

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO BRITISH MONARCHY



This chapter aims at introducing the unique of British under its monarchy system. This introduction is expected to bring general idea about monarchy system in British.

A Brief Introduction

The **monarchy of the United Kingdom** (commonly referred to as the **British monarchy**) is the constitutional monarchy of the United Kingdom and its overseas territories; the title of the monarch is king or queen. Queen Elizabeth II became monarch on 6 February 1952. The monarch and immediate family undertake various official, ceremonial, diplomatic, and representational duties. As the monarchy is constitutional, the monarch is limited to non-partisan functions such as bestowing honours and appointing the Prime Minister. The monarch is by tradition Commander-in-chief of the British Armed Forces. Though the ultimate formal executive authority over the government of the United Kingdom is still by and through the monarch's royal prerogative, these powers may only be used according to laws enacted in Parliament, and, in practice, within the constraints of convention and precedent.

The British monarchy traces its origins from the Kings of the Angles and the early Scottish Kings. By the year 1000, the kingdoms of England and Scotland had developed from the petty kingdoms of early medieval Britain. The last Anglo-Saxon monarch (Harold II) was defeated and killed in the Norman invasion of 1066 and the English monarchy passed to the Norman conquerors. In the thirteenth century, the principality of Wales was absorbed by England, and Magna Carta began the

process of reducing the political powers of the monarch.

From 1603, when the Scottish King James VI inherited the English throne as James I, both kingdoms were ruled by a single monarch. From 1649 to 1660 the tradition of monarchy was broken by the republican Commonwealth of England that followed the War of the Three Kingdoms. The Act of Settlement 1701, which is still in force, excluded Roman Catholics, or those who marry Catholics, from succession to the English throne. In 1707 the kingdoms of England and Scotland were merged to create the Kingdom of Great Britain and in 1801 the Kingdom of Ireland joined to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The British monarch became nominal head of the vast British Empire, which covered a quarter of the world's surface at its greatest extent in 1921.

In the 1920s, five-sixths of Ireland seceded from the Union as the Irish Free State, and the Balfour Declaration recognised the evolution of the dominions of the empire into separate, self-governing countries within a Commonwealth of Nations. After the Second World War, the vast majority of British colonies and territories became independent, effectively bringing the empire to an end. George VI and his successor, Elizabeth II, adopted the title Head of the Commonwealth as a symbol of the free association of its independent member states.

The United Kingdom and fifteen other Commonwealth monarchies that share the same person as their monarch are called Commonwealth realms. The terms *British monarchy* and *British monarch* are frequently still employed in

reference to the shared individual and institution; however, each country is sovereign and independent of the others, and the monarch has a different, specific, and official national title and style for each realm

The Queen's Role

Elizabeth II is a constitutional monarch: that is, she is Britain's head of state, but her executive powers are limited by constitutional rules. Her role is mostly symbolic: she represents Britain on state visits and on ceremonial occasions. According to the royal website, her primary role is as a "focus of national unity". She is queen of 16 former British colonies, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand; and head of the Commonwealth, a multinational body created after the dissolution of the British empire.

What powers does the Queen have?

The Queen has the right to rule: the people of Britain are not citizens, but subjects of the monarch. Most public servants must swear an oath of loyalty, or make an affirmation of their loyalty, to the crown. Although the Queen is politically neutral, she has the right to be consulted and to "advise and warn" ministers. Otherwise her residual powers - the "royal prerogative" - are mostly exercised through the government of the day. These include the power to enact legislation, to award honours (on the advice of the prime minister), to sign treaties and to declare war. But royal prerogative is the subject of controversy, because it confers on governments the power to make major decisions without recourse to parliament.

When Edward Heath brought Britain into the EEC in 1972, parliament was not consulted until afterwards. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher used royal prerogative to go to war in the Falklands in 1982.

The Queen has two individual powers that could cause a political crisis if they were ever exercised. She may refuse a government's request to dissolve parliament and call an election, if she believes a government can legitimately be formed. She also has the right to choose the prime minister: a formality in the case of a clear majority, but potentially controversial after an inconclusive general election. This almost happened in February 1974, when Labour failed to win an overall majority but the Conservatives considered power-sharing with the Liberals.

What land does the Queen own?

As hereditary sovereign, the Queen owns the crown estate - almost 120,000 hectares of agricultural land, plus the seabed around the UK. Its statute includes some archaic rules: through the crown estate, for example, the Queen can claim ownership of all whales and sturgeon that are washed ashore. But the estate did turn

a profit of £147.7m in 2000-01, all of which was credited to public funds.

Also held by the Queen as sovereign are the occupied royal palaces, such as Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace, Kensington Palace and Windsor Castle. The Queen's private property includes the palaces at Balmoral and Sandringham.

Much of the Queen's private income comes from the Duchy of Lancaster - an estate comprising more than 19,000 hectares of land, which made the Queen £7.3m before tax in 2000-01. The Duchy of Cornwall, which comprises more than 50,000 hectares, funds the Prince of Wales.

How much does the monarchy cost to run?

The Queen's "head of state expenditure" - official expenditure relating to her duties as head of state - is met from public funds. The total spend in 2000-01 was £35m, a figure which excludes the cost of security from the police and army, and of soldiers on ceremonial duty. Apologists for the monarchy point out that this figure is much lower than the profits of the crown estate.

The most controversial part of the expenditure is the Civil List, the money provided on a 10-year cycle for the running of the Queen's household. The spend was £6.5m in 2000-01, but has been fixed at £7.9m per year until 2011 - despite the fact that the Queen made a £35.3m profit out of the money provided for the previous 10 years.

The £35m for 2000-01 also includes almost £1m which went to the Queen Mother and Duke of Edinburgh; £15.3m spent on funding the occupied royal

palaces (listed above), and £5.4m spent on travel (much reduced since the decommissioning of the royal yacht). The rest went on pensions and other expenses incurred by government departments, including postal services, "equeries and orderlies", and the administration of honours. £1.5m went on the Palace of Holyrood House, Edinburgh.

Balmoral and Sandringham are maintained out of the Queen's personal income.

Does the Queen pay tax?

The Queen pays tax on a voluntary basis from her private income, but not on "head of state expenditure". But she did not pay almost £20m of inheritance tax after the death of the Queen Mother: this, says the royal website, is primarily because "constitutional impartiality requires an appropriate degree of independence for the sovereign".

What is the Guardian's position on the Queen?

The Guardian has launched a legal campaign against the 1701 Act of Settlement - which excludes Roman Catholics, Muslims and other non-Protestants from succeeding to the throne. It is also campaigning against the Treason Felony Act of 1848, which inhibits discussion of republican forms of government.

A Guardian editorial in December 2000 hoped that "in time we will move - by democratic consensus - to become a republic".

