also provides a unique opportunity for interaction with many Small States from the Pacific and the Caribbean in an informal setting.

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