

# Trinidad and Tobago



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1962
Population:	1,339,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	5.1% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 59
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TT\$)

## Geography

Area:	5,128 sq km
Coastline:	362km
Capital:	Port of Spain

The country, the most southerly of the West Indian island states, situated 11.2km off the Venezuelan coast, consists of two islands: Trinidad and Tobago.

**Area:** 5,128 sq km: Trinidad (4,828 sq km) and Tobago (300 sq km).

**Main towns:** Port of Spain (capital, pop. 50,000 in 2009), Chaguanas (76,100), San Juan (greater Port of Spain, 58,800), San Fernando (57,000), Arima (greater Port of Spain, 37,300), Marabella (greater San Fernando, 26,600), Tunapuna (greater Port of Spain, 18,800), Point Fortin (18,700), Sangre Grande (17,200) and Princes Town (11,000) on Trinidad; and Scarborough (4,700) on Tobago.

**Topography:** Trinidad and Tobago are unique among Caribbean islands in that only 10,000 years ago they were a part of the South American mainland; the geology and rich flora and fauna are closely akin to Venezuela. A mountain range runs along the north coast, rising to Trinidad's highest point, El Cirro del Aripo (940m); there are rolling hills in the south and the flat Caroni Plain lies in between. Trinidad is well supplied with rivers, some of which end in mangrove swamps on the coast. The Pitch Lake in the south-west is the world's largest natural reservoir of asphalt. A string of small islands off the north-west peninsula are the remnants of the land-link with the continent. There are sandy beaches in the north and east, and Trinidad has many excellent harbours. Tobago also has a central mountain range descending to a plain in the south-west and many fine beaches.

**Climate:** Tropical, tempered by north-east trade winds, with a temperature range of 22–31°C and an average annual rainfall of 1,631mm. The dry season is January to May and the wet season June to December, with a short dry sunny season called the Petit Careme during September and October.

## did you know?

Kamla Persad-Bissessar became the first woman prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago in May 2010.

Sir Vidia Naipaul, born in Chaguanas in August 1932, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001; and Earl Lovelace won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1997.

Brian Lara, born in Santa Cruz, Trinidad, in May 1969, was Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1994 and 1995.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are water pollution from agricultural chemicals, industrial wastes and raw sewage; oil pollution of beaches; deforestation; and soil erosion.

**Vegetation:** Forest covers 44% of the land area, having declined at 0.2% p.a. 2000–07. The forest is tropical evergreen: high in the mountains are mountain mangrove, tree-ferns and small palms; on the lower slopes, hog-plums and sand-box; and in the fresh and brackish swamps, mangrove and gable-palms. The most important agricultural areas are in the central plain of Trinidad. Arable land comprises 5% and permanent cropland 4% of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** There are many more species of birds and butterflies than on any other Caribbean island, including 15 varieties of hummingbird (131 species of birds and only one endangered, 2002). There is a wildlife sanctuary in the Northern Range on Trinidad at El Tucuche with agouti, golden tree-frogs and more than 400 species of birds, and the Caroni Swamp reserve is the home of thousands of scarlet ibis. The government has proposed a National Parks and Wildlife Bill, which aims to protect endangered species of which there are now relatively very few.

**Transport:** There are 8,320km of roads, 51% paved. There is no railway.

Port of Spain and Point Lisas are the main ports. Point Lisas deep-water port on the west coast serves the petro-chemical industries. Other terminals are at Pointe-à-Pierre, Point Fortin and Guayaguayare (petroleum); Claxton (cement); Tembladora (bauxite); Brighton (asphalt); Chaguaramas (dry-docks); and Scarborough on Tobago. Tourist cruiseships dock in Scarborough and Port of Spain.

Piarco International Airport, 25km east of Port of Spain, is a major regional centre for passenger and cargo traffic and aviation-related industries. Crown Point International Airport on Tobago can handle wide-bodied intercontinental aircraft.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 261  
 Life expectancy: 70 years  
 Net primary enrolment: 98%

**Population:** 1,339,000 (2009); some 51,000 people live on Tobago; 14% of the whole population lives in urban areas; growth 0.4% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 15 per 1,000 people (27 in 1970); life expectancy 70 years (66 in 1970).

The population is of about 40% Indian, 38% African and 21% mixed descent, with smaller numbers of people of European, Latin American and Chinese descent (2000 census).

**Language:** English is the official and national language; English-, French- and Spanish-based Creoles, Indian languages including Hindi and Chinese dialects are also spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 26%, Anglicans 8%, Pentecostals 7%), Hindus 23% and Muslims 6% (2000 census).

**Media:** English-language dailies include *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, *Daily Express* and *Newsday*; *The Bomb*, *The T'n'T Mirror*, *The Probe* and *Sunday Punch* are weeklies.

The Caribbean News Media Group operates public radio and TV services; and there are a number of private radio stations and TV channels.

Some 88% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 132 personal computers (2007) and 443 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** There are seven years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. Some 96% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in September.

Tertiary institutions include the St Augustine campus of the regional University of the West Indies (UWI), which also has campuses in Barbados and Jamaica. At St Augustine UWI offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in faculties of Engineering; Humanities and Education; Law; Medical Sciences; Science and Agriculture; and Social Sciences. The University of Trinidad and Tobago was established by the government in 2004. Other tertiary institutions include the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts; the Polytechnic Institute; and the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 128:100 (2005). There is virtually no illiteracy among people aged 15–24.

Since 2006 the government has paid tuition fees for Trinidad and Tobago citizens on courses at tertiary institutions locally or in other CARICOM countries. The programme is aimed at increasing the gross tertiary enrolment ratio to 60% by 2015.

**Health:** Traditionally good services have suffered somewhat from reductions in public expenditure. 94% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 92% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 31 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (61 in 1960). In 2009, 1.5% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Communications:** Country code 1 868; internet domain '.tt'. Mobile phone coverage is good. There are numerous internet cafes and post office branches on the islands.

There are 235 main telephone lines and 1,472 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

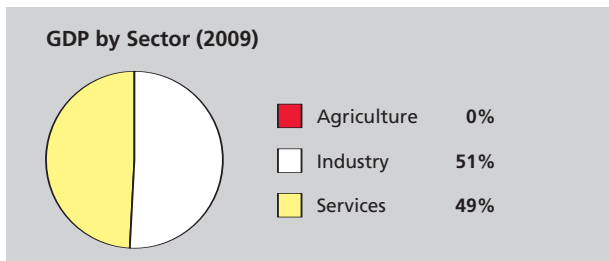
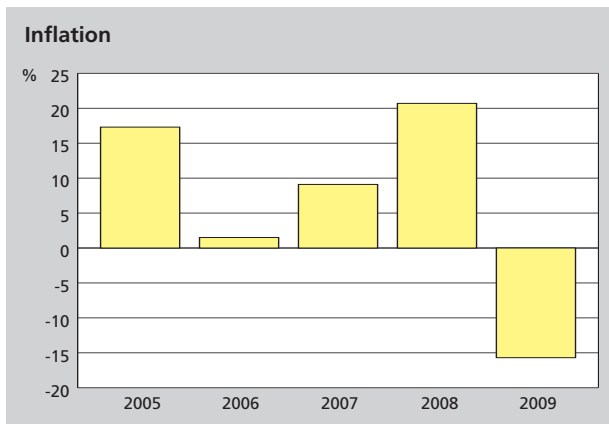
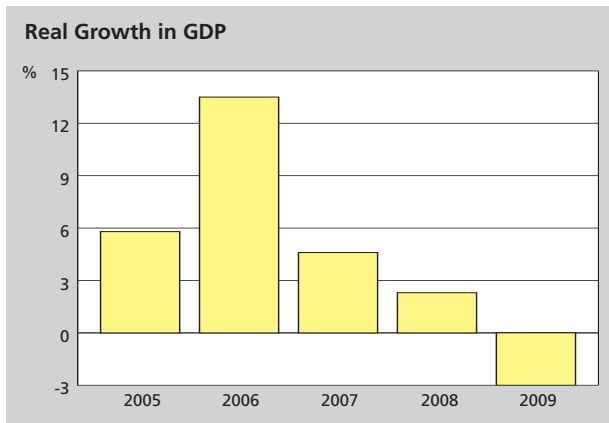
**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Spiritual Baptist Shouters' Liberation Day (30 March), Indian Arrival Day (30 May, 1845), Labour Day (19 June), Emancipation Day (1 August, 1834 and 1838), Independence Day (31 August), Republic Day (24 September), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Carnival (Monday before Lent), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Corpus Christi, Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Diwali (October/November). Carnival is celebrated during the month leading up to Carnival Day.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

GNI:	US\$22.4bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$16,700
GDP growth:	4.5% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	5.7% p.a. 2005–09



**Overview:** Trinidad and Tobago has a very sophisticated economy for a country of its size, embracing mineral extraction, agriculture, industry, tourism and services, but which is underpinned by a single commodity – oil – which was first discovered in 1866. The high price of oil in the 1970s allowed considerable publicly financed development, but when the price fell in the 1980s the economy faltered badly. In the recession years (1985–89), GDP fell by 30% in real terms. Although the government had substantial reserves, these were exhausted by 1987, and the economy had to be supported by the IMF until 1993, when oil prices had recovered.

In the late 1980s, a programme of privatisation was under way and continued through the 1990s. At the same time industries based on natural gas, tourism and other service industries were developed. Tax receipts have been rising through more efficient collection, though many tax rates have been cut.

With the new industries on stream and oil prices strong, the economy was buoyant in the latter 1990s and 2000s, pausing briefly only in 2001–02, a period of political uncertainty, when the government was distracted from the structural reforms and

investor confidence diminished. Then there was strong growth during 2002–06, peaking at 13.9% in 2003; it was 13.5% in 2006, 4.6% in 2007 and 2.3% in 2008. With the onset of the global economic downturn in 2008, demand for Trinidad and Tobago’s manufactures weakened sharply and the economy shrank by 3.0% in 2009, recovering with growth of about 1% in 2010. Unemployment, which had fallen to an all-time low of 4.6% in 2008, rose rapidly in 2009.

**Trade:** Exports of goods and services account for 73% of GDP (2008). Main exports are petroleum, natural gas, ammonia, methanol, manufactured goods, food and live animals.

**Oil and gas:** There are more than 30 producing oil and gas fields, many of them offshore. For a long time after the 1970s there were no very significant fields discovered but exploration in areas off the east coast led to discovery of the large Angostura field in 2001. Oil production then increased from 113,500 barrels a day in 2001 to 144,500 in 2005, falling to 102,000 in the second quarter of 2010. Exploration has intensified following the Angostura find, but offshore fields are costly and slow to be brought on stream. There are two oil refineries: at Pointe-à-Pierre and at Point Fortin.

Trinidad and Tobago has estimated natural gas reserves of 19 trillion cubic metres (2009). The Atlantic LNG Plant at Point Fortin started to export natural gas in 1999. It was then expanded in stages during the 2000s and the country is among the world’s biggest exporters of LNG.

**Manufacturing:** Manufacturing and process industries are centred on the free-trade zone. The government established joint ventures with foreign companies to produce iron and steel, petrochemicals, cement, ammonia and other nitrogenous fertilisers, urea and methanol. Plans for construction of an aluminium smelter funded by China were announced in 2008. This followed rejection of US-based Alcoa’s plans for a large smelter which were successfully challenged by environmentalists.

Trinidad and Tobago’s natural gas has a high methane content with few impurities and is very suitable for methanol and ammonia production. The Point Lisas industrial estate has seven large, modern methanol plants, nine ammonia plants and a urea plant, with more under development, and the country is among the world’s largest exporters of both methanol and ammonia.

It also assembles motor vehicles and produces consumer durables, such as television sets and gas cookers, and clothing, and there is a significant printing industry.

## Constitution

**Status:** Republic  
**Legislature:** Parliament  
**Independence:** 31 August 1962

Trinidad and Tobago is a unitary republic with a representative government and a degree of regional autonomy. The head of state is a non-executive president elected by an electoral college comprising all the members of parliament. The executive is led by the prime minister who heads a cabinet chosen by him or her and responsible to parliament.

The legislature consists of a bicameral parliament, with a directly elected 41-member House of Representatives and a 31-member

## History

Until 1888, Trinidad and Tobago were separate territories. Both have a history of repeated invasion and conquest by competing European powers.

Trinidad, named *Iere* (probably meaning 'humming bird') by the Arawak inhabitants, was claimed for the Spanish Crown by Christopher Columbus in 1498. The embattled Spanish colony that developed was raided by the English, Dutch and French through the 17th century. Large-scale importation of African slaves enabled a plantation economy to develop. French Haitians (who were offered incentives by the Spanish Crown) swelled the settler population.

In 1797, the island surrendered to a British expedition and became a British Crown colony in 1802. Slaves were emancipated in 1834, free trade adopted in 1846, and more than 150,000 immigrants from India, China and Madeira brought in between 1845 and 1917. These indentured labourers came on short contracts, after which they were free to return home or buy plots of land. The Indians worked mainly on the sugar plantations of the Caroni and Naparima plains and introduced the cultivation of rice there.

Tobago's name derives from the Carib word *Tavaco*, the pipe in which the Amerindians smoked tobacco leaves, and was inhabited by Caribs at the time of Columbus's visit in 1498. These people had all been killed by 1632 when 300 Dutch settlers arrived. Further Dutch and French settlers followed. Tobago changed hands more frequently between 1650 and 1814 than any other Caribbean territory – ownership shifting from a settler (Cornelius Lamprosius, declared owner and Baron of Tobago by Louis XIV of France) to the Duke of Courland, to a company of London merchants, to neutral status in 1748, to the English Crown by the Treaty of Paris of 1763.

Even then, Tobago was fought over. The French captured it in 1781; the British took it back in 1793; the French regained it through the Treaty of Amiens (1802), but it was returned to the British in 1814. Despite these battles, Tobago was prosperous until its sugar industry was weakened by the abolition of slavery, a hurricane, the decline of West Indian sugar in general and the Belmanna riots. No longer viable as a separate colony, it was amalgamated with the larger island of Trinidad in 1888.

The Spanish constitution was retained after Trinidad became a British Crown colony in 1802. The governor was assisted by a council of advice and a *cabildo* elected by the taxpayers. The council of advice evolved into the nominated legislative council and the *cabildo* became Port of Spain's town council. When Tobago was amalgamated with Trinidad in 1888, the laws of Trinidad were extended to the smaller island and, after a period, the revenues of the two islands were merged and Tobago's debt to Trinidad cancelled. Tobago was administered by a commissioner (later a warden) appointed by the colony's governor.

In the 1920s, the labour movement organised trade unions, and pressure increased for greater local democracy and then independence. A new constitution brought a limited form of electoral representation to Trinidad for the first time (Tobago had had elections before). But only seven of the 25 members were elected, and high property and language qualifications limited the vote. This did not satisfy the growing demand for political expression, which led to the 1937 labour disturbances, an increase in the number of elected members in 1941 and, in 1945, universal adult suffrage.

In 1950, the constitution was redrawn, providing for a legislative council of 26 members, 18 of them elected; a policy-making executive council of nine (five elected by the legislative council), and a rudimentary ministerial system. Further constitutional changes followed, and by 1959, the legislative council had more elected members and an elected speaker, and the ministerial system had developed into a cabinet elected from the legislative council. The governor's powers were circumscribed: he did not normally chair cabinet meetings, and had to act in accordance with the cabinet's advice.

The 1956 elections gave the majority to the People's National Movement (PNM), led by Dr Eric Williams. Williams instituted further constitutional talks with the UK in 1959–60, resulting in full internal self-government and a bicameral legislature (nominated Senate and elected House of Representatives). The general election of 1961 was again won by the PNM, which implemented the new constitution.

In 1958 Trinidad and Tobago became a co-founder of the Federation of the West Indies, which aimed to become an independent country, but Jamaica withdrew in 1961, and Trinidad and Tobago also decided to seek its own independence. Further constitutional talks with the UK began, and a draft constitution was drawn up after much consultation. The country became independent in August 1962, and a republic in 1976.

The PNM under Williams (and after his death in 1981, George Chambers) had a long run of electoral successes. Economic conditions worsened in the early 1980s and the PNM was ousted in 1986 by a coalition of opposition parties, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) led by A N R Robinson. However, the coalition was troubled, and soon the United Labour Front (led by Basdeo Panday, Robinson's deputy) quit the alliance to form the United National Congress (UNC).

In July 1990, an attempted coup was staged by a militant Muslim faction, which stormed parliament and took Robinson and members of parliament hostage for five days and led to an outbreak of looting in poor areas of the capital. The hostages were released on the promise of an amnesty, but the NAR government was never able to recover and the PNM, under Patrick Manning, won an easy electoral victory in December 1991.

Senate. Senators are appointed by the president, 16 on the advice of the prime minister, six on the advice of the leader of the opposition, and nine of the president's own choice. Elections are held every five years.

Tobago has a regional house of assembly, set up in 1980, with certain local powers over finances and other delegated responsibilities. It has 12 elected members and several members appointed by the political parties. Constitutional amendments have granted Tobago greater control over urban and rural development, health, education and housing, though its assembly has no legislative powers.

## Politics

<b>Last elections:</b>	<b>May 2010 (national)</b>
<b>Next elections:</b>	<b>2015 (national)</b>
<b>Head of state:</b>	<b>President Professor George Maxwell Richards (2003–)</b>
<b>Head of government:</b>	<b>Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar</b>
<b>Ruling party:</b>	<b>People's Partnership coalition</b>

The People's National Movement (PNM) lost its powerful majority at the November 1995 elections: it won 17 seats, exactly the same number as the United National Congress (UNC), while the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) won two, and thus held the balance of power. The NAR chose to support the UNC, which was then able to form a government, headed by Basdeo Panday. Following the retirement of President Noor Hassanali, A N R Robinson became the country's president in February 1997.

The UNC's position was strengthened by divisions within the PNM. Although its leader, Patrick Manning, won a leadership contest in October 1996, the challenger received 40% of the votes; two PNM MPs subsequently left the party, becoming independents. Both later began to support the UNC and were appointed government ministers. Consequently, although the UNC–NAR coalition remained intact, the UNC had a parliamentary majority on its own from the middle of 1997.

In June–July 1999, ten convicted murderers were hanged. These executions – the first since 1994 – had been delayed for several years by appeals to the Privy Council in the UK, and had only been carried out when the Privy Council had ruled that hanging was not in itself inhumane. The Caribbean Court of Justice has been established in Port of Spain as the final court of appeal for CARICOM countries.

In the December 2000 general election, the UNC was re-elected, winning 19 of the 36 elected seats, while PNM took 16 and NAR one; Panday continued as prime minister. However, the PNM immediately challenged the result on the grounds that two candidates had had dual nationality. There was further controversy when the president was unwilling to appoint seven of Panday's nominations to cabinet posts who had all been defeated in the elections.

President Robinson finally gave way in February 2001 but the PNM's challenge to the legitimacy of the two UNC members took far longer to resolve and the new administration continued in 2001 amid considerable uncertainty, which was only dispelled when a fresh national election was called for December 2001.

This was tied with both the UNC and PNM winning 18 seats and the NAR none; the president chose Manning to be prime minister and he formed a PNM government. However, when the House convened in April 2002, it failed to elect a speaker and Manning was obliged to prorogue parliament.

Fresh elections were held in October 2002, when PNM secured a majority taking 20 seats with 50.7% of the votes, while UNC took 16 with 46.5%; Manning resumed as prime minister.

In the elections in November 2007 (with the number of contested seats increased from 36 to 41), on a platform which highlighted its strong economic management and proposed introduction of an executive presidency, the ruling PNM won with 26 seats and 45.9% of votes. The main opposition UNC took 15 seats and 29.7% of votes and the newly established Congress of the People gained 22.6% of votes but no seats. PNM's majority was a few seats short of the two-thirds required to amend the constitution.

Following a threatened vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Manning in April 2010, he dissolved parliament. In the general election which followed on 24 May 2010, a new five-party coalition, the People's Partnership, led by UNC leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar and including the Congress of the People, won 29 of the 41 seats in the lower house and 42.9% of the votes cast, soundly defeating the incumbent PNM (12 seats and 39.6%). Persad-Bissessar became prime minister, the first woman in the country's history to assume the role.

## International relations

Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Caribbean Community, Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Trinidad and Tobago hosts the secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States in Port of Spain.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** Drug traffickers face severe penalties in Trinidad and Tobago. The authorities are alert to the carriage of illicit drugs of any kind and checks are thorough.

It is against the law for anyone, including children, to dress in camouflage clothing. Visitors should ask before photographing local residents.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting. Casual wear is usual, but beachwear must not be worn in towns.

Lightweight suits are the norm for business and business cards are usually exchanged. The best time to visit is from December to April, except during the Christmas festivities. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1630.

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. Visas are requested of some nationals and all visa requirements should be checked well in advance of travel. All visitors must be in possession of a return or onward ticket and have sufficient funds for their stay.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be needed by all those arriving from infected areas.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left and visitors may use their national driving licence for up to 90 days. Car hire is available at both airports. Trinidad's highway system connects the east-west and the north-south corridors, and the speed limit is 80kph; in urban areas the speed limit is 50kph. There is a 50kph speed limit throughout Tobago.

Trinidad has a public bus service. Mini-vans, called Maxi Taxis, pick up and drop off passengers as they travel; they have no fixed timetable but are easy to flag down along most of the main roads near Port of Spain. In Tobago, there are regular bus services between Scarborough and Crown Point, Buccoo, Plymouth and Roxborough.

Taxis are available on both islands and official taxis are recognised by the 'H' on their licence plates. Taxis are not metered and fares should be agreed before travel.

Scheduled ferry services run daily between the two islands; high-speed CAT ferries take two hours 30 minutes.

A 30-minute flight is the most comfortable and convenient way of travelling between Trinidad and Tobago, and Caribbean Airlines operates hourly services.

**Travel health:** Visitors should have comprehensive health insurance. Dengue fever is endemic in the Caribbean, and visitors should protect themselves against mosquito bites by using insect repellent and wearing suitable clothing. Visitors should stay away from the poisonous manchineel trees. They are found on some beaches and are clearly marked; skin contact with any part of this tree or its fruit will result in severe blisters.

Drinking water outside of major cities in Trinidad should be boiled or sterilised before use; bottled water is widely available. The mains water in Tobago is safe to drink.

**Money:** The local currency is the Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TT\$). Foreign currency can only be exchanged at banks and some hotels. Credit cards are widely accepted, but many traders may charge an additional 5% for their use. ATMs are common throughout Trinidad, but in Tobago are available only in Scarborough. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0800–1400, Fri 0900–1200 and 1500–1700.

There were 436,000 tourist arrivals in 2008.

## Further information

Trinidad and Tobago Government Portal: [www.gov.tt](http://www.gov.tt)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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