

not to assume a place within it. The most recent member of the Commonwealth to withdraw is Pakistan, which severed its connection on January 30, 1972, because of the recognition of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) by a number of Commonwealth countries. South Africa withdrew on May 31, 1961, after choosing to disassociate itself from the Commonwealth as it was then emerging. Ireland left the Commonwealth on April 18, 1949, owing to strained relations with Britain during the previous two decades. The Japanese conquest of Burma during the Second World War accelerated the growing desire within that country to attain complete independence from Britain. Unwilling to remain within the Commonwealth association as it then was under the terms of the *Balfour Report*, Burma chose to become an independent republic outside the association on January 4, 1948.

Nature of Commonwealth association

The essential functions of the Commonwealth can be put in two words: consultation and co-operation. As stated in the opening paragraph of the Commonwealth Declaration, Commonwealth governments consult and co-operate in the common interest of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace. Members have, however, complete freedom to belong to any grouping, association or alliance, or, of course, to remain non-aligned. Membership carries no obligation to come to the assistance of another member that may be attacked, though, not unnaturally, Commonwealth countries would be seriously concerned about such a decision. At an earlier stage, commerce was an important cohesive factor within the association. With the economic growth and the liberalization of trade on a multilateral basis following the Second World War, the Commonwealth preference system became less significant as a unifying element. The value of the Commonwealth preference system with regard to trade with Britain was, of course, affected by Britain's entry into the European Economic Community on January 1, 1973⁷. On a broader scale, Com-

⁷Britain's entry required the termination of the Canada/United Kingdom Trade Agreement and the removal of Canadian preferential access to the British market. Canada, however, still accords preferential access to the Canadian market to many goods from Britain and other Commonwealth countries. Preferential treatment has been exchanged with Australia and New Zealand, and goods from Caribbean Commonwealth countries have preferential access to Canadian markets.