

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *A cluster of elections took place in the Commonwealth in the first months of 2004. The biggest surprise came in India, where the BJP lost power and Congress returned under Sonia Gandhi. She declined power and a Sikh became prime minister for the first time—Manmohan Singh. In South Africa Thabo Mbeki easily won a second presidential term. Abdullah Badawi also had a straight victory in Malaysia, but when Bakili Muluzi stepped down in Malawi his nominee as president emerged winner in a confusing and disputed poll. In Antigua and Barbuda the Bird dynasty lost after 23 years in power. In referenda in Cyprus the Turks voted Yes and the Greeks No to the UN reunification plan. Controversially, the suspension of Pakistan from the Commonwealth was lifted.*

South Africa

Ten years after the election victory of Nelson Mandela and the advent of majority rule the African National Congress was returned to power under President Thabo Mbeki in the third universal-suffrage election (14 April 2004). It was an easy victory, with the ANC taking 69.8% of the vote—against 63% in 1994 and 66.3% in 1999. The Democratic Alliance (DA) took 12.33% (up from 9.5% in 1999) and the New National Party, successor to the old apartheid National Party, collapsed to below 2%, against 7% in 1999.

The poll showed that most South Africans were still voting along racial lines; the DA voters remained mostly white or mixed-race. Only 20 million of the 27 million people eligible to vote had registered. Turnout was 70%, down from 89%.

The ANC majority was over two-thirds, entitling it to change the constitution, but Mbeki quickly promised he had no intention of doing so. He said the ANC was ready to enter into a coalition with the Inkatha Freedom Party of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, but in the election Inkatha had lost control of its only stronghold, KwaZulu-Natal province. Buthelezi was dropped as home affairs minister and Inkatha turned down an offer of two other seats in the cabinet.

Mbeki made few changes to his government. All the main players stayed in place, including controversial Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang. Jacob Zuma remained Deputy President. Five new women joined the 49-strong team

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of ministers, bringing the total to 22. The leaders of the New National Party and the Azanian People's Organisation were given jobs.

Buthelezi dropped a court challenge claiming irregularities in the poll. In the election campaign Inkatha and the DA had made a pact in a bid to stop the ANC winning a two-thirds majority.

A newcomer on the political scene was Patricia de Lille, leader of a newly formed party, the Independent Democrats, which claimed to have broken the mould of racial politics. De Lille, who was vocal in parliament on AIDS, had been a member of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and a rattled DA was forced to run adverts attacking her.

More than 40 heads of state and government watched as Mbeki was sworn in for his second term in Pretoria (27 April). Mandela drew the biggest cheer, but the second biggest, a deafening roar, went to President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe as he appeared on the giant screens, although he was also greeted with loud boing.

In contrast to 1994 and 1999 Mbeki's victory came after a largely peaceful but dull campaign. It also came at a time when unemployment had risen above 40%, poverty had increased, and the fight against AIDS had been delayed by Mbeki's puzzling attitude, with anti-retroviral drugs only becoming widely available in March. But the ANC had achieved social and political stability, kept the economy on an even keel, and people responded to its appeal for more time to solve the country's problems. It claimed the government had built 1.6 million new homes, connected five million black homes to the national grid and given 17 million running water. Mbeki's 88-year-old mother Epainette said her son had done well but "he could have done more".

Mandela, 86 in July, addressed a joint sitting of Parliament (10 May) to mark the 10th anniversary of his inauguration. He praised Mbeki, but warned that HIV-AIDS threatened the country. He attacked the USA and UK—"so-called democracies"—for launching a war on Iraq that the UN did not sanction.

A few days later Mandela and two other Nobel peace prizewinners—Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former president F. W. de Klerk—appeared on stage with President Mbeki to hear the news from Zurich (15 May) that South Africa had been chosen to host the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Mandela had made two long-haul trips against doctor's advice to lobby for South Africa. On the final trip he went to Trinidad and Tobago, where he said this would be the last of his international travelling. He left Trinidad early and cut short a visit to Grenada because of the death (30 April), at 82, of his first wife, a one-time nurse who bore him four children.

An 18ft tall bronze statue of Mandela was unveiled in Sandton Square, Johannesburg's luxurious shopping complex, by his eldest grandchild (31 March). It was renamed Nelson Mandela Square

A study by the Medical Research Council said that, between 1998 and 2003, adult deaths from AIDS rose by 68%. Deaths of women rose by 168%. In a rare public comment Chief Buthelezi said in May: "I reach out to all the other people who died of AIDS. My son did."

The London *Times* reported (3 April) that large numbers of white South Africans who had left for Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada in 1994 for fear of a bloodbath after the fall of apartheid, were now returning.

After talks with the USA and France the government gave the overthrown president of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide, permission to enter South Africa. He

was flown there in a South African air force jet and warmly welcomed by Mbeki (31 May).

The journal *Science* reported that the oldest known example of jewellery had been unearthed in South Africa. A collection of 41 perforated snail shells, strung as beads and found at Blombos Cave on the Indian Ocean coast, seemed to be 75 000 years old—30 000 years older than any other jewellery so far found.

Port Elizabeth City Councillor Mike Xego called for the removal of a marble statue of Queen Victoria “in the same way that the Americans brought down the statue of Saddam Hussein”. English-speaking residents said the councillor had become “deranged and unhinged”. While streets, towns, regions and provinces across South Africa had been renamed since the end of apartheid this was the first time a row had broken out over a colonial-era statue.

Swaziland

Marwick Khumala, who had opposed King Mswati’s plans to buy a private jet, resigned (10 March 2004) as Speaker of the House of Assembly, despite unanimous endorsement only weeks before that he should continue. He said King Mswati had ordered his resignation because of discovery of a sex scandal involving the Speaker when he was 14 years old. Khumala said he had been abused by one of the 100 wives of Mswati’s father, King Sobhuza, who died in 1982. Khumala was succeeded by his deputy, Trusty Gina.

King Mswati hosted a party for 10 000 guests in the national football stadium to mark his 36th birthday (19 April). Mario Masuku, leader of the banned opposition Pudemo party, said it was a huge waste of public money.

The Commonwealth, through the Secretary-General acting in his good offices rôle and his special envoy from the Secretariat, Ade Adefuye, continued its efforts to achieve adoption of the new constitution leading to full parliamentary democracy within two years.

Lesotho

King Letsie III and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa attended the opening in mid-March of the first phase of the enormous Highlands dam and water project that will channel water to industries and cities in South Africa. So far two huge dams have been built. Over many years more will follow.

The government decided to sell 70% of the Lesotho Electricity Company by the end of 2004. It did not have the capacity to finance household connections, and in 30 years had wired only 7% of the country’s 400 000-odd households.

Namibia

In a ballot of party members (29 May 2004) the ruling SWAPO party chose Land Minister Hifikepunye Pohamba, 68, to succeed President Sam Nujoma in the presidential election in November. He won 341 votes against former foreign minister Hidepo Hamutenya, who had been sacked a week earlier. Pohamba is a long-time ally of Nujoma.

Six land evaluators were deployed to Namibia to advise (4 April) on Namibia’s land expropriation drive, but Nujoma told the BBC that redistribution must be on the agreed ‘willing seller willing buyer’ basis and no one would be

allowed to break the law. Nujoma ordered six large-scale commercial farms to be seized for black resettlement in March and two months later a number of farm owners were asked to begin negotiations for the purchase of their land. About 75% of prime farm land in Namibia is white-owned.

On the 100th anniversary of the uprising of the Herero people (12 January) Germany expressed “deep regret” for the killing of tens of thousands of tribesmen in one of the greatest of colonial atrocities—the “first German genocide”. The German ambassador called the mass killings “unfortunate”, but fell far short of making the full apology demanded by the descendants of the Herero people. The Herero rose in 1904 when settlers stole their land. They hacked 200 Germans to death, whereupon the Germans tried to wipe out the whole people. After three years 15 000 of the 120 000 Herero were left.

A new bridge financed by Germany was opened in May across the Zambezi between Namibia and Zambia, linking Lubumbashi in the Congo to the Namibian port of Walvis Bay. Namibia can now export fish and salt to south Congo and bring in timber from there, and Zambia can export mining, cotton, coffee and tobacco via Walvis Bay.

Thousands of people were evacuated from northern Caprivi in the worst Zambezi river floods for 50 years.

Zimbabwe

President Robert Mugabe was 80 in February. In an interview with Sky News (23 May)—the first given to the British media for years—he held to the view that the Blair government was responsible for his country’s problems. His people were not hungry and his government would not accept international food aid in the coming year: “Why foist this food on us? We don’t want to be choked. We have had enough.” He rejected charges of terror, rape and torture by his youth militia. He called Archbishop Desmond Tutu “an angry, evil and embittered little bishop”. Mugabe said he would serve his current term until 2008, but earlier, in Kenya’s *East African Standard*, he was quoted as saying that he wanted to retire from politics, adding “I have had enough. I am also a writer and would like to concentrate on writing after this term of office is over.”

Although the government said (11 May) that it would not need food aid in 2004, a report by Germany’s Friedrich Ebert Foundation said the food shortfall was 900 000 tonnes—half the country’s needs. After decent rains the government reported a harvest of 1.7 million tonnes of maize, one of the highest in decades, but the true figures were difficult to establish. Teams of UN agronomists were ordered out of the country before they could make their assessment.

Finance Minister Chris Kuruneri was arrested (24 April) and charged with corruption and illegal dealings in foreign currency worth \$1 million—the first senior minister to face charges in an anti-corruption drive. Some junior officials had been jailed and several bank and business directors had fled the country. Kuruneri admitted building houses in South Africa and Canada, but said he was paying legally.

An international delegation of bar leaders visited Zimbabwe in April. Stephen Irwin, chairman of the UK Bar Council, called for a campaign of international pressure to prevent Mugabe abusing Zimbabwe’s “once fine working justice system”. He pointed out that none of 36 petitions challenging the validity of the 2000 general election had been presented to the courts. If only 10

had gone the other way the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) would have had a majority.

In a by-election (29 March) the ruling Zanu-PF won back the Zengeza, Harare, seat it lost to the MDC in the 2000 elections. Just before polling a young MDC activist was shot dead and 10 others were hurt. Violent youth militia had been bussed into the constituency, hitherto an MDC stronghold. Three weeks later Zanu-PF won by 900 votes an election in Lupane, Matebeleland, which the MDC had taken with 80% of the vote in 2000. The election results were seen in South Africa as a new setback to Pretoria's efforts to get talks going between the two parties.

Earlier police tried to stop the MDC launch of a 70-page economic policy manifesto entitled Restart. They raided the party offices and seized documents. The MDC got a court order (29 January) overturning the ban, and the plan to rebuild the country was launched.

The European Union renewed its sanctions against Zimbabwe for another year (23 February). The number of senior members of Mugabe's inner circle under a travel ban was raised from 79 to 95 and now included the heads of the electoral and media commissions.

Harassment of the media continued. It emerged in January that Judge Michael Majuru had fled to South Africa because he was under investigation for lifting a ban on the independent *Daily News*—the seventh judge to give up the bench for handing down judgments against the government. He had ordered that the state-run media commission be replaced by a body with an impartial membership. The *Daily News* finally ceased publishing on 6 February. Two hundred staff lost their jobs, a core of 50 being retained. A US-registered Boeing 727 cargo plane with 64 men aboard was seized at Harare airport (7 March). The men turned out to be mercenaries. The plane's owners said they were experts being flown to provide security for mining companies in the Congo. Instead it emerged that they were heading for Equatorial Guinea, allegedly to topple its President Teodoro Obiang Nguema. The group was made up mainly of South Africans, Namibians and Angolans, black and white, with British ex-SAS officer Simon Mann, Eton and Sandhurst, as leader. They were arrested on charges of immigration and firearm violations, but later accused of plotting to murder Nguema. President Mugabe held talks with Nguema following the signing by Zimbabwe of a treaty with Guinea that would enable the men to face trial there.

Zimbabwe Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi said the men had been aided by MI6, the CIA and the Spanish secret service. Several countries were involved in a story that was reminiscent of Frederick Forsyth's *The Dogs of War*. In Equatorial Guinea a South African soldier Nick du Toit and 14 others were arrested (9 March) and also charged with plotting to kill the President. Twelve Zimbabwean prison officers were charged with assaulting three of the mercenaries in prison. Nguema seized power in Equatorial Guinea, the third largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, in a bloody coup in 1979.

Argument as to whether the England team should visit Zimbabwe for a Test tour at the end of 2004 divided the cricket world. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) faced intense pressure to withdraw because of Mugabe's human rights regime—action that could lead to England's suspension from international cricket for a year for failing to meet a commitment. The British government opposed the tour, but the whole question of Zimbabwe's status as

a Test-playing nation came to the fore when players signed a document listing details of corruption and malpractice within the Zimbabwe Cricket Union. Fifteen Zimbabwean players, including captain Heath Streak, were sacked (10 May).

Zambia

President Levy Mwanawasa pledged never to sign a death sentence during his presidency when he commuted (27 February) the death sentences against 44 soldiers who plotted a coup against his predecessor, Frederick Chiluba. Zambia last carried out an execution in 1997 and 250 were still on death row.

Mwanawasa hosted a lavish 80th birthday lunch in Lusaka for the first president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda (24 April). Four days later four presidents—from Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia—as well as Nelson Mandela gave a birthday party for him in Johannesburg.

Lusaka High Court quashed a deportation order against newspaper cartoonist Roy Clarke of *The Post*. The judge said he had shown that his constitutional right to freedom of expression had been violated by the order and he had been discriminated against because his editor had not been issued with an order.

British Airways launched a regular service from Johannesburg to Livingstone. Zambia, not Zimbabwe, had now become the favoured place from which to enjoy the Victoria Falls.

Nigeria

In an Easter message President Olusegun Obasanjo warned Nigerians to “remain constantly alert and ready to thwart any attempt by unpatriotic elements to breach the peace and security of our nation”. Days later several military officers were arrested following reports of a coup plot. Presidential spokeswoman Remi Oyo said Hamza al-Mustapha, chief of security under former military leader Sani Abacha, was suspected of being involved in the plot. Mustapha was held in a Lagos jail but moved to Abuja after late-night gunfire in the capital. For a short period the armed forces cancelled holidays and restricted their soldiers to barracks.

Kano state, which was at the centre of the world’s worst polio outbreak, boycotted the start of a UN vaccination programme (22 March 2004). Muslim clerics claimed the vaccine was contaminated with female sex hormones as part of a Western plot to make Muslims infertile. In 2003 almost half the 750 new cases of polio in the world were in Nigeria and the disease had spread to several neighbouring countries where polio had been eliminated, even jumping across to Botswana. The WHO and UNICEF launched a big immunization drive in 10 African countries in February. In 1988 the number of children with the virus was 350 000 world-wide. In 2003 it was 750. In May the Kano government said it had obtained a ‘safe’ polio vaccine from Indonesia.

In three months of violence in the first half of 2004 between Muslims and Christians in Plateau state up to 1000 people died. The centre of the trouble was the town of Yelwa. In a bid to restore peace President Obasanjo declared a state of emergency and replaced state governor Joshua Dariye, who is from the ruling

People's Democratic Party, with a retired general. He said the situation "bordered on genocide".

Within weeks of delivering the 2004 BBC Reith Lectures, Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, 69, was briefly arrested at an anti-government rally by 500 activists "against civilian dictatorship and wasteful governance" in Lagos (15 May). Police used tear gas to break up the protest. Soyinka is head of the Citizens' Forum, a coalition of pro-democracy forces. He wants election reforms and a new constitution and said he would go on demonstrating.

Works Minister Adeseye Ogunlewe courageously gave out his private phone number on a radio show (17 May) and asked citizens to call him if they spotted a poor road. Most of the country's roads are in bad shape.

Sierra Leone

Huge numbers of people across the country listened in to the opening ceremony in Freetown of the UN-backed war crimes court (10 March 2004). It had been set up to try those who bore "the greatest responsibility" for the decade-long civil war. Some members of the Civil Society Movement were critical of the £35 million budget for the court, arguing that the money would be better spent on rebuilding the almost entirely destroyed university.

Attempts were made by lawyers defending rebel leaders charged with atrocities to remove British lawyer Geoffrey Robertson as court president. They alleged he was biased because of what he said about the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in a book he wrote before his appointment. It was decided (13 March) he would retain his post, but stand down from appeals involving three defendants.

The UN Security Council extended the term of its 11 000 peacekeepers for another six months to 30 September. A presence would remain, reduced by stages to 3250. Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that the peace remained fragile.

A Commonwealth expert team from four countries organized by the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum was present for local government elections (22 May). Its brief was to observe the preparations, the polling, counting and results process and the overall electoral environment.

Ghana

Parliament approved the takeover of Ashanti Goldfields by AngloGold of South Africa (18 February 2004). The decision was taken by a head count, which led to a boycott of the vote by the opposition National Democratic Congress, which holds 91 of the 200 seats. It said the deal was illegal because it reduced the government's share to less than the 10% threshold in the legislation.

Jerry Rawlings, who was head of state for 19 years, testified in early February to the commission investigating human rights atrocities. The hearings were televised. He was asked about the murders of three high court judges and a retired army major. The Ghana Bar Association alleges 200 people disappeared in the early years of his rule. Rawlings, now 55, said there might have been extra-judicial killings while he was leader, but he had not witnessed them. The authorities said they wanted to find out the truth, and to heal, not shame or punish.

A crackdown on NGOs was signalled (25 February) by Kojo Amoakwe, chief director of the Ministry of Manpower Development and Employment (25 January). He said Ghana had 3000 NGOs but only 150 had submitted annual reports and statements of accounts. A blacklist of NGOs would be circulated. A main reason NGOs had proliferated was because aid agencies were increasingly contracting out much of their fieldwork to them.

President John Kufuor said on a visit to London (26 April) that Ghana was close to becoming the first country to meet the convergence criteria for a monetary union with Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Guinea. The target date was July 2005 and afterwards the union would merge with the CFA franc into a single currency area. Inflation in Ghana was down to single digits from 40% when Kufuor took over. He faced elections in December.

The Gambia

President Yahya Jammeh announced that “large quantities” of oil had been found offshore that would result in “a harvest of prosperity”. He gave no details of the size of the reserve, but the news followed discovery of large deposits off São Tomé. An Australian company was said to have a licence to explore.

Uganda

Lord’s Day Resistance (LRA) rebels killed 192 people in an attack on a refugee camp near Lira (21 February 2004). The local defence force was outgunned. Three days later President Yoweri Museveni visited Lira and apologised to the people. He blamed the army for ‘mistakes’. In May 70 rebels gave themselves up to the Ugandan army—the largest surrender since the LRA took up arms in the late 1980s—and helicopters killed another 54.

On a visit to Kampala UK International Development Secretary Hilary Benn urged Museveni to recognize that the 18-year-old conflict could not be solved by military means alone and later Museveni said he would order a ceasefire if the LRA was willing to talk (16 April). But, in an interview in a Kenyan-based magazine, reclusive LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony said Museveni was a killer and he would talk to him “through the holy spirits and not through the telephone”. The UN Security Council condemned the LRA atrocities (14 April).

Museveni said he would retire from the army to concentrate on nurturing the National Resistance Movement Organization (NRMO), which would join other parties fighting the next election on Uganda’s return to multiparty politics. Under Ugandan law no serving member of the military can hold a position in a political party. Critics said Museveni had a firmer hold on the army than ever and the army would be delinked only when he left power.

Kenya

President Mwai Kibaki appealed for calm on television (5 March 2004) as feuding grew between two factions of his coalition, his National Alliance of Kenya and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The problem arose after the draft constitution had been passed at a constitutional conference. The government withdrew from the conference. A faction close to Kibaki threatened to block the

draft's passage through parliament. The dissenters said the reforms could help the LDP win more power.

The new constitution, which curbs the presidential powers and creates a post of executive prime minister, was a key pledge by Kibaki's coalition in the 2002 elections. The High Court ruled that the draft should be approved by referendum and not by parliament. Former president Daniel arap Moi called for it to be given back to Kenyans "for re-examination to thrash out contentious issues" before being presented to parliament.

Land and Settlement Minister Amos Kimunya (10 February) said the government planned to give farmers of idle land a year to develop it, after which it would be redistributed. Unlike in Zimbabwe, land would be taken from anyone, white or black. He said: "We want to see that there is economic activity...so that you do not have 40 acres and put two zebras there and say you are operating a sanctuary".

More than 300 000 people living in slums around Nairobi faced eviction as the government began to clear shanty settlements on the edge of railway tracks and on land reserved for road building. Protests from the UN and the Vatican halted the process in March, but Kenyan Roads Minister Raila Odinga insisted homes built on land reserved for public utilities must be demolished. The problem is a growing one all over Africa as urbanization proceeds apace.

The trial of four Kenyans accused of murdering 10 Kenyans and three Israeli tourists in the Mombasa hotel bombing in 2002 opened in the Nairobi high court (2 February 2004). Three others were already on trial for conspiracy.

The government announced (28 April) that it would reinvestigate the murder of Julie Ward, who died aged 28 in the Masai Mara game reserve in 1988. The news was given at the inquest in Ipswich, UK. The Kenyan authorities said Julie Ward had been killed by lions, but her father, on 100 trips to Kenya to investigate, proved she had been murdered. At the Ipswich inquest Kenyan Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs Kiraitu Murungi called the murder "one of the great unsolved mysteries" of President Daniel arap Moi's regime. There had been deliberate obstruction in the Kenyan inquiries and his government was now trying to unravel other deaths.

A case brought against the UK Defence Ministry for allegedly killing and maiming hundreds of Kenyan tribesmen with munitions left over from training exercises collapsed (11 February). The claimants, poor herders, settled out of court for £500 000—a fraction of their demands for £40 million. They tried to copy 230 others who had won £4.5 million in 2002.

A new inquiry into the unsolved murder in 1990 of foreign minister Robert Ouko was told by his brother, Eston Barrack Mbajah, that he was offered a cabinet post, new houses and money to pay his mortgage in return for helping to conceal the crime. He refused the offer, was picked up and tortured. He fled to the USA and returned only after arap Moi lost power in 2002.

The elephant population had become so overcrowded in the coastal Shimba Hills reserve that a herd of 400 was being rounded up to ship south to the Tsavo East park. Rangers in helicopters fired tranquillizer darts at selected animals and crated them for removal by road. Cost of the operation: £1.5 million. In the 1980s the elephant population was in danger of being wiped out by ivory poachers.

Malawi

Opposition parties complained of flaws in the new computerized voters' roll and the high court ordered a two-day postponement of the presidential and parliamentary elections from 20 May 2004. The judge called for re-inspection of the lists, which showed the numbers registered had dropped from 6.6 million to 5.7 million.

In the wake of President Bakili Muluzi's retirement after 10 years in office it had been a troubled campaign, with internal dissent in the ruling United Democratic Front over its candidate, former World Bank economist Bingu wa Mutharika. Retiring deputy president Justin Malewezi had moved over from the UDF to the opposition People's Progressive Movement.

The election result, delayed for three days, showed Mutharika with 35% and John Tembo, of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) with 27%. A third candidate from the seven-party Mgwirizano coalition secured 26%.

In the new parliament the MCP won 59 seats, the UDF 49 and Mgwirizano 27, with 38 independents and 14 others. Turnout was 52%. The coalition filed a legal challenge, claiming huge irregularities.

Protests against the results led to rioting and looting in Blantyre. Four people were killed. The result seemed likely to cause political instability since Mutharika's UDF held only 49 seats in the 193-seat parliament and needed the support of other groups. Three opposition groups signed a deal to unite (27 May) and become the largest bloc in parliament (92 seats).

The Mgwirizano coalition asked for a re-run of the poll, claiming huge 'irregularities'. Chakuamba even declared himself the presidential winner and Tembo said he was unhappy about the results.

Mutharika, who is 70, was inaugurated as the new president on 24 May in a quarter-full stadium. Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe attended. Mutharika said he was ready to work with the opposition and urged them "to bury the hatchet".

Mbeki had praised (20 April) Muluzi's compliance with the constitution by stepping down after two terms in office: "This is a very important sign to all around the continent...a long distance from when Malawi had presidents for life."

A notable feature of the campaign was the way the once-shunned AIDS became an election topic. The parties competed for the votes of those with the disease by offering free medical treatment. The lands minister said he had lost three children to AIDS. Maluzi said he had lost a brother. All election manifestos promised help. One million of the 11 million population is infected.

A Commonwealth observer team from 14 countries was led by Justice Joseph Warioba, former prime minister of Tanzania. The team's initial verdict was that "the voters were free to express their wishes on election day itself, but because of the problems with the register, the bias of the state media and the abuse of incumbency, the process prior to election day was unfair". It added: "Some of the requirements of the democratic process have been met, but others have not". A European Union observer team was also highly critical of the process.

Tanzania

The presidents of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania signed a protocol in Arusha to prepare the ground for a customs union (2 March 2004). Ratification would take some months. The deal would eliminate most duties within the East African Community and was planned to lead to a common market and single currency along European Union lines. The old East African Community collapsed in 1977.

Zanzibar's parliament passed a bill in mid-April outlawing homosexuality and lesbianism. Jail terms of 25 years would be imposed for gay male relationships.

The government said Zanzibar would have its own flag by the end of the year. Until now it has used the flag of Tanzania.

Mozambique

The latest big investment project, a £500 million high-tech gas plant in the south owned by Sasol, highlighted the fact that Mozambique has become one of the top destinations for foreign investment in Africa. In February 2004 it began pumping gas into a pipeline to South Africa. Since 1996 economic growth has been in double digits and about £5 billion foreign investment has gone into the country in two years.

Two Indian firms won a 25-year, £98 million contract to revamp the railways. The link from Beira to Zimbabwe will be rebuilt and so will others handling trade to Malawi, Zambia and South Africa.

The government agreed to refund £160 000 development aid to Sweden because an audit showed that it had not been spent on scholarships as per the agreement. Such repayment is rare, though not unprecedented.

Zimbabwean Information Minister Jonathan Moyo was forced to abandon a speech to journalists in Mozambique. They carried banners, "Once a snake, always a snake", and refused to end their demonstration until he left their trade union headquarters (7 May).

Anibal Antonio dos Santos, serving 28 years for killing investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso, escaped from Maputo jail (9 May) and turned up in Canada. He was recaptured by Interpol at Toronto airport and Mozambique Foreign Minister Leonardo Simao applied for his extradition.

Seychelles

President Albert René, 68, announced (24 February 2004) that he would retire during the year "because he was getting older" and hand over to Vice-President James Michel. René came to power in a coup in 1977 and was last re-elected in 2001.

Environmentalists were angered at news that the government had tendered for a resort and luxury hotel to be built on an island of the Aldabra group, the world's largest raised coral atoll. Aldabra lies north of Madagascar and was declared a world heritage site in 1982. It is host to a wondrous collection of wildlife—insects, plants and mammals, including 152 000 giant tortoises—the largest population in the world. The atoll is hundreds of miles from human habitation. The Seychelles Island Foundation, which manages Aldabra, said it cost £400 000 a year to run and had to be put on a sustainable footing.

India

At the end of an extraordinary election that brought the Congress Party back to power Sonia Gandhi, Italian-born widow of Rajiv Gandhi, declined to become prime minister. Congress MPs voted unanimously for former finance minister Manmohan Singh, a Sikh, to be their leader and President Abdul Kalam invited him to form a government (19 May). He was sworn in two days later as India's 14th prime minister. At 72 he became India's first non-Hindu prime minister. He is an Oxford-educated economist who became governor of the central bank and has a reputation for being tough, incorruptible and gracious. In 2003 he chaired the Commonwealth Expert Group on Development and Democracy, whose report was the centrepiece of the Abuja Commonwealth summit in December.

More than 670 million people voted over three weeks at 700 000 polling stations in an election that BJP prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had called (6 February) six months early because of the economic boom. For the first time the elections were completely electronic, so that illiterate voters could take part by selecting a party symbol. More than half the Indian population is under 25. In icebound Ladakh officials were dropped by helicopter to set up a polling booth 17 000 feet above sea level.

The result (13 May) saw Congress emerge for the first time since 1991 as the country's largest party. It took 149 Lokh Sabha seats. The outgoing BJP's seats fell from 182 to 135. With its allies the Congress now had 217 of the 539 seats, while the BJP and its allies had 187. The Congress success was seen as having been achieved through the vote of the poor. Although the economy had grown remarkably under the BJP government, to the benefit of the better-off, the 300 million rural poor in particular, who make up two-thirds of the electorate, had not benefited. More than 90% of Muslims were said to have voted for Congress. One casualty of the election was the high-flying technocrat Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu. His capital, Hyderabad, had become the centre of India's IT revolution. But his defeat had been attributed to neglect of agriculture, on which two-thirds of the state's 80 million depend. In Gujarat, scene of bloody riots in 2002, the BJP won again and Narendra Modi remained chief minister.

In the immediate aftermath of victory Sonia Gandhi, as President of the Congress but one who had no experience of government, showed signs of accepting the prime ministership, but after several days she told the party (18 May) that she had never wanted to be prime minister and was rejecting the job in the interest of the nation. She said: "The post of prime minister has not been my aim. I was always certain that if ever I found myself in the position I am today I would follow my inner voice. I humbly decline the post...I will not revert."

The days immediately after her election produced emotional scenes countrywide. Many Congress voters felt they had voted for Gandhi and had been let down. BJP followers deplored the prospect that India might be run by 'a foreigner'. Indian stock markets slumped dramatically on fears that Congress would move to a socialist economic agenda. In 90 minutes the largest, Bombay, fell 700 points—the biggest fall in its 129-year history. Trading was twice stopped.

Markets recovered when Singh was appointed and he named his government. He was the man who launched India's economic reforms in 1991. He assured investors: "our policies will be pro-growth, pro-investment, and pro-savings ... we will continue with the good work done by the previous government". A strong element in the Congress campaign had been the launch on the political scene of Gandhi's two children, Priyanka, 31, and her brother, Rahul, 34. Only Rahul stood for a seat—and won—but Priyanka played a major organizational rôle. They may have been one reason for their mother's decision to step down. Veteran Communist Party leader Jyoti Basu reported: "They said 'We've lost our father. We don't want to lose our mother as well'."

One twist in the other direction came when Maneka Gandhi, the widow of Indira's first son Sanjay, and her articulate son Varun, stood for the BJP. She had sat as an independent for eight years. In the inquests that followed the Congress success the BJP admitted that it had been mistaken to campaign on the glossy slogan 'India Shining' when its economic success had not reached down to the rural poor. Congress had focused on the 300 million who still lived on less than a dollar a day.

Congress headed a coalition of nearly 20 centre-left parties, but kept all the key posts in the 28-member cabinet. Other parties took 25 of the 68 ministerial posts. The cabinet included: P. Chidambaran (Finance), Shivraj Patil (Interior), Pranab Mukherjee (Defence), Natwar Singh (Foreign Affairs), Laloo Prasad Yadav (Railways), Sharad Pawar (Agriculture) and Arjun Singh (Education). Two posts, Shipping and Revenue, went to the Tamil regional DMK and the Speaker was for the first time a communist, Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI (Marxist).

After marathon talks with its coalition partners the new government, known as the Progressive Alliance, announced its policy agenda. It heavily emphasized tackling the needs of the poor while pushing ahead with economic reform and growth. Profitable state-run firms would not be privatized and loss-making firms would be decided case by case. Education spending would rise by 6% of GDP. The BJP's Prevention of Terrorism Act would be scrapped. Women would be "fully empowered". "Friendly ties" with the USA would be pursued but "all attempts at unilateralism" opposed.

A 23-page mission statement (27 May) pledged economic reform with a "human face". It focused on improving standards for the rural masses and included a guaranteed minimum 100 days of employment a year for all. The appointment of Harvard-educated lawyer Chidambaram, 59, as Finance Minister was seen as signalling continued reform.

Foreign ministers of India, Brazil and South Africa signed a 'framework agreement' in Delhi (6 March) to boost trade. The pact aimed to counter industrialized nations' domination of the world trading system. The three underlined their countries' claims for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Britain and India signed a memorandum of understanding (19 March) by which India would buy 66 Hawk training jets from BAE Systems. The British said they would not oppose a move by the Indian air force to convert the jets into fighter aircraft.

An all-party report by MPs concluded (4 February) that Coca Cola and PepsiCo sold soft drinks containing pesticides harmful to human health and misled the Indian people over claims that their products were safe for human consumption. It called for new regulations for fizzy drinks that would "seek

complete freedom from pesticide residues". An estimated seven bottles of cold drinks are sold to every Indian each year. The report, which followed a heated debate in parliament in August 2003, was seen as a victory for environmentalists.

India was near to eliminating polio. Against 223 cases recorded in 2003, only eight more had been confirmed by May 2004. A mass immunization campaign was under way to insure against any new outbreaks.

A silver sword used by Tippu Sultan against the British and taken from his bedchamber when Srirangapatnam was captured in 1799 was brought back to India in April. It had been bought for £175 000 at auction in London by Vijay Mallaya, millionaire owner of Kingfisher beer.

Pakistan

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) decided at its meeting in London (21–22 May) that Pakistan should no longer remain suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth. It "welcomed the progress made in restoring democracy and rebuilding democratic institutions...as well as the restoration of the 1973 constitution, as amended by the 17th Amendment".

The decision was qualified about the strengthening of the democratic process. It noted "continuing concerns", including "the Group's expectation that there would be no deviation from the agreement reached between the Government and the opposition parties in December 2003 and that the 17th Amendment to the Constitution be implemented fully in letter and spirit, including the issue of the separation of the offices of President and Chief of the Army Staff. The Group further hoped that the process of democratisation would be consolidated in such a way as to encourage a broader embrace of the Harare principles."

The statement went on: "CMAG agreed to remain seized of the situation by retaining Pakistan on its agenda. It requested the Secretary-General to utilise his good offices and technical assistance, as appropriate, to support the strengthening of democracy, institution building and good governance, and to provide an update on developments to CMAG at its next meeting."

The CMAG meeting, chaired by Nigerian Foreign Minister Olu Adeniji, was difficult and protracted. Strong pressure for Pakistan's return had come from the UK and Australia, although neither was currently represented on CMAG. Canada, Bahamas, Lesotho and Tanzania were reported to be uneasy. The main reservation was the position of President Pervez Musharraf. He had promised to step down as head of the army at the end of 2004, but until he did so Pakistan's head of state remained a military leader in a Commonwealth that no longer accepts military government. The CMAG meeting turned out to be unfortunately timed—days after the new Indian government had come to power and at the moment Canada had called an election. Both countries are on CMAG, but their foreign ministers had to field officials as stand-ins.

After the decision Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the former Secretary-General, said it was "a tragic blow to the hard-earned credibility of the association as a force for promoting its fundamental principle of democracy". Pakistan's progress towards democratic government, he said, "cannot be regarded as complete until its President and Executive Head of State becomes an elected civilian politician".

Musharraf reacted angrily to the CMAG decision to continue monitoring Pakistan. He said he would not be dictated to by the Commonwealth, adding: "We will take steps that are in the interests of Pakistan, not of the Common-

wealth. The Commonwealth should be proud of having a country like Pakistan joining it. Therefore we don't accept such conditional ties. Countries involved in the decision, especially those from Africa, should look to their records before criticising others."

Pakistan was suspended in 1999 when Musharraf ousted then prime minister Nawaz Sharif by coup. The Commonwealth's Millbrook rules lay down that action should be taken when a country violates the Harare Declaration, "particularly in the event of an unconstitutional overthrow of a democratically elected government".

Another cause for concern at the CMAG meeting was the deportation (11 May) to Saudi Arabia within an hour of landing in Lahore of a top opposition leader, Shahbaz Sharif, former chief minister of Punjab and brother of Nawaz Sharif. He had been in exile in London for three years. More than 1000 supporters of his faction of the Muslim League were arrested before he arrived. The Supreme Court had ruled that he should be allowed to return, but that he could be arrested for any outstanding crimes. He is charged with ordering the killing of five men when he was chief minister.

Gunmen fired on a procession of Shia Muslim worshippers in Quetta (2 March), killing 44. Sunni militants were suspected. In Karachi gunmen stormed a police station near the airport, ordered policemen to recite Islamic verses and killed five of them (5 April). Two car bombs exploded near the US consul's home (27 May).

The Pakistani army made renewed attempts in March to force militants out of the mountainous regions bordering Afghanistan, as the USA pressed Musharraf to step up its attacks. The Americans launched Operation Mountain Storm with 113 500 troops in a bid to smoke out al-Qaida and Taliban supporters. The Pakistani attack on the sensitive northern borders faltered when its casualties rose and hundreds of trapped rebels slipped away through a maze of tunnels. Deaths in the fighting were estimated at 150 and 163 fighters were captured. Al-Qaida's second-in-command was believed cornered, but then a tape said to be recorded by him urged Pakistanis to overthrow the government and he was assumed to have escaped. US Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Pakistan (17-18 March). A few hours earlier a bomb outside the US consulate in Karachi was defused with five minutes to spare.

Musharraf, who had pardoned scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan after he had admitted selling nuclear arms technology around the world, said later that he had "nipped the proliferation in the bud" when he forced Khan into early retirement three years ago. As speculation grew in February as to how widespread Khan's dealing had been, Musharraf was at pains to argue that "Pakistan's nuclear programme is not under the aegis of the military—it never was and it is not now".

In a speech (11 February) US President Bush supported Musharraf's view that Khan and his colleagues had acted alone and for financial motives. Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto (22 February) rejected Musharraf's claim that he and other senior army figures did not know of a black market network selling nuclear technology around the world. It was, she said, inconceivable that Khan had travelled to North Korea in 2002 without Musharraf's knowledge.

For the first time since independence in 1947 a cut in the size of the army was announced (29 April). Its 500 000 troops would be reduced by 50 000

through modernization of logistics and administration. Pakistan spends 20% of its budget on defence.

India and Pakistan

The Indian cricket team arrived to a huge, tinsel-garlanded welcome for the first full tour of Pakistan in 14 years (10 March 2004). Pakistan issued visas to 8000 Indian fans for the five one-day and three five-day matches. Among the spectators at the first match were Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi. India won the series—the first time it had beaten Pakistan on its own soil—and returned to a massive, firework welcome in Delhi. The tour, proposed by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee as part of his attempt to secure peace, had been a triumph in building fraternal relations, although even as the tour began Pakistan had test-fired the Shaheen II, its most powerful ballistic missile to date. As before, Pakistan warned India in advance of the test.

Just before the cricket tour India and Pakistan began their first formal peace talks in six years in Islamabad (15 February). These were three-day talks about talks to set an agenda. The real talking could not begin until the Indian election was out of the way.

When Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister of India he pledged to continue the peace process begun by Vajpayee. Singh said he would seek the most friendly relations on all issues. Meantime, nuclear talks scheduled for the end of May were postponed while his cabinet was completed. The new Foreign Minister, Natwar Singh, is a former ambassador to Pakistan and was earlier deputy high commissioner in London. He said on taking office: “We will further strengthen, widen and deepen our relations with Pakistan”.

Just before the new government began business a landmine blew up a bus in Kashmir, killing 28 people (23 May). The leading militant group Hizbul Mujahideen claimed responsibility. Since the peace process Kashmir had been relatively quiet, apart from occasional shootings by Indian troops of Muslim militants.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell upset Delhi when he announced without warning in April that the USA was designating Pakistan a ‘major non-Nato ally’—a move that gave it access to cheaper US military equipment and put it in the same category as Israel and South Korea. It would also have access to improved weapons systems for the first time since 1998, when the USA imposed sanctions after Pakistan began nuclear tests.

Bangladesh

The cabinet approved the proposal to establish 45 parliamentary seats reserved for women (8 March).

Former president Badruddoza Chowdhury, who aimed to form a new reformist political party, tried to hold a political rally in Dhaka (11 March). A mob threw stones and police rescued him. Chowdhury, founding secretary of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, had been forced to resign as president in 2002.

Commerce Minister A. K. M. Chowdhury resigned (5 March) five days after being criticized for not controlling basic commodity prices. Top businessman

Chowdhury was said to be contemplating joining the former president's movement for a new party.

A bomb hurled at British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhary as he left a mosque in Sylhet after Friday prayers (21 May) bounced off his stomach and exploded, killing two worshippers. He had leg injuries and 50 other people were injured. Nine people were arrested. Choudhary, 44, was born in Bangladesh but left as a boy and had become the first senior high commissioner from an ethnic community background. He had taken up his post only two weeks earlier and was making a trip to his home district.

Students and police clashed in Dhaka after author Humayan Azad was stabbed on Dhaka University campus (27 Feb). His new book had criticized Pakistani and Bangladeshi collaborators before independence in 1971. Islamists denounced the book.

UNDP representative Jorgen Lissner attacked MPs (26 May) for absence from parliament. He said many attended only one day of proceedings to avoid being expelled under the constitution. Lawmakers had also become lawbreakers by not paying their telephone bills. Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque said 771 lawmakers from the first to the eighth parliaments owed nearly £1 million. Defaulters included a former president, two former prime ministers and 18 current ministers.

A tornado lasting only minutes hit 12 villages, killed 66 people and injured 1000 in Mymensingh and Netrokona, north Bangladesh, in mid-April. Two river ferries sank in storms, one in Chandpur, south of Dhaka, killing more than 60 people (23 May).

The annual report of Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) said Bangladesh was "by far the world's most violent country for journalists". Eleven had been murdered in six years and 110 physically attacked since Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia took power in 2001. RSF called for aid to be linked to an end to violence against journalists. It pointed to recent remarks by World Bank President James Wolfensohn that "studies show the higher the level of press freedom in a country the greater the control over corruption".

Sri Lanka

Three years ahead of schedule President Chandrika Kumaratunga dissolved parliament and called a snap election (8 February)—the third in four years. The decision was the climax of the crisis that began in November when the President created a constitutional coup against Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. Two days after calling the election Kumaratunga sacked 39 members of the government headed by Wickremesinghe.

The election campaign was comparatively peaceful until three killings took place in three days at the end of March—one of a Tamil National Alliance candidate. The result of voting (2 April) was a defeat for Wickremesinghe's United National Party, which took 82 seats in the 225-seat parliament, and a swing towards left, ethnic and religious-based parties opposed to the Tamil separatists. Kumaratunga's People's Alliance emerged as the largest group with 105 seats, but was eight short of a majority. Turnout was 75%. For the first time an all-monk party—the National Heritage Party—stood for election. It won nine seats. The monks said they would stay independent and support any party

which agreed to Buddhist ideals. One said: "We have to cleanse politics in this country, which is drowning in a pit".

Lakshman Kadirgamar, the diplomat who had stood for Commonwealth Secretary-General against Don McKinnon in December 2003, was said to be favoured as prime minister by Kumaratunga, but it was former fisheries minister Mahinda Rajapakse, 58, who got the job. Kadirgamar became Foreign Minister. As soon as Rajapakse was sworn in coalition talks began. On taking office he said talks with the Tamil rebels should start right away and he urged India to pay a bigger rôle in the peace efforts.

The Alliance had included in its manifesto a pledge to abolish the executive presidency. Kumaratunga was not eligible to serve another term as president after 2006, but she could serve as prime minister.

For the first time the Tamil Tigers openly backed a political party—the Tamil National Alliance. It won 22 seats, making it the third largest party.

The election was fought against the background of a major split among the Tigers. A renegade commander known as Colonel Karuna broke away at the beginning of the year from the main guerrilla army with some 6000 of its fighters. Karuna's army was on one side of the River Verugal and the followers of the Tiger supremo, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, on the other. Four days of fighting in which dozens died led to a mass surrender in mid-April. Karuna ordered his group to give up the fight and disappeared.

A 12-person Commonwealth team was sent to observe the elections—the 43rd such Commonwealth group since 1990. It was led by Margaret Reid, former president of the Australian Senate, and included former chief election officers from India and Trinidad, and Commonwealth Youth Ambassador Dr Ashique Selim of Bangladesh.

In preliminary remarks at the close of polling Dr Reid criticized the bias of the state media in the run-up to polling. Absence of balance had cast a shadow over the process. A second shadow had been intimidation and violence. But polling had been well and efficiently carried out and voters were able to cast their votes freely and in secrecy.

The Tamil Tigers said (13 May) they had agreed with the government to restart the peace talks which had been stalled for a year. Their chief negotiator Anton Balasingham said President Kumaratunga was keen to resume.

Malaysia

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi won a landslide victory in the general election (21 March). His ruling National Front government increased its share of the vote to 65% from 56.5% in the 1999 election. It took 198 of the 219 seats in the lower house. Abdullah's victory halted the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), leaving it in control of only Kelantan state. In Terengganu the PAS leader lost his parliamentary and state seats and the position of chief minister. PAS had 26 seats in the parliament; now it had only seven. The National Justice Party of the jailed former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, lost four of its five seats. His wife, Azizah Ismail, was the only party member to keep her seat. The Front's victory gave it a two-thirds majority in parliament, allowing the government to pass laws uncontested.

The campaign had been dominated by the rôle of Islam in the multi-faith nation, with Abdullah, an Islamic scholar, pledging to promote a "progressive,

modern form of Islam". The result was seen as boosting his drive to cut corruption. He said he was committed "to root out corruption because it is a cancer that destroys society". The stock market rose sharply. Abdullah said: "the fund managers have signalled that this is a good country to do business...the people have given us a mandate to develop the country into a joyful, hearty and prosperous nation".

After victory Abdullah reshuffled his government lightly. The old faces remained, but he brought in several younger politicians, notably Hishammuddin Hussein, son of Malaysia's third prime minister, as Education Minister.

In the weeks before the election several arrests for corruption were made, including those of the former manager of the national steel maker, Perwaja, and the minister for land and cooperative development, Kasitam Gaddam, who had resigned. One problem for Badawi arose when police officials told him that US and British intelligence had said the Scomi Group, a company controlled by his son, was involved in a nuclear network headed by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who provided nuclear equipment to North Korea, Libya and Iran. Abdullah accused President Bush of using unreliable intelligence to implicate Malaysia.

Malaysia rejected overtures by the USA to help patrol the Straits of Malacca to counter terrorism. The top US commander in the region wanted to deploy speedboats carrying marines and special forces along the narrow straits. He said Singapore had agreed. The waterway is divided between Malaysia and Indonesia and Washington was warned it could not deploy its forces without Malaysian consent.

In a row over the felling and selling of rare timber Indonesia called for a global boycott of Malaysian wood products. Forestry Minister Mohammed Prakosa said (13 February) protected trees from Indonesia were being smuggled into Malaysia, "laundered and re-exported". As he spoke Malaysia was hosting a UN conference on the Convention on Biodiversity with 2000 world delegates. Malaysian Primary Industries Minister Lim Keng Yaik denied the claim.

A pilot scheme for a national service programme aimed at fostering unity between the ethnic communities started (16 February) with the induction of 18 000 18-year-olds.

Singapore

In his annual budget (27 February) Finance Minister and prime minister-to-be Lee Hsien Loong offered incentives to persuade people to breed. The population has been declining for 20 years, with late marriages increasing. A survey of 22 nations by condom makers showed Singaporeans had the weakest sex drive (with the French top). In the 1960s it was a different story. Lee Kuan Yew feared overcrowding and launched a 'Stop at two' campaign. Now for his Finance Minister son the problem was different. In 2003 births fell to a record low of 37 633. Also, Muslim Malays divorce less than Chinese couples and have more children. As part of the government campaign to boost marriage two new scents were launched to "capture the spirit of romance and love". A TV reality show was planned in which 10 couples from different countries would compete to make a baby.

Lee's budget delayed plans to cut income tax—a rare case of the government missing its own deadlines. Lee said it was because of the sluggish

economic performance caused by the SARS outbreak. The economy grew by 1.1% in 2003.

Hong Kong

The Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress passed (6 April) an interpretation of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, giving Beijing total control over political reform and the right to veto anything it does not like. Democrats in Hong Kong said China had jeopardized the '50 years no-change system' introduced when Britain returned the colony to China in 1997. The Basic Law allowed Hong Kong to change its election laws from 2007 to introduce more democracy. China now said its approval of any changes was needed. It appeared Beijing would now control whether and how quickly the number of directly elected legislators could be raised from 24 out of the total 60. It would also decide whether the Chief Executive could be elected by direct suffrage.

But a vote in Beijing (26 April) made it quite clear that direct elections for the next chief executive in 2007 and the entire legislature in 2008 were ruled out. Changes must come gradually. Later Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said direct elections by universal suffrage were still the ultimate aim.

Donald Tsang, deputy to Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, said there was no threat to the 'one country, two systems' policy. Pro-democracy leader Martin Lee said the ruling undermined the law. The deputy secretary-general of the standing committee and a team of officials were sent to Hong Kong for talks.

Just before the Beijing decision thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to oppose China's moves. A senior US State Department official told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that US-China relations would suffer if democracy and freedom suffered in Hong Kong. Martin Lee told the committee in Washington that there was too much interference in Hong Kong's affairs, but later said he was optimistic that China would "get it right". Britain was more low key, reminding China it wanted to see early moves towards full democracy.

Three radio talk show hosts resigned (19 May) because of problems over freedom of speech. One of them was Allen Lee, former leader of the Liberal Party. He said the situation was the most serious since he first took part in the political scene in 1978. Broadcaster Albert Cheng told listeners he felt suffocated after China had dashed hopes for more democracy. Intimidation was intensifying. The offices of a pro-democracy lawyer had been smeared with excrement and a pro-democracy politician said he had been threatened with violence,

A group of business tycoons against change formed the Hong Kong Development Forum in February, a think-tank aimed to counter the growing demands for self-rule. Pro-democracy critics said its real aim was to prevent free elections, protect the fortunes of its founders and promote Leung Chun-ying, convenor of the government's executive council, as the next chief executive.

In his first budget address (10 April) financial secretary Henry Tang projected economic expansion of 6% against 3.3% in 2003.

Fiji Islands

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting in London (21–22 May) took the Fiji Islands off its agenda. It said the country had made considerable progress in addressing the issues of democratic governance and national reconciliation, and welcomed the dialogue between government and opposition and the commitment to abide by the rulings of the Supreme Court. It asked the Secretary-General in his good offices rôle to continue to monitor the situation.

Asterio Takasy, director of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), appealed to the USA and Japan at a regional oceans forum (7 February) to help poor governments clean up the legacy of war. More and more report reefs dying from oil pollution as corrosion eats into the huge number of ships lying on the ocean floor since World War Two. More than 150 large ships were sunk near Solomon Islands during the Battle of Guadalcanal; another 270 lie around Papua New Guinea. Australia's Great Barrier Reef is threatened by oil from two large American ships sunk in the Battle of the Coral Sea. A study by Pacific governments has mapped 3852 ships, including 23 aircraft carriers, 22 battleships and 50 oil tankers. The US and Japanese governments have not responded to appeals for help.

Commodore Frank Bainimarama was reappointed Commander of the military forces (29 January) after weeks of speculation. The Commodore was regarded as the man who saved the country from anarchy when George Speight staged a coup in May 2000. But several members of the government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarfasa said to be linked to Speight wanted him removed.

Three men who were lieutenants of George Speight in the May 2000 coup were released from island jail (17 February). One once served in the British SAS. In Suva a group of 150 supporters greeted the three as heroes.

The opposition Fiji Labour Party won a by-election (18 January) caused by the death of a member of the ruling party.

Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the first prime minister of independent Fiji in 1970 and the dominant political figure in the country for 30 years, died (18 April) aged 83. He was the first Chief Minister in the last years of colonial rule and lost office in the general election of 1987. He was president from 1994–2000.

Tonga

Jesse Bogdonoff, an American citizen who claimed the title of court jester to the King, agreed in February to pay £500 000 to settle a long-running legal dispute. It was claimed he cheated 85-year-old King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV and his government out of money the country had made from selling citizenship to Hong Kong Chinese ahead of the hand-over of the colony to China. The scandal was said to have caused The King great anguish.

Papua New Guinea

Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare dismissed Andrew Baing, leader of the People's Progress Party (PPP) as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Fisheries in November 2003 only two weeks after he had promoted him. The reason was the PPP had voted against a constitutional amendment extending the grace

period for no-confidence votes from 18 months to three years. As a result the government had to concede defeat over the amendment. Somare also dismissed his son as Minister of State Enterprises and Information (17 January 2004) and later Housing Minister Yuntuvi Bao because his People's Labour Party also did not support the no-confidence amendment.

Parliament elected Sir Pato Kakaraya to succeed as Governor-General Sir Silas Atopare (4 December 2003), whose term had expired. Sir Albert Kipalan had been elected in September, but the Supreme Court declared the election null and void because the proper procedures had not been followed.

Niue

A severe cyclone flattened much of the capital Alofi (5 January 2004). Giant waves and winds up to 300 kph denuded the island of vegetation. A state of emergency was declared. New Zealand delivered aid by aircraft and ship and pledged money for reconstruction. A woman and child were killed and several of the 1700 population injured. Prime Minister Young Vivian, who was in New Zealand, where his wife had just died, flew home in the first relief plane. The government planned to move the capital to higher ground.

Samoa

The Fono (unicameral parliament) abolished the death penalty in early January. No executions had been carried out since 1952, the death sentence being commuted to life imprisonment.

Pitcairn Island

A court sitting in Auckland under Chief Justice Charles Blackie ruled that Britain retained sovereignty over Pitcairn, which lies halfway between New Zealand and Peru, and that therefore seven men facing sexual assault charges in Pitcairn would be tried under British law. Lawyers for the seven wanted them tried by their own community, arguing that the islanders had severed all ties with London when they burnt HMS *Bounty* on 23 January 1790 and that therefore British law did not apply. The judge's decision followed the discovery of 19th century documents which the defence argued would reinforce the islanders' claim that they were not subject to British law.

Australia

The death of a 17-year-old boy set off a riot by Aborigines in Redfern, a suburb of Sydney (16 February). The railway station was set alight, a car was burned and windows were smashed in a nine-hour running battle between Aborigines and police. Forty officers were injured. It was Sydney's worst race riot in decades and three separate inquiries were ordered. A key difference between the government led by John Howard and the opposition Labor Party is the issue of Aboriginal reconciliation. Howard remains opposed to a formal apology to the indigenous population for past injustices. In a keynote speech to the party conference in January the new Labor leader, Mark Latham, showed he was determined to achieve reconciliation.

Howard appointed a panel of “distinguished indigenous people” to advise on how to replace the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the top Aboriginal body, which he said had been of no help.

As the 2004 general election loomed an opinion poll (23 March) for the first time put support for Latham level with that of Howard, now Australia’s second longest serving prime minister. Latham said (25 March) that, if he won office, Australian troops would be withdrawn from Iraq.

He promised (20 April) a referendum on a republic within 12 months of Labor coming into power. A simple vote would ask whether Australia wanted to become a republic. If Yes, a second vote a year later would be held to choose a preferred model of electing a president. Links with the monarchy would be dissolved by the end of 2007. With an election due in December the opinion polls in April showed Labor level with the Howard government.

Treasurer Peter Costello made families the centrepiece of his budget (11 May), offering maternity benefits and family tax credit to encourage population growth. The population hit 20 million in 2003. Business groups argued that it must rise to 30 million by 2050 if the economy was to remain strong.

As talks began in Dili (19 April) over disputed oilfields 90 miles from East Timor and 250 miles from Australia, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri accused Australia of stealing a million dollars a day. Timorese President Xanana Gusmao said (27 April) that Australia had snatched oil reserves that belonged to his country and in the talks it had used all the dirty tactics it could. Timor wanted the boundaries to be halfway between the two countries, but Australia wants to keep boundaries agreed with Indonesia in 1972 long before East Timor became independent.

A plague of locusts swept through eastern Australia in early 2004. The arrival of rains after a two-year drought led to the breeding of millions of insects. They swarmed southwards on a 745-mile front from southwest Queensland to the town of Dubbo in New South Wales, then, despite aerial spraying, headed in April for Melbourne and Adelaide.

The government banned fishing on one-third of the Barrier Reef system from July. The move made it the most protected marine environment on Earth. Until now fishing has been banned on 4.5% of the marine park—6200 square miles. Commercial fishermen will be compensated. Pollution of the Reef from the holiday industry, however, remains.

The felling of native forests in Tasmania stirred animal rights campaigners in March. The issue set off an intense political battle in Australia. Tasmanian forests contain some of the largest trees in the world. Fast-growing plantation timbers were being planted. Acting Premier Paul Lennon said 40% of the state was a nature reserve and the end of logging would cost 8000 jobs. An international 80 000-member movement called People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals threatened to boycott Tasmanian goods. It said that in the felling process a poison being used after burning away the undergrowth was killing animals.

New Zealand

Seven years of false starts and scandals ended with the launch of Maori Television in the presence of Prime Minister Helen Clark (28 March). Programmes were planned to further the recovery of the Maori language through indigenous music and dance, documentaries, cartoons and comedy.

Immigration Minister Lianne Dalziel was forced to resign (20 February) after she was shown to have lied about leaking a document to the media. It referred to a controversial asylum bid involving a Sri Lankan girl.

Barbados

The USA apologized to Barbados for wrongly portraying it as a suffering from rising violent crimes and an inept police force. It said the remarks were wrong and had been removed from its website. Barbadian Attorney-General Mia Mottley said she felt "disappointment and disgust". The description had sat on the website for four months. The US State Department said it had been intended for another, unspecified country.

Guyana

A 21-gun salute greeted Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on a one-day visit to Guyana (19 February). He was there to discuss with President Bharrat Jagdeo a new highway and the sale of oil at preferential rates as provided for under an agreement made in 2000 between American and Caribbean countries. Chavez played down the long-standing dispute over two-thirds of Guyanese territory and instead hailed Venezuela's "extraordinary relationship with Guyana". He said: "We are ready to begin a new era between two brother countries".

Interior Minister Ronald Gajraj said (7 May) he would step down to allow an impartial investigation into allegations that he headed a hit squad which carried out 40 killings in 2003. For months the government had denied that a hit squad was being used to hunt escaped convicts and crime suspects. The opposition walked out of parliament in April, vowing not to return until an inquiry was ordered. They said the squad was used to curb rising crime—160 killings in 2002 and 210 in 2003.

Antigua and Barbuda

Lester Bird, prime minister since 1994, whose family had dominated politics for 60 years, lost a general election (23 March). His Antigua Labour Party had sought a seventh term of office. The opposition United Progressive Party won a landslide victory in the 17-member parliament. Baldwin Spencer, 55, was sworn in as prime minister, pledging to open an inquiry into the Bird family's alleged links to financial fraud, cocaine smuggling and money laundering. Lester Bird's father, Vere Cornwell Bird, led from 1946 the movement that brought independence in 1981.

The new Attorney-General, Justin Simon, ordered an investigation into the alleged diversion of funds from the Treasury and the actions of public officials during the Bird administration. He was responding to demands for legal action over the removal of government files and other records from the prime minister's office and other departments days before the general election.

A Commonwealth expert team headed by Arthur Donahue of Canada, former secretary-general of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, was present for the election.

Antigua won in March a dispute with the USA on internet gambling. It complained to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that it had been shut out of the American market by laws banning cross-border gambling. The USA said it would appeal. Antigua relies on online gaming for much of its foreign earnings and claimed online casinos provided 3000 jobs at home. The USA said online gambling was a haven for money launderers.

Anguilla

Jeremiah Gumbs, who led the movement for the secession of Anguilla from St Kitts and championed the island's cause relentlessly as a roving ambassador in 1967–69, died (9 April) aged 91. In a referendum Anguilla became a dependency of Britain in 1967 and Gumbs, fisherman, baker and Byron lover, was honoured by the Anguillan government in February.

Dominica

New Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said (29 March) that Dominica was cutting relations with Taiwan and establishing them with China, which was to give it nearly £50 million in aid over five years—equal to nearly £750 for each Dominican or half annual per capita income. Of 26 countries worldwide which still recognize Taiwan, 12 are in the Caribbean and Central America. It is the largest single aid donor to countries like Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Jamaica

Scotland Yard detectives, asked by Minister for National Security Peter Philips in 2003 to investigate the fatal shootings of 30 suspected drug dealers by Jamaican police, concluded that some may have been the victims of a shoot-to-kill policy. The inquiry followed the disbanding of an elite police unit and dismissal of its head. In five years Jamaican officers had shot dead nearly 1000 people.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted president of Haiti, who fled to the Central African Republic, turned up in Jamaica (14 March) and was reunited with his family. Jamaica refused to recognize the Haiti interim government, which withdrew its ambassador and suspended relations.

Cayman Islands

After talks with UK officials the government gave a conditional commitment to comply with the European Union drive against tax evasion. If Caymans received financial concessions from Britain, Chief Minister McKeever Bush said, legislation would be introduced to accept the EU savings tax directive. One demand was recognition of the Caymans stock exchange. The EU sought to tax savings income of EU citizens with funds outside their home countries. The Caymans said it would lose banking and hedge fund business to Hong Kong and Singapore.

Canada

After Prime Minister Paul Martin called (23 May) a general election for 28 June opinion polls put his Liberal Party ahead, but several points lower than when he took over from Jean Chrétien in December. Revelations of government misuse of funds had tarnished the party.

Auditor-General Sheila Fraser had accused the Liberal government (10 February) of "blatant misuse" of millions of dollars in a scandal-plagued programme aimed at boosting the federal government's profile in Quebec. Her report said the money was channelled to government-friendly communications companies without control. Martin ordered a public inquiry. He scrapped the programme on becoming prime minister, suggesting the scandal was a legacy of his predecessor, Jean Chrétien. The opposition pointed out that he was finance minister when the programme was initiated.

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale promised in his budget (23 March) to reintroduce a powerful comptroller-general's office to oversee all government spending and to tighten the rules for state enterprises.

But the Fraser report had given the opposition parties new life. The right, under Conservative leader Stephen Harper, was united after years of division and the socialist New Democratic Party, under energetic new leader Jack Layton, campaigned hard in the hope of becoming kingmaker to a minority Liberal government.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed both houses of parliament (9 March) and praised Canada for sending 450 troops and six helicopters to Haiti on a three-month UN-mandated mission. When he called for an immediate £18 million in aid for Haiti Martin immediately pledged £2.5 million.

Louise Arbour, Supreme Court justice and former UN war crimes prosecutor, was named UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (20 February) in succession to Sergio Vieira de Mello of Brazil. De Mello died in the bombing of the UN HQ in Baghdad in August 2003.

Canadian and Danish diplomats began talks in Arab countries in early 2004 aimed at creating an umbrella organization and human rights charter for all those states in the region, including Israel, Turkey and Iran, that are excluded from membership of the Arab League. The aim was to gauge interest in setting up something like the Organization of American states (OAS) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Statistics Canada reported (9 March) that new waves of immigration had changed the face of urban Canada. The number of enclaves where at least 30% of the population comes from a single ethnic group had risen phenomenally. In 1981 there were six such enclaves; now the number was 254, nearly all in Toronto and Vancouver. The total number of black people in Canada had climbed from 34 400 in 1971 to 662 200 in 2001. Community leaders said the new number was now nearer one million.

A deal made in August 2003 with the Dogrib or Tli Cho Indians of the Northwest Territories was in the last stages of ratification. Under it the 4000 Tli Cho will control 39 000 square kilometres of land between the Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes. The agreement was signed by then prime minister Jean Chrétien, Tli Cho representatives and the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations gathered in a school gymnasium. The deal gives the community

leverage over the area's main employers, Canada's first diamond mines based north of Yellowknife.

A US claim that American companies were threatened by Canadian shipments of softwood timber was rejected by a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) panel (29 April). The US International Trade Commission was told to come up with better justifications.

The slaughter of 19 million chickens, turkeys and ducks in Fraser Valley, British Columbia, was ordered in April in a bid to halt bird flu. It would affect 80% of the province's poultry stock.

Cyprus

A complex UN deal for reunification of the island worked out after weeks of negotiation and leading up to the country's entry to the European Union was wrecked in separate referenda (24 April). The Turkish Cypriots voted overwhelmingly for the plan—64.9% said Yes and 35.1% No. But the Greek Cypriots voted the other way—24.2% Yes and 75.8% No. Turnout in both sectors was nearly 90%. The Greek Cypriot rejection exceeded expectations, but about 11% of voters abstained. Brussels had hoped for a small margin so that another vote might follow. When the EU enlargement took place on 1 May the Turkish-occupied sector remained outside the Union and celebration of the event was muted.

President Tassos Papadopoulos, who had campaigned for a No vote, said the plan could still be the basis for reunification once changes had been made. Greek Cypriot objections to reunification were partly motivated by fears that Turkey would not honour its commitments to withdraw most of its 38 000 troops from the island. The Turkish Cypriot Yes vote was partly motivated by Turkey's desire to join the EU. Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash, who had opposed reunification, said he would retain his position.

After 1 May EU law technically extended across the whole island under its treaty of accession, but EU laws and benefits were to be suspended in the northern enclave until a solution was found.

The 9000-page Annan plan was for the creation of a loose federation of two largely autonomous and politically equal states under a weak central government. A new flag and anthem (without words) were included in the final plan which contained these main points: government by a nine-member presidential council—six Greek, three Turk and three without voting rights; the presidency to rotate; Turkish Cypriot territory to be reduced by 7% to 29% of island; and Turkish and Greek military presence to be reduced to token numbers by stages, with a larger UN force.

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw said (3 March) that the Greek Cypriots would damage themselves in the EU if they rejected the plan. Britain had confirmed (16 March) that it would cede nearly half the territory of its bases to Cypriot sovereignty if the island was reunited under the Annan proposals.

EU reaction to the vote was angry. External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten said the rejection had created "a huge amount of political ill-will" in Brussels. The Greek Cypriots were "not going to be a very popular addition to the family". Former Cyprus President George Vassiliou, who negotiated EU accession, said the outcome was shameful. Papadopoulos had played on peo-

ple's fears by talking only about the plan's negative aspects. An "industry of misinformation" had been at work.

Papadopoulos said after the vote that the trade embargo on the north would be lifted and the airport opened to international flights. He wanted the Turkish Cypriots to benefit from the EU accession. Turkish Cypriot firms could export their goods through ports in the south and Larnaca airport.

As a reward to the Turks for voting Yes, the EU began work on a package of measures that would reduce the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots by making more flexible the green line—the demarcation boundary that has partitioned the island for three years.

Just before the referenda the USA pledged £225 million in aid for a reunited Cyprus if the communities backed the UN plan. Britain pushed for a UN vote to strengthen those in the south campaigning for a Yes. But Russia vetoed (21 April) a resolution which sought to reassure the Greek Cypriots about the security aspects by approving a new UN force for Cyprus. Russia said it was an attempt to influence the outcome of the vote.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had laboured long and hard to get agreement on his plan, holding another marathon round of talks in New York in early February that led to more negotiations in Nicosia. After 48 hours of talks in Burgenstock, Switzerland, involving Prime Ministers Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Costas Karamanlis of Greece and EU Commissioner for Enlargement Gunther Verheugen (but in the absence of Denktash), he pleaded with all parties within minutes of the midnight deadline (31 March) to seize the chance of peace.

But despite numerous UN updates and modifications no agreement was reached and the decision was left to the referenda, as had been agreed with Annan.

Malta

The ruling Nationalist Party chose (28 February) Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi to take over as prime minister from Eddie Fenech-Adami, who had held the post for all except two of the past 17 years. Malta is to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2005 and as such its prime minister will subsequently become chair of the Commonwealth.

Gibraltar

The itineraries of cruise liners that include Spain and Gibraltar were thrown into disarray when Spain began using an obscure EU regulation that restricts the entry of non-EU vessels into EU ports. It maintains that the colony does not form part of the EU. The Bahamas-based liner *Norwegian Dream* was banned from visiting Barcelona after berthing in Gibraltar (25 April), then the Dutch ship *Prinsendam* was not allowed into Tarragona. In three weeks eight ships were affected. The London-based Passenger Shipping Association told Spain it was threatening the whole Mediterranean cruise business. When the Foreign Minister of the new Spanish socialist government, Miguel Angel Moratinos, paid his first visit to Britain (19 May) British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw said the disruption was unacceptable. Moratinos offered no solution. British officials said it was an attempt to strangle Gibraltar's economy.

For the first time campaigning took place for the elections to the European Parliament (10 June). The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 1999 that Gibraltarians should have a vote. The rock's 20 000 voters are not enough to form a constituency, so they are part of South West England's 3.5 million electorate. Votes were counted in Gibraltar and phoned to the mainland. Tory Party leader Michael Howard briefly visited the colony (17 May) to campaign.

United Kingdom

Prime Minister Tony Blair announced (26 February) that he was setting up an international commission to propose solutions to Africa's problems. He would chair it himself. Among the nine commissioners were South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and Development Secretary Hilary Benn, and Sir Bob Geldof. The findings would be available in 2005 when Britain would host the G8 and be president of the EU. The commission is reminiscent of the commission on development set up by German Chancellor Willi Brandt in 1977.

Brown announced (17 March) that Britain's development aid budget would be raised and put a special focus on Africa. Figures released in April showed aid in 2003–04 was £3.77 billion—0.34% of national income and a 15% rise on the previous year. The target for 2005–06 was 0.4%.

Blair backed (22 March) the outsourcing of call-centre jobs to India and other developing countries and called on nations to embrace globalization and make it work.

Former Scottish Secretary Helen Liddell was appointed British High Commissioner to Australia in place of Alistair Goodlad.

Trade Talks Mission

Following a decision at the Abuja CHOGM a Commonwealth trade mission went to Geneva, Washington, Tokyo and Brussels in February to drive home the concerns of developing countries on trade issues which are considered essential in restarting the trade talks that collapsed in Cancun in 2003. The mission members were: Minister of Commerce Alhaji Idris Waziri of Nigeria, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Dame Billie Miller of Barbados, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Kaliopate Tavola of Fiji Islands. They urged the global players on trade to negotiate positively and flexibly to reinvigorate the Doha Round of trade talks and speed a final agreement.

After the mission the new chairman of the WTO General Council, Ambassador Shotaro Oshima, called on Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon in London (24 February). McKinnon urged Japan to seize the opportunity provided by its election as Chair of the WTO "to play a leadership rôle during the year when the US is involved in presidential elections and the EU sees changes in key personnel".

Later, when EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said the EU would offer to eliminate export subsidies on agricultural products, McKinnon said developing countries had been saying for years "Just do it!". He added: "They never actually delivered. It now seems the EU is ready to heed their call."

Commonwealth Day (8 March)

The theme for 2004 was Building a Commonwealth of Freedom. As Chairperson-in-Office, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria issued a message pointing out that “events throughout the world remind us that freedom can never be taken for granted. The quest for freedom—freedom from persecution, freedom to express one’s political and religious beliefs, freedom to live out one’s chosen way of life—is never achieved once and for all. Even in long-established democracies there is always room for improvement.”

Tourism Conference

The first meeting of Commonwealth Tourism Ministers held in Kuala Lumpur (19–21 March), set up a Commonwealth Centre for Tourism Promotion and laid plans for tourism and information exchange. A task force from all regions would work out the Centre’s functions and its financing. Ministers agreed to incorporate tourism as a priority in development and poverty reduction. A Tourism Business Forum organized by the Commonwealth Business Council took place alongside the meeting.

Agriculture Ministers

Two hundred delegates attended the 21st Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Albury, New South Wales (24–27 March).

The main subject was the latest techniques in maximizing food production using minimum amounts of water. Australia is the driest inhabited continent and delegates were briefed on its vast irrigation system that produces 40% of the country’s food.

Commonwealth Principles

The principles setting out the relationship between parliament, the judiciary and the executive—known as the Latimer House guidelines—were launched at the Commonwealth Secretariat (12 May). They had been six years in the making and were endorsed by Heads of Government at the Abuja CHOGM in December 2003. The principles had first been drawn up by four NGOs—the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Legal Education Association, the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association.

Teacher Recruitment

The first meeting of a 12-nation Commonwealth working group on teacher recruitment took place in Maseru, Lesotho (23–25 February)—the result of a decision by the last education ministers’ meeting. The aim is to develop codes of conduct for recruitment and to tackle such problems as preventing excessive loss of teachers and recovery measures to be taken to help train more.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Four free email-based virtual conferences were held in May and June with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). They enabled participants from around the world to discuss, on line, issues affecting developing countries. This was a lead up to the third Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Dunedin, New Zealand (4–8 July). COL communications manager Dave Wilson said: “A face-to-face conference costing \$25 000 reaches maybe 200 people while the same amount invested in internet technology can reach 200 000 people”. COL has sponsored several virtual conferences.

Sir John Daniel, Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO, became President and Chief Executive officer of COL in succession to Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, who retired in May. He was Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University 1990–2001. As a Reader in the Anglican Church he became the first person to preach in Westminster Abbey from a laptop computer.

Around the Commonwealth

Former Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien delivered the 2004 Commonwealth Lecture in London (30 March 2004). His subject: Making Progress through Multiculturalism. He called for greater trade liberalization, pointing out that developed countries spend \$350 billion annually on subsidies to their own farmers, while their aid to the poor ones is only \$50 billion.

Twenty countries attended a seminar in Mauritius (15–18 March) on implementing a public sector Performance Management System that upholds the principles of law, equity and public interest. The seminar highlighted the global pressure on governments to embark on reform of the public sector.

An expert group met in the Commonwealth Secretariat in March to assess human resource management strategy on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the public sector.

Commonwealth environment ministers met ahead of the special session of a UN Environment Programme forum in Jeju, Korea, to discuss security concerns and the emergence of highly communicable and vector-borne diseases challenging the development of small island states (28 March).

The Commonwealth Journalists Association inaugurated its new headquarters at the University of the West Indies in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago (3 May). The CJA has been based in London since its foundation in 1978. The move is seen as encouraging the decentralization of Commonwealth NGOs away from the UK.

A new initiative to transfer skills and capabilities among young people through volunteering was launched at the Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus meeting in Kuala Lumpur (30 April–2 May).

A meeting organized by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Indian Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in Shillong, India (5–7 April), discussed promotion of the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative, the micro-credit programme that encourages entrepreneurship.

Promoting and sustaining local democracy and good governance from the ballot box to sustainable mechanisms for local decision making was the subject of a regional symposium in Montego Bay, Jamaica (18–21 April).

New Commonwealth Secretariat publications in 2004 included:

International Technology Transfer to Developing Countries. Edited by Kamal Saggi, 91 pp.

Agriculture in the Commonwealth. Official publication of the Commonwealth conference held in New South Wales in March. Its theme: The Power of Water. Edited by Rajiv Biswas.

A Framework for Citizenship Education in Sierra Leone. Published by the Secretariat in association with the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the British Council, 82 pp.

Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2004. Commonwealth Business Publications, 212 pp.