

PD 65

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PRINCIPAL,
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Discuss the opinion that "The Commonwealth is more likely to become stronger and more united by the end of this century."

The Commonwealth was formed on basis of a very noble idea: to maintain close ties and co-operation with countries that were at one time under the British rule.

When my country Malaysia first attained independence in the year 1957, one of the first organisations that she joined was the Commonwealth. This was because our leaders believed that the Commonwealth could assist and help us face the uphill task that countries usually encounter after gaining independence. Our leaders as well as the leaders of other Commonwealth countries believed in fulfilling the ideals and aims of the Commonwealth. The fact that the Commonwealth was one of the most powerful and influential organisations at that time, spurred them on further.

However, many years have gone by since the Commonwealth was formed and that noble idea of maintaining close ties and unity that has kept the Commonwealth together has since impaired and faded. The Commonwealth has since lost its shine. Relationships within the Commonwealth have deteriorated. The breed of new generation leaders of Commonwealth nations have begun to question the potency of the Commonwealth in overcoming major worldwide problems that affect Commonwealth countries. So far the Commonwealth has failed to limit the effects of the global economic recession on her member nations. The sorry state of Britain's economy and the decline in value of the British pound is good enough proof.

From raising the price of candy to the price of limousines, the current economic recession has taken its toll on the wallets of people all over the world. The public of Commonwealth nations have not been pardoned either! Unemployment, strikes and the effects of inflation have taken the limelight in newspapers. Britain, the leader of the

Commonwealth and the pioneer of the Industrial Revolution has taken a very bad dent and unemployment rates are at her highest since the great depression of the 1930's.

A great burden of keeping factories from closing down and finding job opportunities for her unemployed citizens is on the shoulders of Mrs. Thatcher's government. The primary function of Mrs. Thatcher's government now, is to find a solution to unemployment. The British deplorable unemployment situation is further deteriorating with factories closing down due to the effects of the current recession.

With this internal crisis on, the role Britain is playing as the leader of the Commonwealth has become less and less significant.

The importance of keeping the Commonwealth closely knit has become secondary to her plight of limiting the effects of the recession. Plans to further promote close relationships and initiate strong links among Commonwealth countries have been shelved. Britain and many other member countries have been guilty of neglecting the Commonwealth. The recession and its effects on the Commonwealth have dealt a severe blow to efforts to strengthen and further unite Commonwealth nations. The Commonwealth might barely survive this blow by the end of this century.

Commonwealth nations cover a very vast area and are scattered across the continents from Canada to New Zealand. Distance may be a hinderance to communication within the Commonwealth but it is made possible by modern technology. The main barriers towards mutual understanding however still remain unsolved, such as the language barrier. Imagine a person from a native African tribe of an African Commonwealth country trying to communicate and understand an Aussie! Religious and cultural differences in the Commonwealth form a barrier that is impossible to overcome. When Britain once ruled the Asian Commonwealth countries, some of her culture seeped into the lifestyles of

the people of these Asian countries. Even now in my country Malaysia twenty five years after our independence some of this influence is still apparent, for example we still learn English history and English literature in our schools. Once these Asian countries attained independence this British influence was regarded as "alien." Once attaining independence many of these Asian Commonwealth countries went on a quest to find their true national culture and identity.

The governments of these Asian countries began to spread propaganda through the mass media. This soon evoke various reactions from their citizens. An overwhelming feeling of love, attachment and loyalty towards their country was aroused, in other words it marked the beginning of nationalism in these countries. On the whole, nationalism brought good to these countries but some internal difficulties flared. The emergence of radical groups and movements was one bad effect of nationalism in these countries. These groups believed in the extreme. These radical movements made many atrocious demands and terms and wanted their countries to abandon diplomatic ties with western and Commonwealth nations. However, these radical groups only formed a minority and were not representing the voice of the people on the whole. Fortunately these extremists failed as they lacked the support of the public as the latter realised the futility of the former's actions.

However, some of the extremist ideology that was preached by these radical groups seeped into the heads of many people. The public of these Commonwealth nations of the Asian region began to detest western influence in their daily life as well as culture. Though their displeasure and detestation was not expressed as vividly as the radical groups, it was enough to create detachment within Commonwealth nations.

This not only created another gap within the Commonwealth but also promoted regional relationships and understanding. Mutual understanding in the same region became more effective because many barriers like language, religion and culture ceased to exist.

Since gaining independence many Commonwealth nations have placed much emphasis on regional co-operation. Organisations with members of neighbouring countries were formed. Now these organisations play a much more commanding role than the Commonwealth in the policy making of many Commonwealth nations. Commonwealth countries in the South East Asian region are now more committed and dedicated towards reaching the aspirations and ideals of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) than they are in fulfilling the aims of the Commonwealth. Even Britain is guilty of putting much more emphasis on relationships with the European Economic Community (EEC) member nations than she has with the Commonwealth. Regional organisations are more closely knit and now form the backbone of many government policies of Commonwealth nations.

Similar cultural background is one of the factors that promotes regional co-operation. The member countries of the EEC and ASEAN respectively are all from the same region, therefore the language and cultural barriers are disposed of. Many countries fear a flow of harmful foreign influence on their own culture. The possibility of an influx of unsuitable and inflicting influence on their own culture could therefore be abolished. Another reason that backs regional relationships is that of a defence point of view. During times of war or emergency, these countries believe that having allies in their own region is more practical than having to wait for support from thousands of kilometers away. With Commonwealth countries putting more emphasis on regional

co-operation, the Commonwealth is growing even further apart and the future of the Commonwealth never seemed so bleak.

While Britain was being burdened by the Falkland Islands crisis, the Commonwealth as a whole did not lift a finger to help her out. This silence of Commonwealth member nations was regarded by many as very callous. Only Australia and New Zealand were willing to send troops to lighten the burden on Britain's shoulder.

It was a very pathetic and impassive situation as the rest of the nations in the Commonwealth sat quietly and indirectly asked Britain to fight her own wars. This supports the theory that Commonwealth member countries can no longer rely on the Commonwealth for military support and assistance. Another example that certifies this theory concerns my own country, Malaysia. An Australian air force base has been established in a Northern state of Malaysia some years ago to give us a boost in our military power. However, now many squadrons have been disbanded and recalled to Australia. The remaining squadrons will also return in the near future. Countries can no longer be expected to rely and depend on the Commonwealth for military support. Canada has a defence pact with the United States of America. Almost all Canada's military weapons and equipment are from the United States of America. This yet again proves that Commonwealth countries cannot and no longer rely on the Commonwealth for military assistance. No concrete measures have been taken to improve co-operation among Commonwealth nations where military and defence is concerned, or for that matter in any other field.

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It has become void of its powerful influence it once acquired as its leaders have lost faith in its ideals. Unless a compromise is attained by mutual concession by its members, the Commonwealth is heading for a very hazardous and gloomy future. The bottomline is that all these problems arise as the leaders of the Commonwealth are not a cohesive lot and think only of their own national interest without heading towards a mutual compromise with other Commonwealth nations. The Commonwealth is not united and may become more detached by the end of this century. United we burn, divided we fizzle.

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