

The Commonwealth in 2049

The Commonwealth started off as a network of former British colonies. But as we progress in the 21st century, we have found a new purpose as a bridge—between developed and developing nations, as well as between the East and West. We are well-poised for this role because of our sheer diversity—if the wealth of all the countries in the world were plotted on a spectrum, those at both extremes would bear the Commonwealth stamp.

Africa is one of our success stories. Its vast potential was largely overshadowed by poverty and disease at the start of the 21st century. But we had a hand in assisting the world's second-largest and second-most populous continent to modernize with surprising rapidity. Infrastructure, and not mere financial aid, is our focus, and the transfer of skills our strength. Various Commonwealth nations lent their expertise to develop sewage treatment systems and transport networks in Africa, in return for favoured status in the trade of consumer goods.

Specialisation was key to our efficiency. Singapore, internationally respected for her well-managed water resources, set up a system for the production of NEWater. India shared her experience in road-building. It might seem odd that the other Commonwealth nations were so willing to invest in Africa at a time when it was beset with poverty and disease—but I am proud to say that we alone recognised the untapped economic potential promised by Africa's vast labour pool and rich resources.

Africa's story recalls that of the country that overtook the US as the world's richest nation in per capita GDP terms last year—China. The Second Cold War, between the US and China, threatened to eclipse its predecessor when it erupted in 2020. Fortunately, as a neutral body incorporating neither superpower, the Commonwealth was able to resolve this dispute. The hostilities between the two countries polarised the world, with a staggering impact on the interdependent network of global relations. But at the 2030 CHOGM held in Singapore, the mediation of Commonwealth leaders paved the way for the mending of ties and today, the two economic powerhouses are on friendly terms, recognising that their strengths are complimentary. Cooperation, not conflict, is paramount.

When the World Wide Web was launched in the 1990s, its early pioneers could not have envisioned the development of their infant internet into an omnipresent physical medium that revolutionised social relationships, or its marriage with neuroscience to facilitate communications. Yet, in 2045, scientists managed to map thought energy pathways, ushering humankind into a new era of consciousness. As home to many of these institutes of cutting-edge research, the Commonwealth has been one of the first Inter-Governmental Organisations to capitalise on the cognitive-net (cog-net) to widen its reach, especially amongst the young. India's leadership in this area has cemented its position as the world's Information Technology (IT) capital.

The Commonwealth was a surprising player in the climate change crisis of the early 21st century. We are lucky that we possess the best scientific minds as well as a truly international outreach. This puts us in a stellar position to be an international platform for clean energy research. After five years of cross-border collaboration funded by the Commonwealth, our scientists managed to arrive at a low-cost, high-output solution that could be realistically tailored to suit each country's needs. This could not have been possible without the depth of perspectives brought to the table by scientists from our less affluent nations. It is an advantage that we cherish. Put together, their revolutionary ideas were a silver bullet against climate change. They reversed the global warming trends and catalysed a renaissance for environmental protection that has rejuvenated our century.

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