

COMMONWEALTH UPDATE

DEREK INGRAM

As Iraq inevitably dominated the media and the attention of governments worldwide, the Commonwealth continued to wrestle with the situation in Zimbabwe, where violence escalated, the opposition leader was put on trial for treason and President Robert Mugabe went on refusing to talk to the Secretary-General. The one-year suspension was extended until December but not without difficulty and serious divisions among Commonwealth leaders. Cyprus voted in a new president as talks on the UN reunification plan went up to the wire. They failed again—just as Cyprus signed up to the EU. Malta also voted to join the EU. In Canada Quebec voted out the Bloc Québécois. In Nigeria the voters gave President Obasanjo a second term. And Australia won the Cricket World Cup.

IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR in Iraq on 20 March 2003 Australia was the only Commonwealth country to line up firmly with the UK alongside the USA. Most member countries were strongly opposed to action without the backing of a second UN resolution. Canada, not at the time a member of the Security Council, made strenuous efforts in New York to ensure any war had UN backing. In the end Prime Minister Jean Chretien said (17 March) that Canadian forces would play no rôle in any attack launched on Iraq by the USA.

The Ottawa parliament applauded the government stand and the ruling Liberal Party came down decisively against military action without UN approval. Washington was strongly displeased. The US ambassador in Ottawa, Paul Cellucci, said his country was upset and disappointed. Canadian business leaders were alarmed that worsening relations with Washington and concern over border security would damage trade. The USA and Canada have the world's biggest bilateral trading relationship. Canadian exports to the USA make up 40 per cent of GDP.

At the time of the crisis the Commonwealth had two non-permanent member countries on the Security Council—Cameroon and Pakistan. Both sat on the

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fence during the abortive debate on a second resolution, with Pakistan signalling abstention.

President Musharraf told Washington not to expect Pakistan's support for any resolution backing a war, although the Americans offered incentives as part of their pressure to win support.

Most other Commonwealth countries appealed to the USA not to attack Iraq. Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa joined President Adoulaye Wade of Senegal in a joint letter (16 March) to Washington. They said the threat of an attack had virtually achieved the goal of disarming Iraq and there was no need to go to war. War would spell disaster for Africa's economic revival.

Britain sent Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Baroness Amos to Cameroon, Guinea and Angola—the three African Security Council members—to enlist their support. Two weeks later, when Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin visited the three to win them over to the French view, she was sent again.

In Australia huge anti-war demonstrations in all the state capitals, and opinion polls showing only 32 per cent approval, did not deter Prime Minister John Howard from firmly supporting the USA, although he urged President George Bush to give the weapons inspectors more time. He backed the attempts for a second UN resolution, but when these failed Australia confirmed (18 March) that it would commit 2000 troops to the war. Stormy scenes in Parliament followed.

Earlier, Howard became the first Australian prime minister in a century to lose the support of the Senate. The upper house passed a vote of no confidence in the government (5 February)—a move without constitutional consequences since the opposition parties controlled the Senate. A senior intelligence officer adviser to Howard resigned at the government's 'dumb' stance. Yet, with the fall of Saddam a few weeks later, support for Australia's involvement in the war rose to 57 per cent.

New Zealanders firmly opposed the war on the streets and in the opinion polls and the government opposed military action unless backed by the UN. Prime Minister Helen Clark rejected the opposition notion that her stance would jeopardize New Zealand's attempts to get a free trade agreement with the USA.

In India public opinion was strongly against the war. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee expressed his 'deepest anguish', although his government supported the call for Iraq to disarm. Bush phoned Vajpayee three times to seek Indian support for US action.

Malaysian acting prime minister Abdullah Badawi said the USA and its allies had unilaterally disregarded international law, humanity and universal justice. The attack was a 'black mark in history'.

President Thabo Mbeki, speaking for the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement, discussed with Tony Blair at Chequers (1 February) a plan to send a South African mission to Iraq to persuade Saddam to reveal his alleged weapons of mass destruction. Mbeki offered the services of former foreign minister Pik Botha, who had worked with the UN to destroy South Africa's nuclear weapons in 1993. He pointed out that then UN inspectors had taken two years to verify the disarmament.

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Two days earlier Nelson Mandela had scathingly denounced Britain and the USA for planning war. He told a women's conference in Johannesburg that Blair had become 'the foreign minister of the United States. He is no longer the Prime Minister of Britain'. He accused Bush and Blair of undermining UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan because he is black.

The USA asked Cyprus for access to its airports and airspace, but Defence Minister Koulis Mavronicolas said (19 March) they could be used only for 'purely humanitarian reasons'. There would be no rôle for Cypriot ports or airports if war came.

In Washington's official list of the coalition against Saddam only four Commonwealth countries appeared—the UK, Singapore, Solomon Islands and Uganda. European Union countries listed were more numerous—Denmark, UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Zimbabwe

The suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth councils was extended from 19 March 2003 until the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, in December—but not without considerable differences among member countries. The troika of leaders which decided on a year's suspension in 2002—Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia—did not agree on the continuation. Howard strongly felt the suspension must stay. Mbeki wanted it lifted. In public Obasanjo wavered, although in an eight-page letter to Howard he said he now supported Mbeki. Intense diplomatic lobbying by Zimbabwe to raise the suspension had paid off among many African countries. Most in Southern and East Africa went along with Mbeki, but the new government in Kenya was strongly pro-suspension, saying Zimbabwe should emulate its own democratic example.

The troika had agreed at one point to meet in Pretoria, but Mbeki phoned Howard, who was then in Hawaii on his way to Washington, and the meeting was called off.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon's remit had all along been to engage President Robert Mugabe and the political opposition in Zimbabwe, but persistent attempts to arrange a meeting failed because Mugabe refused to see him. McKinnon tried to enlist other eminent figures to break the deadlock, including former Secretary-General Sonny Ramphal, but Mugabe would not talk to them either. As the March deadline approached McKinnon consulted almost all the Commonwealth leaders and found that the broad consensus was for a continuation of the suspension until CHOGM. This he announced on 16 March, Mbeki and Obasanjo having reluctantly agreed.

McKinnon supported the case for continued suspension with a detailed document showing that the law and order and human rights situation in Zimbabwe had got steadily worse. The report said: 'There is clearly a moral case for the UK to contribute towards transparent, equitable and sustainable land reform. But the government's controversial and often violent land seizures have not been supportable.'

Divisions over Zimbabwe also developed between Britain and France when,

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despite EU sanctions, President Jacques Chirac invited Mugabe to a 45-nation African summit in Paris on 19 February. In the end Britain agreed to the visit on condition that France did not oppose the renewal of EU sanctions, due to expire on 18 February. EU wrangling continued for weeks, but on 13 February renewal was finally agreed. When Mugabe attended the Paris summit Chirac greeted him with a perfunctory handshake and pointedly no traditional embrace.

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai claimed (12 January) approaches had been made to him in December by a respected retired army officer on behalf of army chief General Vitalis Zvinvashe and parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa for assurances that, if Mugabe stepped down, his party would take part in a transition to new democratic elections. Some sort of secret deal seemed to be in the air but Tsvangirai had been wary of a trap. The stories were strongly denied and on return from a holiday in Thailand and Malaysia Mugabe told a press conference (14 January): 'I will never, never go into exile. When I die I will be buried in Zimbabwe.' General Zvinvashe told the pro-government *Business Tribune* things had to change because 'we are facing an economic crisis'.

Tsvangirai called a two-day anti-government protest (18–19 March). Businesses across the country shut and public transport was disrupted. He said the regime was nervous—'their bags are now packed'. More than 400 people were arrested. A new wave of violence grew in the run-up to two by-elections in Harare. Civic groups said uniformed soldiers were being deployed and many victims were in hospital.

Despite the violence, the Movement for Democratic Change won both by-elections (29 March) with large majorities, which meant that the ruling ZANU-PF still did not hold any of the 19 Harare seats in parliament. Turnout was low—30 per cent. In a new government crackdown Themba Nyathi, chief spokesman for the MDC, was arrested for trying to overthrow the government (8 April). At Easter the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference issued its most bitter attack on the government, condemning its 'frightening' corruption, lawlessness and abuse of power.

Tsvangirai and two colleagues went on trial for treason in Harare before Judge Paddington Garwe, head of the High Court (2 February). The government said a videotape made in Montreal showed him discussing a plot to assassinate Mugabe. The state's chief witness, Ari Ben Menashe, a Canadian political consultant, said Britain had promised £6.5 million to pay for the assassination. The trial started late because of rowdy scenes as police with batons prevented diplomats, including the US ambassador, MPs, lawyers and journalists from entering court. The defence team was led by George Bizos, who defended Nelson Mandela in the 1963–64 Rivonia treason trial in South Africa.

In a rare act President George Bush blocked all property and financial holdings in the USA of Mugabe and 76 of his government officials (9 March). American citizens were barred from having any financial dealing with people on the black list. The move was made on the grounds that Zimbabwe's democratic institutions were being systematically undermined.

A Chinese state company was awarded a government contract to farm 100 000 hectares in southern Zimbabwe—an admission of the failure of the land reform programme. It was believed payment would be made with tobacco.

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Agriculture minister Joseph Made admitted that half the seized land allocated to black farmers had not been taken up. The government met the Commercial Farmers Union and tried to negotiate a new deal, under which white farmers would be given back their farms, or compensation, and in return hand over irrigation equipment.

Malawi

President Bakili Muluzi announced (31 March 2003) that he would step down on completion of his second five-year term in 2004. He had abandoned attempts to change the constitution to allow him to serve a third term. He endorsed a cabinet proposal for Economic Planning Minister Bingu Wa Mutharika to run as the candidate of the ruling United Democratic Front.

In July 2002 a bill allowing the president a third term failed to win the required two-thirds majority. A second attempt failed because of opposition from the churches, civil society and donors. The choice of Wa Matharika was a surprise. His challenger would be the leader of the National Democratic Alliance, Brown Mpinanjira.

Muluzi appointed a new cabinet (9 April) that included several opposition politicians. Chakufwa Chihana, of the Alliance for Democracy, who supported Muluzi's bid for a third term, became second vice-president. Among those dismissed were Agriculture Minister Aleke Banda and Environment Minister Harry Thompson. Both had said they wanted to become president.

Zambia

In an extensive reshuffle (7 February 2003) President Levy Mwanawasa consolidated his national power base by bringing several opposition figures into his cabinet. He ensured a broader ethnic spread to the government and threw opposition parties into disarray. Support of the Asian business community was encouraged by the appointment of the widely popular Dipak Patel as Trade and Industry Minister.

The Supreme Court stripped former president Frederick Chiluba of his presidential immunity (19 February). A week later he was arrested and was charged on 59 counts with stealing £1.2 million from the state. His passport was seized, and he was given £187 000 bail and allowed to leave the police station. His house was seized. Former intelligence chief Xavier Chungu, National Commercial Bank managing director Sam Musonda and other bank and treasury officials were also charged. Ex-foreign minister Katele Kalumba was arrested on corruption charges (15 January).

The heaviest rains since 1974 in the first months of 2003 brought relief to many drought-stricken areas of the country, but in the Gwembe district, they brought serious flooding and destroyed crops over a large area. More than 10 000 homes were lost, bridges destroyed and Zambian helicopters had to fly in food.

By March an estimated 120 white farmers from Zimbabwe had relocated in Zambia, which welcomed their arrival. Hundreds more were expected.

South Africa

At a Human Rights Day ceremony in Pretoria (21 March 2003) Archbishop Desmond Tutu handed to President Thabo Mbeki the final two parts of the seven-volume report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The last findings found former president F. W. de Klerk had failed to make 'full disclosure' in his testimony about human rights violations. He had said he was ignorant of state-sanctioned terrorism, including the 1988 bombing of the South African Council of Churches HQ in Johannesburg. Since then he had admitted that he knew the police commissioner had been ordered to bomb it. The admission in the report used a form of words approved by de Klerk's lawyers. It said: 'His statement ... was indefensible'.

The commission had prepared a harsher finding for a 1998 report, but de Klerk blocked it with a high court ruling. The first finding, which the commission had agreed never to publish, was represented by a blacked out page in the report. In his last act as chairman Tutu criticized white South Africans and big business for ignoring their rôle in apartheid and called for immediate reparations for 20 000 victims.

Mbeki said (15 April) that the government would make a reparation grant of £2500 to each of 19 000 victims of apartheid who appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It would not introduce a wealth tax on businesses which thrived during the apartheid era, nor would it back lawsuits against multinationals filed in US courts.

Hundreds of activists marched into South African police stations (21 March) to begin a campaign of civil disobedience against the government for refusal to provide anti-retroviral drugs to those with HIV. The campaign was to be modelled on the passive resistance of the apartheid days. The campaigners filed charges of manslaughter against two ministers—Health Minister Manto Tshabalala Msimbang for denying the drugs to state hospitals and the Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin for blocking production of the drugs in South Africa. Many protesters were arrested. The activists argued that President Thabo Mbeki was still dragging his feet on the issue. Finance Minister Trevor Manuel said buying the drugs would be 'a waste of very limited resources'.

For the non-violent protest, planned to last months, thousands of activists had been trained by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). It had the support of religious leaders, the main trade unions, the medical association and thousands of health professionals. The campaign chairman was Zachie Achmat, one-time anti-apartheid activist inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Achmat had been HIV positive since 1997. In 2002 he visited Nelson Mandela, who tried to persuade him to take anti-retrovirals. Achmat said he would do so only 'when the poor of South Africa can have them'.

The AIDS controversy was inflamed when a US-based scientist, Robert Giraldo, who disputes the link between HIV and AIDS, was included in a team of experts to advise the government on how to fight the virus. Calls for the resignation of the Health Minister brought a statement from her that 'our own strategic plan is based on the premise that HIV causes AIDS'. She said Giraldo was to advise on nutritional issues.

In his state of the nation address Mbeki said the South African Defence

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Force's commandos were to be phased out and a new security system set up in the rural areas. The news raised fears of land reform that might move the country in the same direction as Zimbabwe. The farmers' union said that in 2000 142 white farmers were killed and in 2001 another 140. Attacks had continued, ignored by the world's media. A government minister said police had a 94 per cent success rate in arresting people for the attacks. He could not explain why they were happening. The 51 000 commandos are in 183 units with 19 army group headquarters.

Since 1994 about 3 per cent of land had been transferred. The government objective of 30 per cent by 2000 had been extended to 2015. The issue looked like becoming increasingly dominant politically.

A study published by the University of South Africa (20 January) said that because of AIDS the country's population (now 45 million) would stand at only 49 million by 2015 instead of the anticipated 61 million. In some places life expectancy would fall to 33 years.

Matric results for 2002 showed huge advances by black pupils. Blacks and girls scored an overall 68 per cent pass rate. Only two years earlier half the students failed.

A document outlining government plans for black economic empowerment (16 March) proposed 'scorecards' to measure companies' progress in ownership and control, employment and procurement from black suppliers. A mining deal envisaged black stakes of 15 per cent after five years and 25 per cent after ten. Companies and investors gave the plan a cautious welcome.

Following the commission report Anglo-American mining group faced a multi-billion dollar lawsuit claiming that it profited from collaborating with apartheid South Africa. The report singled out the group as a beneficiary of apartheid and urged compensation. Anglo denied wrongdoing. Lawyers representing thousands of victims of racism prepared to lodge complaints in the US courts under the Alien Tort Statute.

The prosecution indictment issued in March against 23 white supremacists awaiting trial accused them of trying to kill Nelson Mandela. All faced treason and terrorism charges. Three members of the terrorist group Boeremag were said to have built a bomb to be detonated as Mandela travelled to open a rural school. The plot was foiled because Mandela went by helicopter. It was part of an attempt to overthrow the government. The 23 were arrested after bomb explosions in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Tony Yengeni, former chief whip of the African National Congress and a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle, was sentenced to four years jail for fraud (19 March) in a trial in the special commercial crimes court in Pretoria seen as a test case for tackling corruption. He had received a 47 per cent discount on a Mercedes car from Daimler-Benz Aerospace—a bidder for a £3 billion arms deal.

The December 2002 roads death toll was 1111—25 per cent up on 2001. The toll for the same period in Australia, which has similar traffic volumes, weather and road conditions, was 66. Drive Alive, a safety campaign in South Africa, said the figures were a national disaster. Transport minister Dullah Omar said half the victims had exceeded drink levels.

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Cricket World Cup 2003

After weeks of controversy the England cricket team led by Nasser Hussain did not in the end play its one-day match against Zimbabwe scheduled for 13 February, costing it four points and a threatened £10 million in penalties. The England and Wales Cricket Board finally lined up with the England players, who had not favoured going to Harare. The British Government were against the visit all along, but the decision was for the cricket authorities. South African Justice Minister Albie Sachs rejected (7 February) a final appeal by the Board to have the match moved.

England finally pulled out the day before, citing safety concerns and still saying the match should take place in South Africa. The Zimbabwe Cricket Union refused to play the match outside the country. India and Sri Lanka played in Harare, but New Zealand pulled out of their match in Nairobi, citing safety worries. The main programme was played in Johannesburg, but six matches were scheduled for Harare.

When the match between Namibia and Zimbabwe opened in Harare (10 February) two much respected Zimbabwean players, Henry Olonga and Andrew Flower issued a statement that said: 'We cannot in good conscience take to the field and ignore the fact that millions of our compatriots are starving, unemployed and oppressed ... we will wear a black armband ... mourning the death of democracy in our beloved Zimbabwe.'

Invincible Australia won the World Cup. Canada went into the record books with an innings of 36 all out against Sri Lanka—the lowest score and shortest game in one-day cricket history.

Namibia

Ngarikutuke Tjiriange, head of the ruling South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), said the decision taken at its 2002 congress when President Sam Nujoma said he would leave office at the end of his third term in 2005 would stand. Nujoma, aged 73, said he would stand down before the last election but then changed his mind. A successor had not been nominated and some traditional leaders still wanted him to stay on for a fourth term.

Swaziland

A new group of business and legal organizations, launched in January 2003 under the title Coalition of Concerned Civic Organisations, said in its first manifesto that government policies were hurting business interests and having a negative impact on the lives of ordinary Swazis. It demanded that 'the government recognises the independence of the judiciary and desists from making threats against judicial officers'. The Coalition included the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Law Society and teacher and religious groups.

King Mswati III, under fire for refusing to have his hereditary power constrained by parliament, held an emergency meeting (9 March) of advisers, ministers and legal officials in a bid to resolve the constitutional crisis that had followed the mass resignation of judges at the end of 2002. The European Union

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and the USA warned that trade ties would be in jeopardy if there were no democratic reforms. The International Bar Association said (2 April) the rule of law was on the point of collapse.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon visited Swaziland in March to discuss the Commonwealth's rôle in formulating a new constitution, now seven years in the making. The Constitutional Drafting Committee was proposing a bill of rights and provision for the separation of powers and freedom of assembly.

The Secretariat denied a London *Times* report that McKinnon had told King Mswati that Swaziland could be expelled from the Commonwealth if it did not uphold the rule of law. A sudden trip to Saudi Arabia in February during the *hajj*, in a plane lent by Libyan leader Colonel Gadafy, raised speculation that the King might convert to Islam.

Nigeria

Olusegun Obasanjo won a second four-year term in the presidential election (19 April 2003). His main rivals were former military ruler General Muhammadu Buhari, leader of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and Emeka Ojukwu, who led Biafra's secessionist forces in the 1967–70 civil war. Several weeks of violence marred the run-up to the elections, but voting in the parliamentary elections, and the presidential and governorship polls which followed a week later, proceeded relatively peacefully.

Obasanjo, aged 66, had been nominated as presidential candidate overwhelmingly at the convention (6 January) of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Former vice-president Alex Ekwueme secured 611 votes against Obasanjo's 2642.

The presidential election results, as announced by the Independent National Election Commission, gave Obasanjo 24.45 million votes (61.94 per cent) and Buhari 12.71 million (32.19 per cent). Twenty parties put up candidates.

In the parliamentary elections the figures were: House of Representatives—PDP 54.49 per cent, ANPP 27.44 per cent; Senate—PDP 53.69 per cent, ANPP 27.87 per cent.

The Commonwealth and the European Union, as well as the US-based International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute (NDI) sent observer groups. The 22-strong Commonwealth team from 12 countries was led by Salim Ahmed Salim, formerly prime minister of Tanzania and Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity. It found that in most of Nigeria a genuine and largely successful effort was made to enable most people to vote freely. But in certain states the election did not go well. The final report said: 'In parts of Enugu and Rivers States, proper electoral processes appear to have broken down, and there was intimidation ... the official results which emerged from Rivers State bore little relation to the evidence gathered by our Observers on the ground.'

Twelve hours after voting ended Rivers State radio said Governor Peter Odili of the PDP had polled 2.1 million of the 2.2 million votes cast, while his ANPP opponent had collected only 44 000.

In his interim statement after polling closed, Salim said the problem in

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Nigeria was not solely electoral in character—‘It is also a question of determination and commitment to an open and transparent democratic process by Nigerian politicians’. He said his Group believed the people ‘should make full use of the legal mechanisms provided for under the Constitution and laws of this country, in order to ensure that their concerns are properly dealt with. However, it is the Government and the political parties which have the major responsibility in the effort that is now required to regain the democratic process for the people in those parts of Nigeria where it has apparently been denied.’

The final Commonwealth report made many recommendations to the government, involving more effective secrecy at polling stations, a better register, more durable voters’ cards, numbered seals for all ballot boxes, and better training for party agents, security personnel and domestic observers.

The EU, which monitored 31 of the 36 states, said it had ‘witnessed and obtained evidence of widespread election fraud’ in 13 states in both the presidential vote and those to elect state governors. The NDI talked about ‘ballot-stuffing, rigging, voter intimidation, violence and fraud’. Obasanjo said the Commonwealth team had understood ‘the Nigerian environment’, while the EU observers had been limited by their ‘European-ness’.

Buhari rejected the result and called for a re-run of the election. He said the international community should not recognize the President’s victory.

Assassinations and clashes between rival groups left dozens dead in the weeks before the elections, but the casualty list was small when set against the estimated 10 000 deaths caused by communal rioting in Nigeria in the previous four years. During the period of the elections about 20 people died. The worst fighting before polling took place in the Niger Delta, Rivers State, and when the polls closed it was there that charges of fraud and ballot-rigging flared.

Just before the election troops were sent into Delta villages to quell violence between Ijaw and Itsekiri people that had forced Shell to shut 11 oil facilities. More than 100 people died. The Ijaws were campaigning for a greater share of the oil wealth and threatened to blow up the installation. The problem followed weeks of fuel shortages in the major Nigerian cities. Forty per cent of Nigeria’s total oil output was halted. Further trouble came just after the elections when 100 expatriate workers were trapped on four oilrigs off the Delta. After two weeks, agreement between union leaders and the US company operating the rig led to workers being brought ashore (3 May). Shell reported (30 April) that it was losing £1.2 million a day because Nigerian criminal gangs were siphoning crude oil from the Delta pipelines.

The old parliament voted (13 March) to replace a key anti-corruption law with an act stripping Obasanjo of powers to appoint financial investigators. MPs approved new rules making obsolete the work of the anti-corruption commission set up by the president after civilian rule was restored in 1999.

A bank and three floors of apartments were destroyed and 30 people were killed by an explosion in Lagos (2 February). Hundreds of people fought over the bundles of cash in the wreckage.

Sierra Leone

Following an armed attack on Wellington barracks, Freetown (13 January 2003)

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Johnny Paul Koroma, leader of the bloody coup in 1997, escaped arrest for questioning when police raided his home. Fourteen people were arrested, but Koroma disappeared and weeks later was still missing. In March Koroma was among seven people indicted for war crimes by the UN special court. Five, including rebel leader Foday Sankoh and former internal affairs minister Sam Hinga Norman, were in custody. The UN court was the first to sit in a country where the crimes were committed. Koroma still commanded support in Sierra Leone and at large he posed a serious threat to the security of the country.

Britain dispatched a company of Gurkhas to Sierra Leone in February because of fear that violence in Liberia might spill over into Sierra Leone. Hundreds of Liberians had fled across the border when the rebel group, called Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, reached within three miles of the capital Monrovia.

Ghana

The nine members of the national reconciliation commission opened (14 January 2003) hearings on human rights abuse and torture committed under previous regimes right back to independence in 1957. An early witness was a man held for 22 months without charge in 1966—the year Nkrumah was overthrown as president. The commission had received 2800 complaints—80 per cent referring to military regimes and that of Jerry Rawlings. No complaint can result in criminal prosecution but the commission can recommend compensation.

The ruling New Patriotic Party endorsed President John Kufuor unopposed (5 January 2003) as its presidential candidate for the 2004 elections. Earlier the National Democratic Congress had chosen former vice-president John Atta Mills as its candidate, so that the 2004 elections would be fought by the same two candidates as in the 1999 poll.

Kufuor, as head of the Economic Council of West African States (ECOWAS), chaired a meeting in Accra (8–9 March) in a bid to end the civil war that had started six months earlier in neighbouring Ivory Coast with an army uprising. Three rebel groups, seven political parties and the Ivory Coast government agreed to set up a government of national unity. The rebels dropped a claim to two key cabinet posts under a peace plan brokered in January by France. The peace was to be supervised by the UN, ECOWAS and the African Union with 4000 West African and French troops. It got off to a shaky start when the rebels and main opposition party failed to attend the first cabinet meeting.

Congo war

Representatives from ten countries witnessed the signing (2 April 2003) in Sun City, South Africa of a deal to hold the first democratic elections and form the first power-sharing government in the Congo since independence in 1960. President Thabo Mbeki hosted the signing, under which President Joseph Kabila would lead a two-year transitional government. Kabila, however, did not attend the ceremony, giving rise to doubts about his commitment.

Only 24 hours afterwards hundreds were killed in a few hours of ethnic violence in the Ituri district, for long an area of fighting in northeast Congo. An

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inadequate 4000-strong UN force was in the Congo, but most foreign troops had left at the end of 2002 under a 1999 ceasefire agreement. Ugandan troops remained and the killings followed weeks of tension between Uganda and Rwanda. Uganda had agreed to withdraw all its troops by 20 March, but later President Museveni said he would withdraw troops from Ituri by 24 April. Ugandan army commanders denied any involvement in the Ituri massacre.

Uganda

President Yoweri Museveni recommended to a committee meeting of the National Resistance Movement (28 January 2003) that the country should return to multiparty politics. He said the economy, not politics, had made him change his position on political pluralism. He said 'we should not take decisions that will scare away investors because if there is disinvestment it will take years and years before we can convince them to return'.

A crowd of Baganda said to be 200 000 strong marched peacefully through Kampala (28 January) to demand a new federal constitution, with Buganda as a semi-autonomous state. The Baganda make up a quarter of Uganda's 24 million population. The Kabaka is Ronald Muwenda Mutebi. His father died after being driven into exile by President Milton Obote. Museveni promised to bring his son home so that he could get Baganda support for the guerrilla war that brought him to power in 1986. He kept his promise, but the Kabaka and his appointed parliament were given no powers. Now they want to be able to make laws and tax and spend.

Museveni accused aid donors of meddling in his defence plans (12 February). The UK, Netherlands and Ireland had told Uganda they would cut grants because it was exceeding limits on military spending. Uganda said it needed to strengthen its military effort to end the war with the rebel Lord's Day Resistance Army (LDRA). The US gave it £2 million to fight the rebels.

Trials with human volunteers of a potential AIDS vaccine began in Uganda. The vaccine was designed by scientists at Oxford University in collaboration with Nairobi University. Uganda mounted one of the earliest and most successful preventative campaigns against AIDS with education and condom protection. Nevertheless, half a million Ugandans have died and 1.5 million are thought to be infected with HIV.

Under new terms signed on 21 February of a 2002 protocol with Sudan, Ugandan forces were allowed to pursue the LDRA in Southern Sudan until 31 May. The LDRA, operating in the border region for 16 years, is led by Joseph Kony, an altar boy turned self-styled prophet claiming supernatural powers. Kony aims to overthrow Museveni and run a government according to the Ten Commandments. Over the years the LDRA has abducted 20 000 children as soldiers, sex slaves and labourers—5000 in the ten months from June 2002. Under the agreement with Sudan, Uganda must in return end its support for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, a rebel group fighting the Khartoum government. When Ugandan troops flushed out the LDRA bases in Sudan in March 2002 people were ordered into camps. By 2003 60 camps held 800 000 people caught between the two sides and living in appalling conditions.

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Tanzania

Eleven political parties met in Dar es Salaam (5 February 2003) to form a coalition in preparation for the 2005 general election. They provisionally agreed to field one presidential candidate. They would also extend their alliance to parliamentary elections by dividing the constituencies among themselves.

Results of the census taken in August 2002 showed the population was now 34 568 609. Population growth rate was 2.9 per cent.

Britain and the USA warned tourists in Zanzibar (15 January 2003) that they had information that terrorists were planning an attack. Tanzania complained of a lack of concrete information and no attack materialized. Tourism brings in 25 per cent of Zanzibar's foreign currency.

The Defence Ministry said (27 March) that the army had destroyed 10 000 anti-personnel mines under the terms of the international treaty banning the weapons. The rest of its 24 000 stockpile would be destroyed by September 2004.

Kenya

After naming his first cabinet (3 January 2003), newly elected President Mwai Kibaki promised to introduce two anti-corruption bills that the IMF had discussed with Daniel arap Moi when he was still president. The new Finance Minister, David Mwiraria, a long-standing Kibaki loyalist, met an IMF team (15–17 January), which welcomed 'the public commitment of the new administration to tackling corruption and strengthening governance'.

A plane carrying senior ministers crashed in Busia, western Kenya (24 January)—dealing a severe blow to President Mwai Kibaki within a month of his election. Labour Minister Ahmad Mohamed Khalif was killed. Three other ministers—those of Tourism, Water and a minister of state, were seriously injured. Two were women.

In the wake of their election defeat the former ruling KANU party was riven by infighting. Many senior figures resigned, including former vice-president Musalia Mudavadi. Demands were made for the resignation of Moi, still party chairman, and of Uhuru Kenyatta, party leader and the defeated presidential election candidate.

Primary schoolchildren were admitted free for the first time (6 January), implementing a campaign pledge by the new government, although lack of preparation led to confusion among parents in some areas.

Chief Justice Bernard Chunga resigned (25 February) following the setting up of an inquiry into his conduct when he was a prosecutor as well as after becoming head of the judiciary in 1999. The Law Society had already told him to quit. Mr Justice Evans Gicheru, Kenya's longest serving high court judge, was appointed to succeed him.

President Kibaki began to carry out an extensive reshuffle of security chiefs and embarked on a major shake-up of the police hierarchy. It was said he aimed to de-ethnicize the organizations. Appointments would be 'on merit, qualification and integrity'.

Home Affairs Minister Moody Awori said (25 February) that 28 prisoners on death row had been released. Most had been in jail for more than 20 years.

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Another 195 on death row had had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. Death row was now empty. Kenya's last hangings were in 1987 and the Prisons Commissioner urged the government to abolish the death sentence.

Plans to set up a truth and reconciliation commission on the lines of the South African one led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu were announced by Roads and Public Works Minister Raila Odinga (13 February) when he toured secret chambers used by the Moi regime to torture dissidents. The commission would aim to help Kenyans heal the damage inflicted by the Moi regime.

The Kenyatta International Conference Centre, one of Nairobi's tallest buildings, was repossessed by the government, which said its appropriation as KANU headquarters in 1989 had been illegal. Party officials were evicted from their offices.

In moves to fight graft Samuel Chepchong'a resigned as head of the telecoms regulator and was charged with fraud. A report from Transparency International (24 January) said seven out of ten people had paid bribes to secure jobs in the Department of Defence and there was widespread bribery in the recruitment of soldiers.

Mozambique

Six men were jailed for up to 29 years (31 January 2003) for gunning down journalist Carlos Cardoso, founder-editor of the independent newspaper *Metical*, in Maputo in November 2000. Cardoso was investigating the theft of £9 million of privatization funds from the Commercial Bank. The trial started a national debate about government corruption. Judge Augusto Paulino called it the 'worst ever crime in Mozambique history'. A member of a prominent family, Ayob Abdul Satar, and a bank manager were convicted of ordering the killing.

Ten minor opposition parties formed a new coalition, the Electoral Union, to fight the 2003 municipal elections and the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections

The World Food Programme started relief efforts in February–March when flooding affected 50 000 people.

Seychelles

The opposition Seychelles National Party made headway in elections to the National Assembly (4–6 December 2002). It won 11 of the 34 seats. Turnout was 86 per cent. In the 1998 election opposition parties took only four seats.

Pakistan

President Pervez Musharraf held talks in Moscow with President Vladimir Putin (4–6 February 2003)—the first such official visit to Moscow in 33 years. He invited Putin back for what would be the first ever trip by a Russian leader. Putin emphasized that better relations with Pakistan were not to harm 'Russia's links with its traditional partners'—a veiled reference to India. Musharraf asked for help in resolving Kashmir. A joint commission was taking 'practical steps' to fight terrorism and Russia was looking to increasing trade with Pakistan.

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Relations with the USA became strained following an exchange of fire between US soldiers and a Pakistan border guard (29 December 2002) on the Afghan border. A US soldier was wounded. The USA called in an airstrike and dropped a bomb on an Islamic school. A US official inflamed the situation by saying American troops' counter-terrorist operations had the right at any time to cross the border. Feelings ran high in the sensitive tribal areas through which al-Qaida members continued to pass. Most of the 400 al-Qaida suspects arrested in Pakistan up to January had been found in the tribal areas.

The state assembly in North-West Frontier Province dominated by an alliance of six Islamist parties accused the USA of 'naked aggression' and called for the withdrawal of US forces from Pakistan.

Afghan officials claimed members of Pakistani intelligence were helping remnants of the Taliban to regroup. General Musharraf showed he was disturbed by the growth of anti-Americanism when he warned Islamist leaders of the danger of American intervention if they continued to pursue an anti-American line.

Several arrests of top al-Qaida suspects took place in February. One was Khalid Sheik Mohammed, believed to be the mastermind of the 11 September attacks in the USA and the third most senior figure in al-Qaida. Another, Mustafa Ahmed Hawsawi, allegedly financed the plot. The arrests took place against the background of the growing strength of the Islamist parties.

The USA accused Pakistan of sharing nuclear technology to make weapons of mass destruction. It did not name any country, but North Korea was suspected. Washington barred trade involving Pakistan's largest nuclear installation in Kahuta, near Islamabad, for two years. Pakistan played down the move, which it called unjustified.

The head of the air force, Air Chief Marshal Mushaf Ali, and his wife were among 18 people killed when an air force Fokker crashed (20 February) near the border with Afghanistan. The cause was unknown.

India

Finance Minister Jaswant Singh announced measures in January 2003 to relax the terms on which rupees can be converted into dollars. Indian companies could now invest up to \$1 billion in the shares of foreign companies as long as the company owned Indian equities.

Omfar Goswami, chief economist of the Confederation of Indian Industry said: 'India is tiptoeing towards *de facto* full convertibility without actually admitting it'.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee reshuffled his cabinet (29 January) for what was seen as the last time before the election due in October 2004. Several economic reformers were promoted. Commerce Minister Arun Shourie was to take over the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications as well. Arun Jaitley took over the Ministries of Law and Trade and Commerce.

Jaswant Singh introduced (28 February) what was seen as a soft budget in advance of state elections. He cut tax for lower income groups and the aged and introduced a life insurance scheme for poor families. The deficit would rise to 5.6 per cent of GDP. The Finance Ministry said severe drought in mid-2002 had restricted growth.

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Indian archaeologists started digging at Ayodhya (10 March) for evidence that a Hindu temple existed on the site of the mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992. The Hindus claimed the site was the birthplace of the god Lord Ram and the demolition triggered communal violence. The dig was ordered by the Uttar Pradesh High Court to discover whether Mughal invaders demolished a temple to build the mosque. A campaign to build a temple on the site planned by Hindu radicals prompted Vajpayee to emphasize that he wanted the dispute resolved through peaceful mediation. Three weeks into the dig a broken pillar was discovered which it was thought might help solve the mystery.

In a crackdown on illegal immigrants seen as a potential terrorist threat to the country a test began (1 April) of a national identity card programme. Three million cards were issued in 13 states. The programme would first take in border states such as Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and West Bengal, as well as Delhi. In a move to capitalize on the success of the 20 million people of Indian origin living overseas legislation was introduced in February to allow some of them dual citizenship. The 1.8 million strong Indian community in the USA is the country's richest ethnic group.

Mayawati, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (pop 170 million), and leader of a party that represents the untouchables, invited 25 000 to a birthday party (15 January) estimated to cost up to £2 million.

For the first time in 37 years two Naga rebel leaders went to New Delhi (13 January) to complete a peaceful political resolution with the New Delhi government. It was a historic moment. The Naga people were forcibly absorbed into India at independence in 1947. Fighting broke out in 1954 and it is said that since then 200 000 Nagas have been killed. After the Delhi talks Naga leader Thuingaleng Muivah said: 'The war is over. We praise the government of India.' Problems remained because some other Naga militant groups remained opposed to a peace deal.

Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul attacked the government (14 January) for assaulting press freedom by putting pressure on the news website *tehelka.com* because its journalists had exposed corruption at the highest levels of government. Naipaul, a director of the website, said what had happened was reminiscent of the Emergency under Mrs Gandhi's rule in the 1970s. The website was now virtually defunct, all but four of the 120 staff laid off, its financial backer jailed without charge and the two reporters who had made the exposé still in jail. Veteran journalist and MP Kuldip Nayar, and Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh deplored the government action.

Vajpayee stunned a science conference in Mumbai when he said it was time for India to achieve its dream of putting a man on the moon. The national space agency (ISRO) launched a plan (30 January) to send an unmanned spacecraft to the moon by 2007. The probe would map a previously obscure part of the moon's surface.

In a renewed drive to eradicate polio, 35 million children in Uttar Pradesh, ten million in Madhya Pradesh and two million in Delhi were immunized in special booths (9 February). Across the world 85 per cent of new cases of polio are registered in India.

Poor Indian farmers were benefiting dramatically from genetically modified cotton, said a study carried out by California and Bonn Universities. Research in

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2001 involving 157 farms had shown yield rises of 80 per cent. The report, published in the journal *Science* in February, said the technology could revolutionize agriculture in the developing world.

A bomb explosion in a train in suburban Mumbai killed ten people—the worst in a series to shake the city over several months.

The government announced (12 February) closure of nightclubs and discos in government-owned hotels to halt a ‘cultural invasion by the West’. They would be converted into showcases of Indian culture with traditional dancing and singing. The move was seen as a step by the BJP-led government to impose Hindu nationalist values.

India and Pakistan

2003 began with renewal by the two countries of an agreement not to attack each other’s nuclear installations (1 January). It followed remarks by Pakistani President Pervez Musharaff that he had told India that Pakistan would have considered ‘non-conventional methods’ if Indian troops had entered its territory during the stand-off in 2002.

India announced (5 January) that to improve regional stability it had put its nuclear missiles under a formal command and control structure instead of an informal control structure. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would have the final say on use of nuclear missiles. India reaffirmed its no-first-use policy. Pakistan formally handed over its new intermediate-range nuclear-capable missile system to the army’s newly created strategic forces command.

Five days later India test-fired Agni missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads off the east coast. When Defence Minister George Fernandes watched the tests he warned Pakistan would be destroyed if it started nuclear war. Britain said the test ‘sent the wrong signal in the region’. In tit-for-tat action India expelled Pakistan’s acting high commissioner and four other staff, then Pakistan expelled the Indian acting high commissioner and four others (9 February). Eight days later both countries agreed to the arrival of replacements. India said Pakistan had not kept its promises to end cross-border terrorism. When Musharaff and Vajpayee attended the Non-Aligned Movement summit (24–25 February) in Kuala Lumpur the two men did not meet. Musharaff angered Vajpayee by referring in his speech to the ‘oppressed peoples of Kashmir’ but later said he wanted to extend friendship to India.

A month later (26 March) India and Pakistan both conducted nuclear missile tests again.

India signed a £1.9 billion deal with Russia to lease four long-range nuclear bombers and two nuclear-capable submarines. Russia would also hand over free an ageing aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Gorshkov*. The aircraft were capable of dropping nuclear bombs on China.

Men pretending to be Indian soldiers descended by night on a remote village in Kashmir and massacred 24 Hindus, including 11 women (23 March). On the same day, Abdul Majid Dar, commander of the biggest separatist group arguing for dialogue with India, was assassinated near the border with Pakistani Kashmir. The attacks were a setback for the ‘healing touch’ policy of the newly elected Chief Minister of Kashmir, Mufti Sayeed. They were likely to upset his

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attempts to persuade 400 000 Kashmiri Hindus driven from their homes ten years ago to return to the province. India accused Pakistan of carrying out the village massacre.

Bangladesh

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan held talks with Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Singh in New Delhi (13–16 February 2003), at which a main topic was the growing illegal traffic of people between the two countries. A meeting of Indian police chiefs and security officials had been held in January, at which, according to the Interior Ministry, it was decided to launch a drive to deport more than 20 million Bangladeshis. The immediate issue was the fate of hundreds of Bengali-speaking Muslims being deported from West Bengal. Bangladesh denied they were Bangladeshis. India said no one was being forcibly deported, but while the talks were going on Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani renewed a pledge that India would deport illegal immigrants. India was accusing Bangladesh of being a safe haven for terrorists and Washington listed it as a ‘suspected terrorist sanctuary’. After the talks Khan said ‘irritants’ in relations would be solved by discussion and not force.

Staggered council election polls carried out over nearly two months (25 January–16 March) led to the deaths of nearly 40 people. Voting was put off in 98 centres. A total of 198 700 candidates contested the elections, including 42 250 women vying for 2684 seats reserved for them.

On a visit to Bangladesh in mid-February Sierra Leone President Tejan Kabbah thanked former president Sheikh Hasina for sending Bangladeshi troops to his country as part of the UN peacekeeping force and for their rôle in building school buildings and roads there.

Sri Lanka

A fourth round of peace talks held in Thailand (6–9 January) produced agreement to speed the return and resettlement of 250 000 refugees from the Jaffna peninsula. Issues on disarming the Tamil Tigers in advance of political settlement made little progress and a demand from President Chandrika Kumaratunga that the Black Tigers squad of suicide bombers be disbanded was rejected. Another hot issue was the recruitment of child soldiers. Up to 40 per cent of Tiger troops were said to be under 18, with some 10 or 11.

The fifth round of talks was held in Berlin (7–8 February) because the Tigers’ chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, was ill and being treated in Germany. Just before the talks opened three rebels died when their trawler was intercepted off Jaffna and found to be packed with arms.

It was generally agreed that many tough issues had still to be tackled but, when the first anniversary of the ceasefire (23 February) arrived, comfort was taken from the fact that two people had been killed in encounters since—against 2000 in the previous 12 months.

A soldier and policeman held in custody by the Tigers for several weeks were released at the request of the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (6 March). The mission and the Tigers worked out a release mechanism to avoid

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the recurrence of such incidents.

The next round of talks was held in Hakone, Japan (18–21 March), where the focus was on monetary aspects of the proposed federal structure, but the meeting failed to adopt the draft of a memorandum of understanding on human rights.

On a visit to New Delhi Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe talked to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee about the planned bridge across the Palk Straits to make a land route from Sri Lanka to India. Sri Lanka had talked to the Asian Development Bank about funds for its part of the project. In a speech in Delhi (28 February) Wickremasinghe looked beyond the peace in Sri Lanka and, pointing to his country's strategic location astride important trade routes, held out the prospect of a sub-regional economic centre which could become a catalyst to economic growth throughout India and South Asia.

Malaysia

Police raided the offices of the internet news website Malaysiakini.com and confiscated its 19 computers (20 January 2003). The youth wing of the ruling UMNO said it had published a 'seditious' letter criticizing the government's racially affirmative policy towards Malaysia's Malay majority. Human rights groups and the Bar Council of Malaysia criticized the move. The website, which claimed 100 000 daily readers, had been one of the few independent news sources in Malaysia. It was effectively shut down. Unlike mainstream media, Malaysiakini needed no licence because the government had pledged there would be no control of the internet.

The UN International Court of Justice ruled (17 December 2002) in favour of Malaysia in a dispute with Indonesia dating from 1969 over sovereignty of the small islands of Ligitan and Sipadan off the island of Borneo.

Singapore

Free trade talks with the USA (completed 15 January 2003) would require Singapore from January 2004 to enact 'competition rules' allowing US firms to compete on an even footing with the island's government-linked companies. It was the first such agreement Washington had made with an Asian country.

A report on restructuring the state-directed economy (6 February) disappointed private economists because it did not dismantle the island's corporatist economic model. It focused on attracting foreign investment. The island's growth rate in 2002 was 2.2 per cent—far below the 9 per cent average since independence in 1965.

A government study (9 January) gave details of the regional network of Jemaah Islamiyah, held to be responsible for the Bali bombing in October 2002. It named the targets of a planned bombing campaign in Singapore foiled by arrests in December.

Malaysia–Singapore

Plans, now dating back 80 years, for a bridge to replace the causeway between the two countries were discussed when Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir

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Mohamad held talks with Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (14 February 2003). On his visit Mahathir revealed a talk he had had years ago with Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in which he said he personally had no objections to the project, but Goh felt nostalgic about the causeway and was against it. Lee told him the bridge could be built after Goh retired. Mahathir said: 'I feel very sad because the number of vehicles that cross the causeway has risen dramatically. We can't wait till Goh Chok Tong retires.' Goh had now said that if Malaysia wanted it could replace its side of the causeway with a bridge and the rest could be built after he had gone.

Brunei Darussalam

In talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair (9 January 2003) the Sultan agreed to the stationing in Brunei for another five years from 29 September of a battalion of the British Brigade of Gurkhas. The Sultan had negotiated with Britain to retain the Gurkhas when Brunei became independent in 1984—mainly to protect the oilfields. The deal was last renewed when John Major was prime minister.

Hong Kong

Alarm at the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) grew steadily early in 2003 as more and more cases were reported in Hong Kong and the death toll rose. The virus surfaced in China in November 2002. Only gradually was it realized that the source of the infection was neighbouring Guangdong province. The World Health Organisation warned in April 2003 that SARS was a threat to global health because it travelled with ease through air travel. By mid-April it had reached 20 countries and killed 126 people. Tourism in Asia was crippled and airlines cut flights sharply. Forecasts for the region's GDP were slashed and Hong Kong reported retail sales down 50 per cent. In one block of flats 107 people had caught the disease and were moved into isolation camps.

The Chinese government began to admit that it had not revealed the full extent of the outbreak. Signs that Chinese secrecy over the outbreak were beginning to strain relations with Hong Kong came when Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa met President Hu Jin-tao (13 April)—a rare event. Tung admitted that Hong Kong did not have the disease under 'effective control'. Singapore had taken severe measures, shutting schools. The outbreak began to affect the politics of the region. A key finance ministers' meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Manila was cancelled.

In his annual policy address Tung warned (8 January) that taxes would have to rise because of the unprecedented economic slump. He would cut his own £280 000 salary by 10 per cent and his ministers and top officials would take a similar cut. The deficit would rise to above £6 billion.

A proposal to move the statue of George VI, erected in 1958, from the city centre to make way for one of Sun Yat-sen met opposition in the Legislative Council. George VI was to be moved to a spot near the monkey cage in the zoo.

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Papua New Guinea

Governor John Momis of Bougainville said (10 January 2003) that the Interim Provincial Government and the People's Congress would merge to form the Constituent Assembly to debate and approve a constitution for the island. But first, he said, more amendments had to be made to the Papua New Guinea constitution and more progress made in weapons disposal. Three weeks earlier it had been reported that the peace process had been set back when containers holding nearly 500 surrendered weapons had been broken into and 360 were still missing. Despite this, the commander of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force said his last ten men would be withdrawn from the island.

A military court found (20 December 2002) 24 soldiers guilty of mutiny at Moem barracks, Wewak, on 8–23 March and sentenced them to 9–15 years in jail. They had demanded the resignation of the government of Sir Mekere Morauta.

Solomon Islands

Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza survived a vote of no confidence in parliament (18 December 2002) after five ministers threatened resignation. A week earlier Finance Minister Laurie Cohan resigned, it was said in protest against government capitulation to police demands, backed by violence, for unscheduled allowances. Chan became Foreign Minister.

William Morrell, former deputy chief constable in Manchester, was sworn in as police commissioner (30 January 2003). Kemakeza wanted an outsider to reform the ill-disciplined police force. Morrell had helped train a new police force in Kosovo for the UN.

Vanuatu

Four senior police officers were convicted of mutiny (5 December 2002), kidnapping and false imprisonment and given a suspended prison sentence. They had objected to the appointment of Mael Apisai as police commissioner—a step later overturned by court order.

Police barred former Prime Minister Barak Sope from reclaiming his seat in the National Assembly (11 December). It was claimed he had forfeited the seat through a fraud conviction—even though he had been given a presidential pardon.

Tonga

Half an hour after the Supreme Court ruled (5 April 2003) that a ban on the country's main independent newspaper, *The Taimi 'o Tonga*, was illegal the Tongan Privy Council reimposed it. The government shut the paper in February, claiming that it was trying to overthrow it and disaffect the people. The paper was later made a prohibited document. The Chief Secretary said the Privy Council Order had already been printed before the court ruling.

Pro-democracy legislator Akilisi Pohiva, journalist Filokalafi Akau'oilala and

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Kalafi Moala, publisher of *The Times of Tonga*, were awarded damages in the Supreme Court (9 December 2003) for wrongful jailing in 1996.

Tonga's opposition Human Rights and Democracy Movement defended the government (9 January) against allegations that it had allowed the al-Qaida network to use ships registered in Tonga. It had been claimed that al-Qaida had a fleet under the Tongan flag. The opposition accepted that the government had made a mistake in opening a shipping registry and was now closing it down.

Fiji Islands

Cyclone Ami, the most powerful since 1987, hit the main northern island of Vanua Levu (14 January 2003). At least 14 people were killed when villages were flooded by 90-foot waves. Communications with the main town, Labasa, were lost for several days. Aid from Australia, France, the UK and the UN arrived by the end of the month. Damage was estimated at £20 million.

All 56 soldiers court-martialled for mutiny after the May 2000 coup pleaded guilty (28 January). Two officers were jailed for life and the rest to four-to-eight-year terms. Earlier a man who failed to pass on his foreknowledge of the coup was jailed for two years in the High Court.

Journalist Josefa Nata and deposed MP Timoci Silatolu were found guilty of treason in the High Court (20 March) over their rôle in the coup. Nata, a prominent editor and publicist, was media adviser to coup leader George Speight.

Nauru

Bernard Dowiyogo was sworn in as President (9 January 2003) the day after President René Harris lost a parliamentary vote of confidence by eight votes to three. Next day the Supreme Court sitting in Melbourne, Australia, issued an injunction preventing Dowiyogo claiming the presidency because Harris and his cabinet had boycotted the vote. With the cabinet there, the legislature was split evenly. The deadlock prevented Parliament passing the 2003 budget.

The root of the problem was Harris's deal with Australia to accept 1000 asylum seekers for internment in Nauru while their applications for refugee status were being processed. Nauru had received £13 million by 10 January, having agreed to extend the scheme for another year to cover up to 1500 asylum seekers. The opposition said the policy was creating social instability and that Nauru was sliding into poverty and bankruptcy. The USA threatened economic sanctions because Nauru was selling passports and banking licences to raise cash. Washington said terrorists were taking advantage of the schemes.

Despite the injunction, Dowiyogo remained president and flew for talks in Washington. There he was taken ill, underwent heart surgery and died (9 March). Derog Geouria became acting president pending elections, but he suffered a mild stroke and went to Brisbane for treatment. Meantime, Parliament had passed legislation shutting offshore banks and tightening anti-laundering laws. An election was called and the asylum-seeker negotiation renewing the agreement with Australia, due to expire in June, was held up.

Dowiyogo had been six times president of the tiny republic (population 12 000). His shortest term in office was 15 days, his longest six years. He was 57.

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Samoa

The government decreed in February 2003 that guests at state functions must wear a new national uniform having coconut shell buttons and made with material featuring traditional designs. The picture of a teuila, Samoa's national flower, must be printed on the left side for women and on the pocket side of men's shirts.

Australia

A white paper on foreign policy unveiled by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in February 2003 said Australia was committed to strengthening its already close economic and security ties with the USA. It added: 'We have never been better placed to put our views to the US and have them heard. The government wants to deepen the alliance.' The white paper promised a renewed focus on regional security, and on tackling the growth of Islamic extremism and terrorism in Southeast Asia.

The opposition said anger remained in the region about Prime Minister John Howard's recent threat to make pre-emptive strikes. In February Howard flew to Jakarta to assure President Megawati Sukaroputri that any US-led conflict in Iraq would not be intended as a war against Islam.

In the wake of the Bali bombing Australia embarked on major measures to secure its missions. Many would be fenced off and blocked by concrete bollards. Some would be relocated—the first in the Philippines. Plans to open an embassy in North Korea were shelved.

Free trade talks between Australia and the USA opened (16 March). Canberra was seeking the end of tariffs and quotas restricting agricultural exports to the USA—its second biggest export market. In February Australia signed a wide-ranging free trade agreement with Singapore that involved elimination of tariffs, market access for services, and transparent customs procedures.

Rioting asylum-seekers caused £3 million worth of damage in detention centres across the country at the turn of the year. Inmates at Villawood tried a mass breakout on New Year's Eve. Fighting took place at three other mainland centres and at another on Christmas Island. Inmates lit fires, destroying buildings and tents. The Coalition for Reform of Refugee Policy said the refugees were at their wits' end because of the government's hardline policy and plans to send some of them back to places like Iraq. The government said no boat people had reached Australia for a year and the detainees were down from 2300 to 1200. In March Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said the controversial Woomera centre, where there were now only 77, would be closed.

Australia ratified at the eleventh hour (6 March) a treaty allowing multi-billion dollar oil and gas developments in the Timor Sea that will provide the main income for impoverished East Timor. A deal between Japanese utilities and the US company which would develop the field and pipe the gas to Darwin had to be ratified by 11 March. Months-long wrangling with another company over a much larger field had caused the hold-up.

In January Canberra experienced the worst bush fires in its history. Up to 400 homes and several public buildings, including Mt Stromlo observatory, historic

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telescope and science centre, were destroyed. Nearly a fifth of the capital had no power. Four people died. The fires came after a year that had been the fourth driest and fifth warmest in Australia since 1900. Wheat was bought from Britain and the USA to keep the bakers going.

Debate on Australia's history was intensified with the publication of the first of a three-volume work by Keith Windschuttle, figurehead of a new wave of conservatism. Entitled *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, it seeks to overturn the consensus about the genocide of native people following the white settlement of Tasmania. As the argument flared it was announced that exhibits in Canberra's new National Museum were under review.

The bodies of 75 Aboriginal men and women from the collection of the UK Royal College of Surgeons were returned to Australia (9 April). Most were taken from graves in the 19th century. A purification ceremony was held in the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. Museums in Britain are believed to hold body parts of 5000 indigenous Australians.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie said (9 March) Australia was losing its own language because of the increasing use of American words. He said: 'I've had a gutful. America might control the world but ... we don't need diapers, candy, ketchup, trash cans and fries—we've got nappies, lollies, tomato sauce, rubbish tins and chips.'

New Zealand

Hundreds of Samoans dressed in traditional costume presented to Ethnic Affairs Minister Chris Carter a 100 000-signature petition demanding New Zealand citizenship for all 165 000 inhabitants of Samoa (27 March 2003). They want a 1982 law disqualifying Samoans from citizenship overturned.

A team of scientists at a research institute in Hamilton cloned genetically modified cows to make the first GM milk for sale. They were the first in the world to produce the milk for commercial cheese. The campaign group Greenwatch UK said the process would harm farm animals. The Hamilton centre had been petrol-bombed by anti-GM campaigners. New Zealand earns £900 million from exports of cheese and casein.

The economy grew by 4.4 per cent in 2002, making it one of the world's most buoyant.

Early in 2003 Australia transferred 150 refugees for resettlement in New Zealand. They had been held for more than a year on two Pacific islands.

When Australian Prime Minister John Howard visited New Zealand to mark the 20th anniversary of the two countries' closer economic relationship (7 March) MPs protested at his Iraq war stance. The Greens boycotted the state banquet. Observers said Australia and New Zealand had seldom seemed further apart.

St Lucia

Marius Wilson was sacked as leader of the opposition United Workers' Party (27 January 2003) after several scandals, including charges that he had threatened a police officer with a gun. His successor was Arsen James.

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Trinidad and Tobago

A British warning to tourists that Trinidad might be at risk from terrorist attacks annoyed the government because of its potential damage to tourism. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office suggested a radical Muslim group might attack British and US interests if war started in Iraq. P&O stopped cruise ships calling there. Opposition leader Basdeo Panday said local groups were connected to al-Qaida and associated with the government. Prime Minister Patrick Manning dismissed his charges as irresponsible.

Cayman Islands

David Ballantyre, British-appointed Attorney-General, resigned (8 March 2003) when a six-month-long money laundering trial collapsed because of an obstruction of justice by an 'agent of the British government' named in court. His resignation came three weeks after the Cayman legislature censured him for his rôle in the failed prosecution and demanded that he quit. The case produced stories of wiretaps, MI6 agents and destroyed papers that were said to reveal top secret names and addresses of whistleblowers vital to MI6 work in offshore tax havens. Ballantyre denied any wrongdoing and received a £230 000 payoff. The trial had followed a three-year investigation into the collapse of Euro Bank Corporation. Four former bank employees were acquitted of laundering millions of dollars from a credit card scam. Investigations into shady business dealings had intensified in the Caribbean in the wake of 11 September as part of the hunt for funds destined for terrorist organizations.

Jamaica

Jamaica became the 17th Commonwealth country whose nationals need a visa to visit Britain. The rule came into force on 9 January 2003. The British Home Office said the move was not part of a clampdown on crack cocaine smuggling on flights to London but was to save Jamaicans being held up for two hours or more by immigration controls at British airports. In 2001 6 per cent of Jamaicans visiting Britain were refused entry, but in six weeks at the end of 2003 19.6 per cent were not admitted. In the first six months of 2001 1000 Jamaicans absconded after being given temporary admission.

The Privy Council in London ruled that the practice of detaining 'at the governor-general's pleasure' juveniles or persons of unsound mind convicted of murder and other serious crimes violated the constitution. One hundred convicted prisoners would have to be returned to the courts for sentencing.

Guyana

Big Food Group, owners of the Iceland store chain, tried to claim £12 million from Guyana in a bid to recover a 27-year-old debt ahead of an arbitration hearing by the International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes. In 2000 the Group took over Booker, which claimed £13 million compensation for nationalization of Guyana's sugar industry. Guyana had paid back £6.2 million

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but defaulted in 1989. With interest the amount owed had risen to £12.1 million—a tenth of the government's income. The pressure group Jubilee Debt Campaign pointed out that Guyana was getting debt relief on money owed to the World Bank, Britain and other countries. Britain had written off Guyana's debt to it, but Guyana was still using 40 per cent of its revenue to service other foreign debts. The pressure paid off and Big Food Group climbed down. It decided (17 March) not to proceed 'in the interests of both our company and those of the people of Guyana'.

Canada

The Quebec sovereignty cause suffered a big setback in provincial elections (12 April). The federalist Liberal Party led by Jean Charest won a sweeping victory, ousting Premier Bernard Landry and his Parti Québécois. The Liberals took 76 seats with 46 per cent of the vote, while the Parti Québécois took 45 seats and 35 per cent of the vote. The PQ was expected to enter a period of self-examination.

In Ottawa Industry Minister Allan Rock abandoned his campaign to run for the leadership of the ruling Liberal Party (14 January 2003) when Prime Minister Jean Chretien steps down in 2004. Earlier former industry minister Brian Tobin withdrew his bid. Opinion polls showed former finance minister Paul Martin well in the lead for the job.

Jack Layton, 52, was elected leader of the federal New Democratic Party (25 January) in succession to Alexa McDonough, who had resigned in mid-2002. He scored 53.5 per cent of the votes at a special convention in Toronto.

Inderjit Singh Reyat, a Sikh, became the first person brought to justice for the bomb blast in 1985 that killed 329 people over the Atlantic on Air India Flight 182 from Montreal to New Delhi. He was jailed for five years for manslaughter (10 February 2003). He acquired the materials for the bomb. Two other Sikhs still face 329 murder and conspiracy charges. Reyat, a British and Canadian citizen, had already served 10 years in Britain for manslaughter involving a blast that killed two baggage handlers in Tokyo.

United Kingdom

Results of the 2001 census (published 13 February 2003) showed that, in a population of 58.7 million, 4.6 million were members of ethnic minorities, including mixed race people. In two areas of London—Newham and Brent—non-whites outnumbered whites for the first time. Two per cent of the population of England and Wales are Indian, Leicester having 25.7 of the population. Islam was the second most popular religion after Christianity—3.1 per cent of the population of England and Wales.

As a tribute to the 2002 Commonwealth Games Manchester City Council approved (24 January) creation of the highest sculpture in Britain. At 184ft it would capture the power of athletics and the crack of the starting pistol.

Malta

In a referendum on membership of the European Union (8 March 2003) the Yes

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vote totalled 53.65 per cent—a 19 000 majority. Turnout was 91 per cent, against 95 per cent in the 1998 general election. The outcome was on a knife-edge until the end and as soon as the result was announced the two main parties began wrangling, with Labour Party leader Alfred Sant claiming the Yes votes amounted to only 48 per cent of the total registered voters.

Two days after the result, because he did not have an absolute majority, Prime Minister Eddie Fenech Adami called a general election for 12 April—four days before Malta was due to sign with eight other countries the accession treaty enlarging the EU. Malta was the first of the nine to hold a referendum. Fenech Adami's Nationalist Party won the election comfortably with 51.7 per cent. The Labour Party took 47.6 per cent and the Green party 0.7 per cent. The turnout was 96 per cent.

Cyprus

President Glafcos Clerides, now 83, announced (4 January) that, in an effort to ensure success for the UN bid to reunite the island, he would reluctantly seek re-election in the election due on 16 February. He would seek a limited 16-month mandate and not the constitutional five-year term. The UN had set a 28 February deadline to reach a deal so that a united Cyprus could sign the accession treaty with the European Union in April. Clerides had tried to persuade the Greek Cypriot political leaders to put the poll on hold but Akel, the Communist party, the biggest in the country, refused. It backed the Democratic Party candidate Tassos Papadopoulos. A challenge also came from the Attorney-General, Alcos Markides, who suddenly said he would stand as an independent.

In the event Clerides lost the election. Papadopoulos, a lawyer aged 69, won an outright majority in the first round and became fifth President of Cyprus. He won 51.51 per cent of the votes, Clerides 38.8 and Markides 6.62. Turnout was 95.95 per cent. Papadopoulos argued in the campaign that Clerides had made too many concessions to the Turkish Cypriot side and that he could get a better agreement. He would seek to change the UN plan to secure the right of all displaced persons to return to their pre-1974 homes in 'justice and safety'. After visits to Ankara and Athens UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan took to Cyprus (27 February) a revised peace plan in a last-minute bid to unify the island.

Throughout this period Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash retained his hardline opposition to the UN proposals, although 50 000 people, more than a quarter of the Turkish Cypriot population, took to the streets (14 January) to support them. Denktash, Clerides and UN negotiator Alvaro de Soto met next day in Nicosia, and again on 26 February, with another revised text and now with Papadopoulos and Clerides present—Papadopoulos was to take office two days later—but they said they wanted more time.

An important new feature of the proposals was that 46 per cent of the territory of the two British sovereign base areas would be transferred by Britain to Cypriot sovereignty if a definite settlement was reached on the basis of the UN plan. The bases, totalling 99 square miles, have remained under British sovereignty since independence in 1960.

The new Turkish leader, Recept Tayyip Erdogan, signalled that it was time Cyprus was reunited and said he wanted the UN deal to go through in time for

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the EU deadline of 28 February, but the Turkish army, which had intervened in 1974 to protect Turkish Cypriots, remained strongly opposed. Finally, Annan extended the deadline by inviting the two leaders to The Hague on 10 March to tell him whether they would submit the latest plan to popular referenda. If they did not agree 'this is the end of the road'. To thunderous applause Denktash told the Turkish Parliament (6 March) he would go to The Hague and tell Annan the revised settlement was unacceptable. Annan urged the Cyprus leaders to 'rendezvous with history'. But Denktash said the plan would throw many Turkish Cypriots out of their homes. Papadopolous said he, too, still wanted improvements to the plan.

Fifteen hours of talks broke down on 11 March. The EU said it would go ahead and admit only the Greek sector of Cyprus when the enlargement accession treaties were signed. The breakdown had set back Turkey's own bid to join the EU. The last stages of the long UN exercise to unite the island had become increasingly complicated by the changes of leadership in Cyprus and Turkey and by the growing crisis over Iraq.

Non-Aligned Summit

Fifty heads of government attended the 13th summit of the 114-nation Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur (24–25 February). As Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee set off he called for the NAM to be revitalized. Chairman Mohamad Mahathir, the Malaysian Prime Minister, rejected any invasion of Iraq without UN backing. He said: 'Button-pressing warriors and the people who command them go back to enjoy a hearty meal, watch TV shows or morale-boosting entertainers and then retire to their cosy beds for a good sleep'. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe said the USA should set an example by being the first to destroy its enormous stocks of weapons. The conference lined up against war on Iraq, but urged the country to comply with UN resolutions and get rid of weapons of mass destruction.

Commonwealth Law Conference

When judges and lawyers from 44 countries met in Melbourne (13–17 April) for the 13th Commonwealth Law Conference students from law schools attended from all over the world. They were competing in the Commonwealth Mooting Competition, where teams of students are drawn from various regions to debate hypothetical cases. Their skills were judged by some of the Commonwealth's leading judges, with the final round between India and the UK being adjudicated by a panel headed by Lord Woolf, Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales.

Journalists meet

A total of more than 200 Commonwealth journalists gathered at three successive events in South Asia in early 2003. The Commonwealth Journalists Association (CJA) held its silver jubilee conference in Dhaka (16–22 February); the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) its biennial meeting in Colombo (26–28 February); and in between another CPU event—the Editors' Forum—took place

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in Kandy. The CJA concentrated on the rôle of the journalist in civil society and good governance. Lively discussion took place about recent incidents of arrest and even torture of journalists in Bangladesh. The final CJA statement protested at ill-treatment 'which went against freedom of expression'. The CPU launched an important initiative to provide legal help to less privileged journalists and newspapers in the developing Commonwealth. The distinguished veteran Indian journalist and MP Kuldip Nayar was winner of the Astor Award given for services to Commonwealth journalism.

Around the Commonwealth

The 2003 Commonwealth Lecture was delivered on 11 March in London by Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, which launched its micro-credit project for women in one village in Bangladesh in 1976. The Bank now has 1176 branches and works in 41 187 villages, and its ideas have spread across the world.

An online Commonwealth Forum on Globalisation and Health was launched on 2 April 2003. The coordinator will rotate every three months, the first being Professor Ronald Labonte of Canada. The aim is to share information with ministers, officials, NGOs and researchers about the opportunities globalization offers to improve people's health while minimizing any negative impacts. At first electronic, the Forum will later hold regional and local seminars and meetings

Jamaica launched in March a master plan for sustainable tourism development funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC). Tourism contributes 8 per cent of the country's GDP. The government wants to raise that to 12 per cent and the number of workers in the industry from 32 000 to 150 000 in ten years.

As part of the Commonwealth Action Programme for the Digital Divide managers and executives from 15 countries attended a training programme in March on how e-services can be organized by public sector organizations to improve their services to the public.

The Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network, a virtual network across the Commonwealth, organized a seminar for women business owners and operators in London in March. Others will follow, aimed at giving women a platform to share success stories and discuss business counselling, networking and mentoring. The Network also hosted a conference in Johannesburg on the gender implications of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The Network is a division of the Commonwealth Business Council.

A course held in Brisbane in April on Training the Trainers on Nutrients in the Environment was attended by ten Asian and Pacific countries. It will help provide more trainers at a local level in the behaviour of nutrients in rivers, lakes and seas and set up a Commonwealth knowledge network on the subject.

A regional AIDS forum aimed at mobilizing young people in Pacific countries was held in Papua New Guinea in April. They discussed how to strengthen youth-to-youth support programmes across the region.

To meet the growing demand for processed seaweed in the food, chemical, pharmaceutical and personal care industries Sri Lanka has started a project to

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use seaweed harvested on its northern and eastern coasts, until now afflicted by ethnic conflict. It asked the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme to take part in a ten-month exercise in April with the help of Indian engineers and technologists.