

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT New Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin scrapes home in the general election to form a minority government. Lee Kuan Yew's son becomes Singapore's third prime minister and Albert Rene hands over power in Seychelles after 27 years. Australia moves in a team of 300 to fight crime and corruption in Papua New Guinea. Tanzania launches a controversial project to draw water from Lake Victoria and stirs Egypt over treaties dating back to 1929. Unrest over constitutional change flares in the Maldives. The British High Commissioner causes a rumpus in Kenya over corruption. Mauritius contemplates leaving the Commonwealth over Diego Garcia. The UK hoists its development aid substantially. And Margaret Thatcher's son is arrested in South Africa as details emerge there and in Zimbabwe of a coup plot in Equatorial Guinea.

Mauritius

A crisis arose over Mauritius' membership of the Commonwealth when the government said it planned to take Britain to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the return of the Chagos Islands, the archipelago that includes Diego Garcia, now a US naval base. Britain hived off the Chagos islands in 1965 before giving Mauritius independence, and declared them a British territory to make way for the US base.

Mauritius Prime Minister Paul Berenger, who was exercised by Orders in Council passed by the British government, said he had been advised that he could go to the court only if his country withdrew from the Commonwealth, because the UK had entered a reservation in its accession document to the Statute of the ICJ which barred fellow Commonwealth countries from taking bilateral disputes with Britain to the Court. Berenger wrote to the British prime minister about the matter in March but by July he had still not received a reply. When he said he intended to visit London briefly en route from Addis Ababa and wanted to see him as well as Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don McKinnon, he was told there was no space in Tony Blair's diary on that particular day. Nor could Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw see him. A meeting with junior minister Bill Rammell was offered, which the Mauritians did not accept. A letter from Tony Blair delivered on Berenger's arrival only slightly assuaged the snub.

On the eve of Berenger's visit to London the British government suddenly amended the UK reservation accepting the jurisdiction of the ICJ. The effect of

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the change was to prevent any Commonwealth country from circumventing the present limitations by withdrawing from the Commonwealth and then instituting proceedings against the UK in respect of an existing dispute. In other words, if Mauritius left the Commonwealth it still could not take Britain to the ICJ. Berenger and McKinnon met in Marlborough House (9 July 2004). Afterwards McKinnon criticized Britain's behaviour, saying: "These are issues that can only be resolved at a very high level". On Britain's removal of the Chagos islanders, McKinnon said: "People do not like being lifted up and taken away from their homes". In reference to the sudden legal amendments on the eve of Berenger's visit, he said: "You do not hit someone over the head before they come through your front gate".

Before he came to London an angry Berenger said: "The Commonwealth is not the property of London. It is a democratic club and we will miss the summits which give rise to important exchanges, but on other things like technical and educational assistance we can live without it." During his visit to Britain Berenger said "we will [leave the Commonwealth] brokenheartedly, but we will do it" but later he said he had taken further legal advice and had decided Mauritius had no need to leave.

An article in the influential Mauritius newspaper *Le Mauricien*, however, showed that the episode has left a bad taste in the mouth. It said that, while still believing withdrawal from the Commonwealth may be an ill-inspired move, "London's recent initiatives go much beyond the question of our Commonwealth membership. Sovereign states are being deprived of a judicial right of appeal. Worse, Commonwealth membership is being turned into an unredeemable original sin. The Harare Declaration proclaims that Commonwealth members share a commitment to certain fundamental principles. We never expected them to be subverted into fundamentalist obligations. This smacks of Empire."

Nigeria

President Olusegun Obasanjo said (28 June 2004) that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the powerful umbrella trade union body, would be broken up. It had called general strikes against fuel price rises three times in nine months and was overstepping its powers. The NLC was set up when Obasanjo was military ruler in the 1970s. Now, he said, things had to be done democratically. NLC leader Adams Olshiomhole pledged that the union would not be broken up. One current reason for discontent was the scrapping of fuel subsidies. Petrol prices had doubled since 1999.

Nigeria and Benin agreed (23 July) to redraw their boundary to avert a potential political border dispute. Three villages would be transferred to Benin in exchange for seven villages under Benin control. The move was part of the final phase of redrawing Nigeria's eastern boundary with Cameroon.

The senate voted (19 August) to approve Obasanjo's plans for a peacekeeping force of 1500 Nigerian troops for Sudan's Darfur region. He said it was "one more chance for us to show leadership".

Kano state pledged (15 July) to resume the WHO polio immunization campaign after an eight-month ban that allowed the virus to spread across Africa to Sudan and Botswana. Ten countries which had been freed of polio were now infected again. Pressure from the federal government and Muslim

leaders persuaded the Kano governor to accept that the oral drops were safe. The WHO said 260 children in Kano had been paralyzed as a result of the hold-up.

A group of white farmers from Zimbabwe made a deal in Kwara state to start farming there. It was hoped 200 more would move to Nigeria over five years. Kwara promised tax breaks, loans and help to develop infrastructure. President Obasanjo supported the project. Nigerian farms have been neglected since oil was discovered 40 years ago.

Locusts started devastating Sokoto state in mid-2004. Huge areas of West Africa were affected by the worst invasion since 1987–89. The UN appealed for £75 million to help contain the locusts.

Basil Omiyi, 58, was named the first Nigerian to head Shell's operations in Nigeria. Localization has long been a key demand by the oil workers' unions. Omiyi joined Shell 34 years ago.

Sierra Leone

The UN war crimes court ruled (31 May 2004) that it had the right to try former president Charles Taylor of Liberia on charges that he gave financial and military support to rebels in Sierra Leone in exchange for access to its diamond fields. Taylor, living in exile in Nigeria, claims immunity as a serving head of state at the time of the indictment. The court opened trials on 3 June of those held responsible for atrocities in the 10-year civil war. It is the first of its kind to try suspects in the country where such crimes were committed and to be presided over by UN-appointed and local judges.

The National Assembly voted to create a five-member human rights commission (5 May). All 24 people in a UN Russian-built helicopter died when it crashed in eastern Sierra Leone (28 June). The passengers were UN peacekeepers and aid workers. Fourteen were Pakistanis. Others were from Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda.

The Gambia

The printing press was set on fire in April 2004 in the second attack in six months on *The Independent* newspaper. The paper had long been critical of the government and the editor received death threats. Media organizations said the press was being silenced and the independence of the judiciary undermined.

Cameroon

A 10-year study by a team from London's Kew Gardens announced (20 August 2004) that 50 species of plant and fungi hitherto unknown to science had been discovered in the highlands around Mount Kupe. One canopy tree is thought to belong to an entirely unknown family. Many of the new species may have commercial potential as crops, medicinally or horticulturally.

Uganda

The Constitutional Court nullified the 2000 referendum in which a return to multiparty politics was rejected (25 June 2004). Under the Movement System in

Uganda parties are allowed to exist but not to contest elections. President Yoweri Museveni said on television that the judgement meant that all government acts since 2000 were null and void. The court's decision was "totally unacceptable". It had "usurped the power of the people". The government appealed to the Supreme Court and Museveni said he would hold a new referendum asking Ugandans whether they wanted a return to multiparty politics.

At the international AIDS conference in Bangkok in mid-July Museveni caused a stir by playing down the importance of condoms in curbing the epidemic. He said changing sexual behaviour, particularly by changing the number of partners, was more important than the use of condoms. He added: "In some cultures sexual intercourse is so elaborate that condoms are a hindrance. Let the condom be used by people who cannot abstain, cannot be faithful, or are estranged". Uganda is claimed to have the best record in Africa for success in curbing AIDS.

In a cross-border attack the Ugandan army stormed the headquarters of the Lord's Day Resistance Army (LRA) east of Juba, Sudan (29 July), and killed more than 100 rebels. The leader, Joseph Kony, was not found, but four of his wives were captured. The Ugandans said they were trying to catch Kony alive. They fired at him but he ran away. A few days earlier the rebels had murdered 100 villagers in southern Sudan and forced 1500 to flee. Up to 12 LRA commanders gave themselves up in May and June under a government amnesty. About 300 rebels were welcomed into the regular army after being retrained. Prosecutors in the International Court decided (29 July) to investigate human rights abuses in northern Uganda. Museveni had referred the LRA's activities to The Hague in 2003.

Kenya

British High Commissioner Sir Edward Clay attacked the government of President Mwai Kibaki for its record in tackling corruption. He told a private lunch for British businessmen: "The practitioners now in government have the arrogance, greed and perhaps a desperate sense of panic to lead them to eat like gluttons. They may expect we shall forgive them a bit of gluttony because they profess to like Oxfam lunches. But they can hardly expect us not to care when their gluttony causes them to vomit all over our shoes." Clay said he estimated that the government had entered corrupt deals worth £105 million since Kibaki came to power. The remarks were published in *The East African Standard* (14 July 2004). Clay was summoned by Foreign Minister Chirau Mwakwere to give facts and name names or apologize.

Although Clay expressed regret for any offence the speech had caused, he did not retract it and said the subject was a valid one to raise. His remarks produced widespread support from church groups, opposition figures and donor governments. The head of the Church in Kenya, Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, urged the government to "come out clean". A television poll showed 80% support among Kenyans for Clay's stand. UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for Africa, Chris Mullin, said: "We heard the speech in advance and we did clear it". Clay had been invited by Kibaki to speak out on corruption, but he had been trying to meet the president for four months. In its defence the government, which was elected on pledges to fight corruption,

pointed out that it had reformed the judiciary, acted against corrupt police officers and swiftly on irregularities uncovered in a public contract, and set up a department of ethics and good governance.

The European Union said (22 July) it was withholding an £83 million grant for budget support—funds channeled directly for general spending. Aid for specific projects would continue. A few days before the Clay rumpus the delay in introducing a new constitution led to the resignation (1 July) of Professor Yash Ghai, head of the Constitutional Review Commission. He said he had expected the new constitution to be enacted by 30 June. Kibaki had pledged to introduce it within 100 days of his coming to power in December 2002, but the issue had led to deep divisions within the ruling NARC coalition.

Kibaki reshuffled his cabinet (30 June) into a government of national unity. The former ruling KANU party and the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy–People (FORD–People) were brought into the administration and members of Raila Odinga’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been lobbying for the new constitution, were demoted. Kibaki said he was still committed to the constitution.

A rally in Nairobi organized by the LDP protesting at the changes and demanding constitutional reform led to rioting (3 July), in which 16 people were hurt. In riots in Kisumu police shot a demonstrator.

Long queues formed outside clinics and hospitals in July when fees were scrapped for those unable to pay (1 July). The scheme covers nearly one-third of the population. Free primary education was also introduced after the election, but lack of funds had affected full implementation.

A campaign for the return of ancestral territory was launched at Osiligi (26 July) by Masai tribes in Laikipia district, the community that won a £4.5 million settlement in 2002 for deaths blamed on munitions left over from British army exercises. Hundreds demonstrated across Kenya in August and in Nairobi teargas dispersed Masai trying to deliver a petition to the British High Commission. The new campaign was based on a belief that a treaty signed by the British government in 1904 giving the tribes a 100-year lease of their ancestral lands had expired in August. Sympathetic historians, however, said that factually the 1904 agreement was not a lease.

Malawi

Following the May 2004 election, a surprise deal between the new president, Bingu wa Mutharika, and his bitter rival, Gwanda Chakuamba, gave the president a majority in parliament. Chakuamba signed a deal in former president Bakili Muluzi’s home, dropping his legal challenge to the polls and accepting a post in government. The leader of the National Democratic Alliance said he forgave the governing United Democratic Front for the past. Muluzi said the time for politicking was over. Mutharika’s first cabinet (13 June) contained members of several parties. The new president, who is 70, said he wanted to move out of his official residence in Blantyre and live in the parliament building in Lilongwe, the capital. He ordered parliament (20 July) to move to a disused sports complex. The parliament, formerly New State House, has 300 rooms. It was built as the presidential palace by then president Kamuzu Banda at a cost of £75 million, but he stayed there only 90 days. Muluzi called it an “obscene extravagance” and refused to live in it. Parliament took it over in 1995.

In his first address to parliament (29 June) Mutharika, a former World Bank economist, said his priority was to resume funding from international donors. It had been suspended because of overspending by the previous government. Mutharika said food production had to be increased, adding: "A nation that cannot feed itself cannot claim to be a sovereign and independent country."

Dennis Kambalane, former head of the state-run oil supply body, was jailed for six years in the High Court (11 August) for taking a bribe.

Tanzania

International controversy followed the launching by Tanzania of a project to draw water from Lake Victoria and lay a 170-kilometre pipe to supply it to Kahama, Shinbyanga and 54 villages on the route. As Lake Victoria is a source of the Nile, Egypt accused Tanzania of breaking treaties Britain signed with Egypt and Sudan in 1929 and 1959. These restrict countries initiating projects affecting the volume of the Nile waters without Egyptian permission. Tanzania said it did not recognize the Nile Basin agreements. Under the Nile Basin Initiative, a UN body, 10 countries met in Entebbe, Uganda, for 10 days and then again (20 March 2004) in Nairobi. Egypt modified its stand and accepted that the Nile agreement would have to be amended. Tanzania Water Minister Edward Lowassa denounced "these old treaties" and said that even the British, who had signed them, no longer favoured them.

A website to explain parliament to the people was given a grand launch in May. Although only 300 000 people in Tanzania are online, increasing numbers are accessing the web in internet cafes, which are cheap. The aim is to get voters to find out exactly what their MPs are doing and to achieve the transparency being increasingly talked about in government ministries. The new website is funded by UNDP.

More than 10 000 flamingos died mysteriously in June and July in Lake Manyara National Park. Scientists were called in to inquire. Flamingos are second only to lions as a tourist attraction in Tanzania.

Mozambique

President Joaquim Chissano threw the summit meeting of the African Union (AU) into confusion when he made his farewell address as chairman in Swahili. There was a scramble for interpreters. The AU uses Arabic, French, English and Portuguese at its summits. Swahili is spoken by 100 million people in east Africa, but most leaders do not understand it. Chissano is not a native Swahili speaker. He said he was trying to promote African identity and languages.

The IMF decided in June to lend Mozambique £9.2 million to support its budget until 2006. IMF deputy head Takatoshi Kato said its anti-poverty strategy was working, with the number of people below the poverty line down from 70% in 1996 to 54% in 2002. For 2004 growth of 8% was expected.

Seychelles

President Albert Rene stepped down as president (14 April 2004) and was succeeded by Vice-President James Michel. Joseph Belmont, Minister of Land

Use and Habitat, became Vice-President. Rene and Michel remained respectively president and secretary-general of the ruling Seychelles People's Progressive Party.

Zambia

A magistrates court in Lusaka dropped all corruption charges against former President Frederick Chiluba and ordered his immediate release (20 April 2004). The move followed the dropping of the case by the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Zimbabwe

Briton Simon Mann and 69 other men held in prison since their aircraft from South Africa stopped off in Harare on 7 March 2004 were put on trial (27 August). It was said they had been plotting a coup to overthrow President Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea. Mann, Old Etonian, former SAS soldier and a scion of the Watneys brewing empire, pleaded guilty to having dangerous weapons but denied buying £100 000-worth of firearms illegally. He was found guilty but the case against three of the suspected mercenaries was dropped and the other 66 were acquitted. During the hearing it emerged that Mann was a close friend and neighbour in Cape Town of Sir Mark Thatcher, son of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

South African police arrested Sir Mark (25 August) and charged him with contravening the Foreign Military Assistance Act designed to stop residents acting abroad as mercenaries. Police searched his house and took away his computer and documents. He was released on £165 000 bail, ordered to surrender his passport and stay in the Cape Town area until his case was heard. Sir Mark rejected all suggestions that he had any involvement in any alleged coup. Equatorial Guinea, where Obiang has led a ruthless regime for 25 years, is Africa's third largest oil producer. For some time much American involvement had developed in this West Africa region. Equatorial Guinea Opposition leader Severo Moto, living in Spain, was said to have offered the group oil rights to overthrow Obiang.

The Southern African Development Council (SADC) gave a public show of support for President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe at the opening of its summit in Mauritius (7–17 August). The meeting focused on adoption of a set of standards for future elections in member countries. In a bill Mugabe put before his parliament a few weeks earlier he proposed limited reforms, but SADC Chairman, Prime Minister Paul Berenger of Mauritius, made it clear the organization would not be satisfied with cosmetic changes in Zimbabwe.

He said: "Really free and fair elections mean not only an independent electoral commission, but also freedom of assembly and absence of physical harassment by the police or any other entity, freedom of the press and access to national radio and television, and external and credible observation of the whole electoral process". He indicated that SADC had been held back by the violent Zimbabwe elections in 2000 and 2002. New SADC rules would include a single day of voting instead of two and counting of votes at polling centres.

When he opened parliament in Harare Mugabe announced compliance with some election safeguards long called for by the opposition Movement for

Democratic Change (MDC). Africa seemed to be putting Mugabe under increasing pressure. In advance of its summit in Addis Ababa (6–8 July) the executive of the African Union adopted a highly critical report of Zimbabwe's human rights record.

The Zimbabwe government said (8 June) it would nationalize all the country's farmland and issue farmers with 99-year leases. Land Reform and Resettlement Minister John Nkomo said: "All land shall be state land and there will be no such thing called private land". A week later Information Minister Jonathan Moyo said all farmland would not be nationalized. The policy applied only to plots seized from whites. Only 10% of farmland is now private, but it includes big tea, timber and sugar plantations.

A mob of 3000 Mugabe supporters stormed through central Harare (20 May) calling for the blood of opposition MP Roy Bennett. They roughed up white passers-by and stoned the MDC headquarters. Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa had called Bennett's ancestors "murderers and thieves". Bennett pushed Chinamasa to the ground. He is hugely popular in his constituency, where he holds his rural seat with a big majority.

Mugabe told Sky News (24 May) that Zimbabwe did not need food aid. He said: "We are not hungry. Why foist this food on us? We don't want to be choked." British Prime Minister Tony Blair still considered Zimbabwe a colony. "He doesn't want to talk to us. We are inferior. He is superhuman." In the interview Mugabe called Archbishop Desmond Tutu "an angry, evil and embittered little bishop". He repeated that he intended to serve out his current term, which lasts until 2008. American, Argentine and South African maize was reported to be crossing the South African border.

Unicef reported in mid-2004 that primary school enrolment, which was 93% in 2000, had slumped to 65% by 2003. Literacy, once 86%, was plummeting. Most ordinary Zimbabweans could no longer afford to educate all their children and many schools had no money for textbooks, stationery or chalk. It was estimated that the Zimbabwean diaspora abroad now totalled 3.4 million—a quarter of the country's population—with 1.1 million in Britain. Most are black, so there are four times the number in Britain now than there were whites in what was then Southern Rhodesia. The white population has fallen from 270 000 in the 1970s to 30 000–40 000.

Mugabe told the first conference on AIDS to be held in Zimbabwe (17 June) that members of his family had been affected by the disease. Although a quarter of adults in the country are infected, action to combat it has been slow. Only about 5% of the population has come forward for testing.

Gideon Gono, head of the Zimbabwean central bank, visited Britain in June, forecasting that inflation would fall by 200% by the end of 2004 and the economy would return to positive growth by 2006. His visit was to persuade Zimbabweans living in Britain to use a new government service when they send money to relatives back home. It brought demands that sanctions be tightened against key figures in the Mugabe regime. Gono was not on the list of 95 officials barred from visiting European Union countries.

South Africa

The African Union decided (7 July 2004) that South Africa would host the new pan-African parliament. The only other contender, Egypt, withdrew. Almost 200

MPs had already been sworn in from the 38 signatory countries. To anxieties voiced in South Africa about the cost, it was pointed out that a spin-off would come from job creation. The New National Party (NNP), heir to the party that was founded to promote the interests of Afrikaners and in the 1940s launched apartheid, agreed to dissolve and fight future elections under the banner of the ruling African National Congress (7 August). Officials would retain their party membership and parliamentary and local government seats until September 2005. The party had won 20% of the vote in 1994, but former president F. W. de Klerk stepped down as leader in 1996 and it lost its way under his successor, Marthinus van Schalk. In the April 2004 election its national vote shrank to 1.7%. The National Party was formed in 1914 by General J. B. M. Hertzog.

White extremist Eugene Terre'Blanche left prison (11 June) after serving three years of a five-year sentence for attempted murder. He paraded on his black stallion to the cheers of knots of supporters. Terre'Blanche founded the white supremacist group AWB and admitted ordering five bombings in the 1994 election campaign.

Under a new firearms law enforced in South Africa in July two million gun owners had to reapply for their licences, undergo stringent checks and sit an exam. A person must pass a competence certificate every five years to qualify for a gun licence. The legal age for owning a gun was raised from 16 to 21.

Forty Afrikaners signed up in May for a farm attack survival course in Limpopo, close to the Botswana–Zimbabwe border. They aimed to protect the white farming community from what they called 'the second genocide'. More than 1600 white farmers have been murdered since apartheid ended. A government inquiry found the motive to be overwhelmingly criminal. South Africa took the lead in 2004 to drive forward an ambitious five-country plan to upgrade the Inga plant at the mouth of the Congo river and join up Africa's four regional power pools into a single pan-African grid. The rapids at Inga could generate twice the power of the Three Gorges dam in China, light up all Africa and export to Europe as well. The powerful South African state utility Eskom has signed up with its counterparts in Botswana, Namibia, Angola and Congo.

Zulu leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who lost two children to AIDS, told parliament (17 August) that leadership on the war on AIDS, had been "disastrous". He said AIDS had "placed me on my knees and destroyed my family". Nelson Mandela, who had said on the eve of his 86th birthday that he was stepping down from most of his public activities—"retiring from retirement"—turned up in Bangkok (15 July) to ask the International AIDS conference to do more to tackle tuberculosis, the biggest killer of those infected with HIV. He recalled that he had suffered TB in jail.

Pretoria High Court reduced and suspended a five-year sentence on Winnie Mandela for fraud and quashed theft convictions (7 July).

Botswana

A group of Bushmen launched (July 2004) a court challenge to the government, which they claimed had illegally evicted them from their ancestral lands. A temporary courtroom had been set up in a school in New Xade, a village created to house Bushmen resettled from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Judges

wore gowns and all their formal attire except wigs for the opening session. The reserve used to be the home to thousands of Bushmen, but now only 100 remain. The government argues that the Bushmen no longer lived a traditional hunting existence and so do not belong to an animal reserve. The defence said the government had cut water supplies illegally to force the Bushmen to quit their land. The case was about the rights of citizens to live where they wanted.

In its drive to fight AIDS the government was opening anti-retroviral clinics across the country. The one in Gaborone was probably the world's largest, treating 7300 patients and enrolling at least 20 more each day. The WHO has rewritten some of its rules after studying the way Botswana is tackling AIDS, which affects 37% of the adult population.

The flow of Zimbabweans coming across the border was creating increasing problems for Botswana, with Gaborone being called 'little Harare'. The number of beggars was rising. So was the incidence of crime. Most people in a prison opened in 2002 for illegal immigrants are Zimbabwean. Each day 100 Zimbabweans are loaded into trucks and driven back to the border. Many come straight back. The Zimbabwean High Commissioner said a £2 million electric fence being built along the Zimbabwean border to stop animals infected with foot and mouth was really to stop people coming across. He called it an African Gaza Strip.

Zimbabwe asked Botswana to stop its practice of flogging Zimbabweans who break the law. Zimbabwe said it was primitive, but Botswana pointed out that certain crimes there are punishable by corporal punishment instead of jail and it would not discriminate.

Namibia

German Development Aid Minister Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul apologized for the killing of 65 000 Herero people a century ago. At a ceremony (15 August 2004) marking the Hereros' 1904–07 uprising she said: "We Germans accept our historic and moral responsibility and the guilt...The atrocity committed at that time would have been termed genocide." The minister ruled out financial compensation to the descendants but promised aid, particularly in land reform. Germany is Namibia's largest donor.

India

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram followed his first budget (8 July 2004) with a speech pledging the new Congress-led coalition to push ahead with economic reforms, including privatization, even when Communists allied in the government objected. The budget emphasized reform of the rural economy and proposed a five-year plan to eliminate the country's high revenue deficit. Personal and corporate income taxes were unchanged, but a 2% surcharge on all taxes would be spent on education and VAT would be introduced. Chidambaram would raise new revenues from share offerings in profitable enterprises, such as a 5.25% share of the National Thermal Power Corporation, the largest power generator. Loss-making companies would be sold off or closed. In the budget there was new money for healthcare, drinking water, rural

roads and education but the tangle of bureaucracy would be tackled and this would mean strong decentralization.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told a meeting of chief ministers (29 June) to focus on rural poverty and devolution of financial power to elected villages—the first time in 16 years an Indian prime minister had held such a meeting on the half-completed rural decentralization programme. In June Singh flew to Andhra Pradesh, where 3000 desperate farmers had committed suicide in six years. Growth in India's rural areas, at 2%, lags well behind the national figure (projected at 7%–8%).

The first budget session of the new parliament was boycotted by opposition parties, who wanted the removal of six ministers facing corruption charges. Prime target was Laloo Prasad Yadav, the railways minister, who faced embezzlement charges and whose wife, Rabi Devi, is chief minister of Bihar, India's poorest state.

Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel lowered from 74% to 49% the ceiling on foreign ownership in the government's proposed sale of New Delhi and Mumbai airports. Singaporean, German, Malaysian and French airports had been showing interest.

At the traditional independence day speech (15 August) made from the Red Fort in New Delhi Prime Minister Singh pledged his new government would take a tough stand against groups opting for violence. In a pointer to its secular credentials he said "we must fight all anti-national and anti-social forces that try to disrupt normal life".

A bomb on a college parade ground in Dhemaji, Assam on Independence Day killed 20 people, mostly children, and injured 40 others. The outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom had called for a boycott of the celebrations. Rebels have been fighting for independence since 1979 and 10 000 people have been killed. Trouble also simmered in August in Manipur state. Protesters demanded abolition of a controversial security law and a general strike was called.

Digitalization of India's tax department was beginning to show results. Individual taxpayers had doubled in five years to 30 million and those eligible for refunds were receiving them for the first time. But still twice as many people should be paying tax.

Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee stepped down as leader of the Hindu nationalist BJP (1 June). A bitter internal debate on whether the party should move sharply back to the right had followed its election defeat. Lal Krishna Advani, former deputy prime minister and the party's most prominent hardliner, was appointed to succeed and at 76 became the new opposition leader. Vajpayee, 80, took up an elder statesman's role as chairman of the BJP parliamentary board, but caused a stir when he broke silence (10 June) to declare that the bloody riots in Gujarat in 2002 were a key cause of the party's defeat. BJP leaders closed ranks to defend Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Vajpayee's comments were said to have saved Modi from moves to sack him. India's highest court ordered (17 August) Gujarat state to reopen 2000 cases relating to the Hindu–Muslim riots of 2002. Human rights groups maintain that the former BJP government was complicit in the violence against Muslims that caused 1000 deaths.

Final figures from the 2001 census showed a head count of 1.029 billion. In the decade to 2001 the population rose by 180 million—more than the population of the world's fifth largest country, Brazil. Registrar-general J. K. Banthia

said that by 2035 India's population would rise to 1.46 billion—above China's. The sex ratio in India for children up to six had dropped from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 927 females 10 years later—showing that female foeticide still prevailed. Many girls are still killed in infancy.

A World Bank report said (14 August) India could have five million new HIV/AIDS infections every year within three decades if the use of condoms does not increase. It could become the biggest cause of death.

In the first half of 2004 four discoveries of oil, expected to produce at least 1300 million barrels, were made in Rajasthan by the British firm Cairn Energy. Pumping was expected to start in 2007.

Shibu Soren resigned as Coal and Mines Minister on receiving an arrest warrant over his alleged role in a 1975 rally where 10 people died. Soren is leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, a member of the 12-party coalition. He protested his innocence and said the charges were raised by BJP rivals. A researcher of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative pointed out that India's criminal justice system is open to political manipulation.

The Supreme Court ordered the government (19 July) to distribute £174 million held in the Bank of India to half a million victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy 20 years ago. Union Carbide of the USA, now owned by Dow Chemical, paid out £250 million in compensation in 1989, but much of it was delayed because of bureaucratic wrangling over how to categorize the victims. The government continues to pursue criminal charges against the former Union Carbide chairman, living in New York

A panel of three eminent historians recommended that the National Council of Educational Research and Training should discontinue the use of textbooks written by scholars picked by the previous government. The council sets the national curriculum for students up to 18. The panel report went to the new education Minister, Professor S. Settar, a distinguished historian of ancient India. The Hindu right complained the influence of 'leftists and Marxists' was at work, but more traditional academics accused the BJP government of vandalism and said the suggestions for change were belated.

The thatched roof of a school in Kumbhakonam, Tamil Nadu, caught fire and fell in, killing 90 children (16 July). The fire had started as the midday meal was being prepared in a thatched-roof kitchen. State authorities ordered the closure of all schools with traditional thatched roof classrooms. The Chief Minister accused the school management of negligence.

Flood and drought hit India in July. The monsoon flooded eastern India, particularly Assam, but faltered in the northwest and eight key farming states were without rain.

The first execution in India since 1995 took place in Alipore Central jail, Calcutta (14 August). Dhanajoy Chatterjee, 39, was hanged at dawn after 13 years in solitary confinement. He was convicted of rape and murder of a security guard. Demonstrators against the death penalty outside the jail sang 'We Shall Overcome'. Hangman Nata Mullick, 83, who was helped by his 21-year-old grandson, fell ill after the hanging.

Plans were announced to build the world's biggest statue of the Buddha (150 metres high) where the Buddha died, or attained nirvana, 2500 years ago in Kushinagar, on the border of Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. The £120 million trust project was to be supported by the state government and a Japanese religious group.

Pakistan

Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali resigned as prime minister (26 June 2004) after months of friction with President Pervez Musharraf. Parliament elected Shujaat Hussain, head of the government party, for an interim two months. Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz, a senate member, was nominated as prime minister pending his securing a seat in the national assembly, which he did in an easily won by-election (19 August). Aziz, 55, a former Citibank executive and close confidant of Musharraf, escaped assassination in a suicide bomb attack at Fatehjang, outside Islamabad (30 July). His driver and the bomber were killed. An al-Qaida group said it was responsible.

Eighty people died in terror attacks in Karachi in May and June. Two car bombs caused casualties outside the Pakistan–American cultural centre in Karachi (25 May). A bomb thrown from a car at a mosque killed 20 (31 May). It followed the murder nearby of a top pro-Taliban cleric. In the rush hour the motorcade of Lieutenant-General Ahsan Saleem Hayat, corps commander of Karachi, was fired on from a high roof in the commercial centre. Two police died and six soldiers were injured. A bomb blast followed. In three days of rioting offices were ransacked and cars set ablaze. The city police chief was sacked.

Ten al-Qaida suspects held in Karachi were said to have confessed to the attack on Hayat. Another 10 arrested were said have been plotting to attack the top military and civilian leaders in Islamabad. Thirty suspects held in July and August included a Tanzanian held responsible for the bombing of US embassies in East Africa in 1998. A five-day assault on al-Qaida hideouts near the Afghan border in early June left 72 dead.

Pakistan ruled out sending soldiers to Iraq (3 August), following an initiative by US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his Saudi counterpart to recruit troops from Islamic states to serve there. Pakistani Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said: "Other countries are withdrawing troops, so how can we send them?".

The Pakistani ambassador in Washington, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, was named the new UN head of mission in Iraq (13 July). The position had been vacant since Sergio Vieira de Mello was killed in a bomb attack on UN HQ in Baghdad in August 2003.

Pakistan's economy grew by 6.4% in the year ended June. Finance Minister Aziz said that in Asia only China, India and Thailand grew faster.

India and Pakistan

After two days of talks in Delhi between senior officials India and Pakistan created (20 June 2004) a permanent hotline between their foreign secretaries to avoid a nuclear confrontation and to continue the ban on nuclear tests. It was the first time for five years that the two countries had discussed the sensitive issue. India has said it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but Pakistan has not made that commitment. A day later Foreign Ministers Natwar Singh of India and Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri of Pakistan met on the sidelines of a regional conference in China. In a further two-day meeting of the foreign secretaries (27–28 June) the first formal talks on Kashmir took place. The two sides agreed to open consulates in Mumbai and Karachi and to repatriate hundreds of fishermen held after straying across disputed waters.

A month later President Musharraf of Pakistan met Natwar Singh for the first time (22 July). The Indian Foreign Minister was in Pakistan for a meeting of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Singh said the two countries were "committed to discuss and settle all bilateral issues including Jammu and Kashmir" and Musharraf talked of "reaching a final settlement that accorded with the legitimate aspirations of the Kashmiris within a reasonable timeframe".

In his Independence Day speech in Delhi Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underlined his intention "to carry forward with firm resolve and sincerity the composite dialogue process with Pakistan".

India and Pakistan agreed (6 August) to more talks to resolve differences over the disputed border of the Siachen region.

The 104-year-old Islamia Higher Secondary School in the centre of Srinagar was gutted in a suspected arson attack (5 July). It has 2500 students and housed one of the oldest libraries on Islam with 30 000 books. An ancient handwritten copy of the Koran was lost.

Bangladesh

As former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressed a crowd from a lorry in Dhaka (22 August 2004) a grenade exploded and killed 19 people, including the head of her Awami League's women's wing. Sheikh Hasina suffered cuts and ear bleeding and blamed the government for the blast. Violence spread across the country after the attack. A mob set a train on fire in Bhairab.

The opposition Awami League called off its boycott of parliament (15 June), which began in June 2003. It would take part in parliamentary select committees and accept its quota of nine out of 445 seats reserved for women.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld held talks with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia (5 June). Thousands demonstrated, suspecting he wanted Bangladeshi troops for Iraq. Foreign Minister Morshed Khan said no troops would go without a UN mandate.

The worst monsoon floods for six years covered 60% of the country in July. Up to 600 people were reported dead and 30 million displaced or stranded. Dhaka was severely hit, with half the city submerged. The government claimed damage ran to £5 billion and the garment industry was severely hit. The UN sought £150 million in aid.

Sri Lanka

A suicide bomber blew herself up in a police station near the prime minister's residence in Colombo (7 July 2004). Four officers were killed. The woman detonated the bomb while she was being searched. It was the first such attack since the Tamil Tiger rebels signed a ceasefire two years ago, but the Tigers denied involvement.

The government dropped a refusal to discuss the Tamil liberation movement's proposal for self-rule (29 July) when Norwegian peace envoy Vida Helgesen warned that the ceasefire was in jeopardy.

In the new parliament (5 June) ruling party members tried to stop a member of the Buddhist monk-led opposition party taking his oath as an MP. A fist fight followed and two monks were taken to hospital.

Two journalists were shot dead—Aiyathurai Nadesan, a Tamil with the daily *Virakesari Tamil* (31 May) and Kandasamy Tyer Balanadarajah (16 August) who worked for a Tamil weekly, *Thinamurasu*. Another journalist on *Thinamurasu* was shot and wounded on 26 July.

Maldives

Elections were held (28 May 2004) to choose 42 members of the People's Special Majlis, which was empowered to amend the constitution. Political parties are banned and only a 14% turnout was reported. President Abdul Gayoom, Asia's longest serving leader and now into his sixth term, proposed (9 June) that in future the president would serve two five-year terms and lose his right to appoint eight members of the Majlis. A post of prime minister would be created. A national human rights commission would be set up.

Two months later riot police used teargas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters in Male seeking the release of political prisoners. The cabinet met in emergency session in police headquarters and declared a state of emergency (13 August). Hundreds were arrested, including a former attorney-general. The protesters demanded democracy and the resignation of Gayoom and ministers. The prisoners were released, but the crowds, up to 5000, still did not disperse and state radio said fundamental rights of citizens had been suspended. People would not be allowed to demonstrate or express views critical of the government. Gayoom suspended discussion of democratic reform. The government blamed fundamentalists for the unrest.

Amnesty International had for some time condemned Maldives' human rights record. When Gayoom promised reforms British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw wrote to congratulate him on his plans to change the constitution, but later Britain criticized the crackdown. A political activist living in London said he had been approached by the Maldives national security service "to offer me a coup", but that he was "looking for a way to return with some form of protection".

Malaysia

Signs emerged after Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi's March 2004 election victory of a more conciliatory policy towards Singapore, Australia and the USA. Malaysia and Singapore planned a bilateral business council to finance joint investment missions abroad and Australia hoped to start free trade talks with Malaysia. Following a meeting in Washington between Abdullah and President Bush (19 July), Malaysia agreed in July to send a medical team to Iraq. Relations with Washington had long been abrasive in public when Mahathir Mohamad was prime minister, but cooperation with the USA remained close on fighting terrorism and the USA is Malaysia's biggest trading partner and investor.

Abdullah said in July that he would not scale back his anti-corruption campaign "in any way", even though opposition was building within the ruling party. The first big businessman arrested in Malaysia's anti-corruption drive, the head of Perjawa Steel, pleaded not guilty (2 August) when he went on trial for dishonestly authorizing £10.9 million to a Hong Kong bank account. After 26 public hearings preliminary findings of a royal commission into the manage-

ment and workings of the police in August reported rampant corruption and evidence of excessive force against detainees. Abdullah said he wanted immediate action.

Malaysia and the four other members of the southeast Asian defence alliance—Australia, the UK, Singapore and New Zealand—agreed (7 June) to increase training to prevent a terrorist attack in the Malacca Straits. One-third of the world's trade and half its crude oil supplies pass through the Straits. Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia began coordinated patrols (20 July) in a bid to counter pirate attacks. A quarter of the world's 445 reported attacks in 2003 took place in the Straits.

Malaysia arrested (28 May) Sri Lankan businessman Kuhary Syed Abu Tahir, who was said to be the main financier and money launderer in the global nuclear weapon smuggling network headed by Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan. Tahir had close ties with Prime Minister Abdullah's son, owner of a group said to have supplied centrifuge parts to Libya. Malaysia refused to arrest Tamir at first but appeared to come under US pressure to do so.

Survivors of a 1948 shooting of 24 villagers by a Scots Guards patrol group in the then Malaya renewed pressure on Britain to accept the killings as unjustified. In 1970 the Conservatives reversed a Labour government decision to investigate.

Singapore

Finance Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 52-year-old eldest son of founding father Lee Kuan Yew, was sworn in as the country's third prime minister (12 August 2004). He succeeded Goh Chok Tong who replaced Lee as Senior Minister. Lee remained in the cabinet as "Minister Mentor" and third in the hierarchy. Goh had been prime minister for 14 years. The new prime minister remained finance Minister and Goh took over from him as Governor of the Central Bank. At his swearing-in the new prime minister called on people to "feel free to express diverse views, pursue unconventional ideas, or be different". Economic growth was not an end in itself. One priority would be to encourage more people to get married and have babies—a reflection of Singapore's falling birthrate. Measures to raise the birthrate were announced, including cuts in the working week to enhance family life. The economy grew in the second quarter of 2004 by 11.7% against a year earlier—the highest for eight years.

In his first annual National Day Rally speech Lee said he wanted a more open and diverse society by easing free speech restrictions. Public speakers would not require police permits to hold indoor meetings unless they touched on 'sensitive issues'. He said he was worried about the growth of pro-independence forces in Taiwan and warned that Singapore would not support it if it provoked a war with China. A few days earlier he had paid a 'private' visit to Taiwan and now said he regretted it if that had caused strains with China.

As part of the free trade agreement with the USA, gum would go on sale in Singapore for the first time in 12 years. Chewers would have to register as gum-users and show an identity card every time they bought a packet. Gum was outlawed in 1992 because of the splats of gum dotting the pristine streets. Nineteen brands would now be available (from chemists only), but anyone trading in it illicitly would risk two years jail.

Brunei Darussalam

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, head of state and government, announced in July 2004 that he was to reconvene parliament for the first time since 1962 to give priority to widening the “opportunities of the public to contribute to national progress”.

Hong Kong

On the seventh anniversary of the hand-over to China (1 July 2004) up to 500 000 people marched peacefully through the city demanding a move to democracy. Demonstrators carried inflatable puppets of Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa. Beijing prevented Chinese tourists from going to Hong Kong. At a press conference after the march Tung said he had heard the protesters’ views and his government needed to make “further improvements”. Chinese reaction was restrained. Officials said Hong Kong people had the right to protest legally. Earlier (4 June) a candlelight vigil by about 80 000 marked the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Chris Patten, Hong Kong’s last colonial governor and now European Union Commissioner for External Affairs, said at a press conference in Singapore (30 June) that “there isn’t a political problem in Hong Kong unless it is created from outside”. He urged China to let Hong Kong develop its own sense of citizenship by giving its people “rather more say in shaping their own affairs”.

Stephen Bradley, British Consul-General in Hong Kong, said (3 August) Britain would like to see “early progress towards universal suffrage in line with local sentiment”—a hint that the Chinese government had not honoured its pre-hand-over pledge of self-rule.

Health Minister Yeo Eng-kiong resigned after a critical report and public outcry over poor handling of the 2003 SARS outbreak.

Nearly one million people turned out to see one of the Buddha’s fingers, on loan from the mainland for a 10-day exhibit. The finger was found buried at a temple in Xian in 1987. Pro-democracy supporters said the exhibition was a propaganda exercise by Beijing to cool the heated political atmosphere.

Guangzhou international airport, which was expected to draw business away from nearby Hong Kong, opened in July. It cost £1.3 billion and had a planned capacity of 80 million passengers and 2.5 million tonnes of cargo a year. As it opened China and the USA agreed a fivefold rise in passenger and cargo flights between the two countries in six years. The Pearl River delta area still produces 40% of China’s total exports.

Papua New Guinea

After a six-month dispute Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer signed an agreement in Port Moresby (1 July 2004) to send 300 police and civil servants to Papua New Guinea to fight crime and corruption. Under the deal four Australian judges would sit on the Papua New Guinea bench and an Australian become solicitor-general. Australian civil servants would take top roles in economic management, immigration and prisons. A six-month dispute over legal immunity for the personnel held up the deal. In a compromise, anyone from the deployment breaking the law would be prosecuted in Australia after a committee from both sides had assessed the case.

The chief electoral commissioner said a new electoral system in which voters indicated their first, second and third preferences on the ballot had been successfully used in by-elections and was helping to reduce election-related violence.

Sir Anthony Siaguru, former foreign minister and for five years Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, died aged 57 (16 April).

Fiji Islands

Ratu Epeli Ganilau, president of the Great Council of Chiefs, marked the 125th anniversary of the arrival of Indian immigrants in Fiji with an apology to Indo-Fijians for their sufferings as a result of the 1987 and 2000 armed coups. He admitted the Council had made errors of judgment that worsened racial tension. He thanked "our Indian brothers and sisters" for their "sacrifice in building the nation".

Police said (9 June 2004) they had smashed the biggest methamphetamine laboratory uncovered in the southern hemisphere. It was hidden in warehouses on an industrial estate at Laucala. Five kilos were recovered as well as a tonne of precursor chemicals, worth £300 million if refined into drugs. Three Fijians and four Chinese nationals were arrested. Police said the operation seemed to be financed from Hong Kong.

Pacific Region

Security and greater economic and political integration topped the agenda at the 35th meeting of the 16-nation Pacific Forum in Samoa (5–7 August 2004). Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon attended. The leaders worked on a coordinated plan to counter terrorism and to promote better governance in the region. Airport security and immigration controls were pressing concerns. In 2003 Papua New Guinea's entire computer system for processing passports was stolen. In the wake of the successful intervention in Solomon Islands there was optimism that the Forum was becoming an influential and capable regional organization.

A report from US computer consultants said Niue and Tonga had become global centres of the internet porn industry. They provide addresses for almost as many pornographic web pages as the whole of Asia and Latin America. The domain names of Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu were also alleged to have hundreds of thousands of pages, as well as Christmas Islands and Cocos Island. Domain names have long been a big source of revenue for Pacific islands. Tuvalu has built roads, hospitals and schools with £22 million from leasing the rights to its .tv domain to a Silicon Valley firm.

Vanuatu

Following defections Prime Minister Edward Natapei's Vanua'aku party lost its parliamentary majority. The acting president dissolved parliament at Natapei's request and a snap general election was held in mid-July 2004. After a nine-day count covering the 65 inhabited islands no single party commanded a lead in the 52-seat parliament and 25 new MPs were elected. French-speaking Serge Vohor,

leader of the Union of Moderate Parties, who was prime minister in the mid-1990s, was voted into office.

Tonga

Royal Tongan Airline, founded in 1985, closed in May 2004 when its last aircraft was impounded by the Brunei government. Its cash flow had dried up. The airline served some of the 169 islands in the Tonga group and at one time flew to Sydney, Auckland and Honolulu. Losses had grown to £12 million, further damaging the weak Tongan economy. The closure was a big blow to the country's tourism, which attracts 50 000 visitors a year.

Nauru

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer agreed in talks in Melbourne with President Rene Harris (19 April 2004) to send an Australian Treasury team to Nauru to try to rescue the country from financial disaster. It would effectively take charge of the tottering economy. The team arrived in July, but meantime four-times president Harris was unseated by a no-confidence motion in parliament and replaced by Ludwig Scotty (22 June). It was the 16th time Nauru had changed its president in ten years.

The once-rich economy failed when the island's deposits of phosphate ran out and the proceeds were invested unwisely. Nauru ran up hundreds of millions of pounds of debts. In Melbourne and Sydney bailiffs moved in to seize the island's last property assets. One source of recent revenue has come in the form of aid from Australia in return for provision of an offshore detention centre to house asylum seekers.

Solomon Islands

A year after the July 2003 arrival of Australian-led peacekeepers to restore order after years of ethnic unrest not a shot had been fired in anger. Key militant commanders were locked up and charged with offences that include murder. Thousands of weapons had been taken off the streets. Extortion and intimidation ended almost overnight. The intervention was the biggest military operation in the South Pacific since World War Two. New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff said the challenge now was to restore economic growth, establish good governance and deal with corruption. About 300 police officers from nine countries would stay on indefinitely. The ethnic problems remained considerable; the 460 000 islanders speak 80 languages.

Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza reshuffled his cabinet (29 June) and appointed opposition leader John Martin Garo as minister of state. Parliament elected MP Nathaniel Waena as governor-general to succeed retiring Sir John Ini Lapli, defeating former prime minister Sir Peter Kenilorea (15 June). Despite elections in 2001, parliament has sat only intermittently since the 2000 coup

Pitcairn Island

The island's Supreme Court sitting in Auckland (29 June 2004) decided after weeks of legal argument that the six-week trial of seven men on 96 sexual

assault charges should be held on the island and not in New Zealand. This presented a logistical problem since the island has no airstrip or harbour and little accommodation. Judges, lawyers and court staff—25 in all—would have to make the 5000 km journey from New Zealand. Witnesses would give evidence by satellite. The charges covered 40 years and six other men were under investigation. Amid fears of violence ahead of the trial the 45 residents were asked to hand in their 20 guns to the island's two policemen.

Australia

A statement (8 August 2004) by 43 former diplomatic and defence officials, including three former ambassadors to Iraq, four former heads of foreign affairs and two former chiefs of defence, called Australian policy on Iraq and terrorism deceptive and dangerous. It said the government had undermined democracy and increased the risk of terrorist attacks. Prime Minister John Howard said the proposition that Australia went to war based on a lie had been shown to be "a total distortion of the facts".

In a report (22 July) by former diplomat Philip Flood, Howard had been cleared of 'politicizing' intelligence to justify participation in the war. Flood blamed the intelligence community for failures. Commentators said Iraq had not backfired on Howard because Australia had not suffered a single casualty. Of 2000 troops sent to Iraq, 880 remained.

The government announced (26 August) an £176 million plan to equip its military aircraft with long-range cruise missiles capable of hitting targets up to 250 miles away. Indonesia warned the move risked starting a regional arms race.

Richard Butler, former UN chief weapons inspector in Iraq, resigned as Governor of Tasmania (9 August) after less than a year. His secretary, senior adviser and aide-de-camp had resigned amid rumours of arguments and high-handedness. Premier Paul Lennon blamed a malicious campaign against Butler, an avowed republican. As chairman of UNSCOM, Butler was noted for his confrontations with Iraqi officials.

In a softening of immigration policy the government announced (13 July) that more than 9000 refugees could be allowed to stay in Australia. They were people holding three-year temporary protection visas (TPVs). Many holders were working in rural jobs hard to fill. Immigration Minister Amany Vanstone said "those making a significant contribution to the Australian community" could remain. The controversial TPV policy had been blamed for leaving refugees in a permanent state of limbo. The opposition said the change was simply political opportunism in election year.

Foreign Ministers Alexander Downer of Australia and Ramos Horta of East Timor agreed in Canberra (11 August) to finalize a deal over their maritime boundaries before Christmas. East Timor sought a boundary line halfway between the two countries and Australia sought continuation of the continental shelf boundary agreed with Indonesia after its 1975 invasion of East Timor. At the heart of the problem was a fight for royalties from the £2.6 billion Australian Greater Sunrise gas project.

A white paper launched in June confirmed that the government would not ratify the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions, putting Australia almost alone, except for the USA, among Western nations. Per capita Australia is the second largest producer of greenhouse gases. The white paper endorsed over-

whelming reliance on coal for power generation and said gas emissions were too small for the country to make any difference on its own. Australia was on track to meet its Kyoto target of 108% of 1990 emissions by 2012, even though it does not support the treaty. Australia is the world's fourth largest producer and biggest exporter of coal.

A 10-year plan to preserve Australia's water resources in the face of the worst droughts for 100 years was signed at a Council of Australian Governments meeting in Canberra (25 June). The costs would be shared between federal and state governments. All agreed, except Western Australia and Tasmania. Australian water consumption per person is the highest in the world.

Legislation was put to the federal parliament banning gay marriage. Prime Minister Howard said: "The commonly accepted definition of marriage is a union of a man and a woman. We have decided to insert this into the Marriage Act to make it very plain that that is our view of marriage." The Labor Party said it would not oppose the change.

Howard appealed in Adelaide (8 July) for Australians to behave with more civility. He lamented "a coarsening of the culture...". Australia was a less polite country than it used to be. His remarks were seen as targeting the new opposition leader Mark Latham, who regularly resorts to blunt language.

Australia's first national political party for Aborigines, the Your Voice party, was launched in Melbourne (10 May) by Aboriginal writer Richard Frankland.

Researchers at Monash University discovered a column of ants 60 miles wide under the city of Melbourne. The insects come from Argentina and first appeared in Australia in 1939. They are listed as among the world's 100 worst biological invaders, driving out native species.

DNA testing in Australia and New Zealand ended a century-old claim that a Hawaiian arrow was carved from the bone of Captain Cook. The arrow was given to the Australian museum in Sydney nearly half a century after Cook was clubbed to death in Hawaii (then the Sandwich Islands). A Hawaiian king on his deathbed had told a London surgeon it was Cook's bone.

New Zealand

Associate Maori Affairs Minister Tariana Turia was dismissed (30 April) when she said she would vote against a bill asserting Crown ownership of the coastal areas. She resigned from the ruling Labour Party and parliament. Turia and other Maori activists said the new law contravened the rights of Maoris enshrined in the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. When a two-week protest march arrived in Wellington Prime Minister Helen Clark refused to address them. The opposition National Party pledged to end all forms of discrimination against Maoris. A no-confidence vote in parliament was narrowly defeated (6 May).

After a decade of failure under privatization the rail network was re-nationalized (1 July 2004)—the second large-scale re-nationalization in three years and sharply reversing the mass privatization and radical free market policies of the 1980s. Air New Zealand had been rescued from bankruptcy three years earlier.

Two suspected Mossad agents were jailed for six months in Auckland for trying on false grounds to obtain a New Zealand passport. Prime Minister Clark denounced Israel and imposed diplomatic sanctions. A visit by the Israeli president was cancelled and visa restrictions put on Israeli officials. Clark called the Israeli behaviour utterly unacceptable and a breach of New Zealand sover-

eignty and international law. Hours after she spoke vandals gouged Nazi slogans in a Jewish cemetery in Wellington and damaged 14 graves—the first such attack in New Zealand, which has a community of 10 000 Jews in a population of four million.

Guyana

Home Affairs Minister Ronald Gajraj agreed to step down to allow an inquiry into allegations that he ran a death squad. The opposition walked out of parliament in April 2004 vowing not to return until an investigation was set up. Gajraj and the government of President Bharrat Jagdeo denied involvement in the so-called Phantom Gang. The opposition said the gang gunned down criminals at government behest. The USA and Canada revoked Gajraj's visa and called for an inquiry.

Montserrat

The US Department of Homeland Security told 292 refugees (July 2004) who fled the Montserrat volcano eruptions that began in 1995 they must leave the USA by February 2005. The reason given was that the eruptions "are not likely to cease in the foreseeable future. Therefore it no longer constitutes a temporary disruption of living conditions that temporarily prevents Montserrat from adequately handling the return of its nationals." Seven years ago the refugees were given status that allowed them to work in the USA until the threat subsided.

Caribbean Death Penalty

A panel of judges sitting in London and headed by Lord Bingham abolished the mandatory death penalty for murder in Jamaica, but decided it must remain in force in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados because their constitutions barred them from striking it down. The decision meant a reprieve for 60 prisoners on death row in Jamaica.

The judgment on Trinidad overturned a Privy Council ruling in 2003 that the automatic death penalty was unconstitutional. But the panel reprieved more than 100 prisoners now on death row there because it would be unfair to deprive them of the benefit of the earlier ruling. The hearing was of appeals on behalf of two Jamaicans and two Barbadians. Normally the final court of appeal for the Caribbean sits in panels of five, but this hearing was considered so important that nine judges sat—eight law lords plus a senior judge from Jamaica, Edward Zacca.

Jamaica

The recovery of tourism, back to pre-9/11 levels, and a surge in aluminium exports boosted the economy. In its annual review of the economy in August the International Monetary Fund (IMF) praised Jamaica for tackling its huge debt burden and improving investor confidence. It had succeeded in stabilizing the economy and the prospects were positive. From a financial crisis at the beginning of 2003 it had raised growth from 1% to 2% and could be set for 4% a year.

Inflation had come under control but, said the IMF, major economic reform was still essential.

Nearly 50 murders were reported in Jamaica in a single week in August, bringing the year's total to 835. The mayor of Spanish Town, Kingston, said gangs were wreaking the havoc.

Canada

Prime Minister Paul Martin retained power as leader of the biggest single party in the general election (28 June), but his Liberals lost their parliamentary majority and gave the balance to smaller parties. It was the first minority government since 1979. The Liberals won 135 seats in the 308-seat House of Commons—37 down. The Conservatives, under their new leader Stephen Harper, took 99, up from 73. The New Democrats, also under a new leader, Jack Layton, took 19 seats. In Quebec the Bloc Québécois won most seats at the expense of the Liberals—54 out of 75. Martin seemed set for a comfortable majority when he called the election but anger over misspent public money in Quebec damaged the Liberal Party. Harper won ground in Ontario, but lost seats in British Columbia.

After his setback Martin ruled out any formal coalition, but said he could work with other parties on a case-by-case basis. When he named his new cabinet (20 July) 14 ministers stayed in place. Bill Graham moved from foreign affairs to defence, but Ralph Goodale remained Finance Minister and Anne McLellan, Deputy Prime Minister. The new foreign minister was Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of International Trade since 1999 and a prominent player in World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations.

South Africa's Gold Fields and Canada's Iamgold announced plans (12 August) to merge their international operations in a £1.14 billion deal to create the world's seventh biggest gold producer. Gold Fields International would own mines in Ghana, Mali and Australia.

Cyprus

Consternation was caused in Nicosia when the European Union proposed giving northern Cyprus £173 million to ease its economic isolation (7 July 2004). Cypriot ministers said the money suggested international recognition of an enclave that had been deemed illegal. The European Commission proposed direct trade from the Turkish enclave to ports in the rest of the EU, which had already passed a regulation enabling trading across the UN 'green line' that divides the island.

On the 30th anniversary of the Turkish invasion President Tassos Papadopoulos said he did not regret the April referendum No vote against the UN Annan plan for reunification—"our response had been the correct one". He called on the EU to help revive efforts to discuss a Cyprus settlement (30 June), but a few days earlier he had made a detailed rebuttal of what he called a "deliberately misleading" report by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Greek Cypriots' rejection of his plan. When a new set of 'confidence-building measures' to improve security between Greek and Turkish Cypriots was announced in Nicosia (16 July) the Turkish Cypriot prime minister, Mehmet Ali Talat, dismissed them as "weird".

Plans for the Olympic torch to pass through both sides of the island (7 July) as a symbol of reconciliation collapsed at the last minute because of disagreement over welcoming ceremonies. Cyprus was the last stop on the flame's six-week journey to Athens. In the first elections to the European Parliament (13 June) after Cyprus joined the EU the opposition Democratic Rally became the largest in terms of popular vote with 28.6% and two seats.

Malta

John Dalli, who was finance minister for 14 years and stood for the ruling Nationalist Party leadership in April, resigned (3 July 2004) after only three months as foreign minister. His junior minister, Michael Frendo, took over. Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi had given Dalli two weeks to decide his future after allegations, which he strongly denied, about a shipping deal and ministry travel business.

Gibraltar

Cannon fire, parading soldiers and Union flags marked the 300th anniversary of British rule (4 August 2004). The Spanish government protested. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said: "It is very strange that in the EU, in the 21st Century, the military occupation of part of one member state by another is being celebrated". British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Alan West, Opposition Leader Michael Howard and Princess Anne attended the celebrations. A chain of thousands of Gibraltarians joined hands around the Rock. A British frigate fired a salute, but the US cancelled a navy ship's visit, saying it did not want to offend Spain.

An Argentinian admiral admitted he had sent a team of saboteurs to Gibraltar during the Falklands war to sink a Royal Navy ship. With only hours to spare Spanish police foiled the move to attach limpet mines to the ship.

United Kingdom

Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown announced (12 July 2004) rises in overseas aid that would put Britain on course to reach 0.47% of gross national income within three years. He pledged that the international target of 0.7% would be reached by 2013. When the Labour government took office in 1997 the figure was 0.26%. Brown said £500 million would be spent on the fight against HIV/AIDS. The budget of the Department for International Development would rise from £3.8 billion to £5.3 billion a year by 2007–08. The BBC World Service and the British Council would also get budget rises. In a speech in Vatican City (9 July) Brown renewed his pleas to the international community to cancel Third World debt. New figures showed that Zambia would spend 5.4% of its entire GDP servicing its debt in 2004. For Malawi the figure was 7.4% and a dozen governments of poor countries would use more than 5%.

The 11-strong House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee recommended (13 July 2004) radical reform of the honours system. Knights and dames would be phased out over five years and four awards would replace the existing 16 honours. The word Empire would be deleted in favour of an Order of British Excellence. The top honours would be an expanded Companion of

Honour followed by CBE, OBE and MBE. The Order of Merit would remain. The Orders of the Bath and St Michael and St George would be abolished, but the Orders of the Garter and the Thistle and others in the gift of the Queen would remain.

Downing Street's influence over honours would be replaced by an honours commission. The honours selection committees would be abolished. During the MPs' hearings former prime minister John Major said he had refused a knighthood because he did not feel he deserved one. Plans to abolish the ancient post of Lord Chancellor, announced in mid-2003, were overturned by the House of Lords by a 240 to 208 vote (14 July). Former foreign secretary Lord Howe called the abolition "constitutional vandalism".

A three-month pilot survey carried out in London by the Metropolitan police showed that, of the eight million inhabitants, three million did not have English as their mother tongue. A 999 service being introduced with translators needed to cater for more than 150 languages. Of these, at least 50 were Commonwealth languages, ranging from Samoan and Luganda to Gujarati and Afrikaans.

The Next CHOGM

The 2005 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Valletta, Malta, will be held on 25–28 November. Secretary-General Don McKinnon pointed out that it would be 12 years since a summit was hosted by a small state—Cyprus in 1993.

Sports Ministers

Sports ministers from the 53 Commonwealth countries met in Athens on the eve of the Olympics (12 August) and issued an action plan to enable all to take part in the world-wide anti-doping campaign. The Secretariat is to fund technical advisers to operate alongside the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). One-third of member countries have not yet signed up to the Copenhagen Declaration which commits nations to implement the tough WADA code. The UK, with two doping laboratories, promised help to developing countries. A Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport was set up and help on how to bid for and stage championships will be given by countries with experience, such as Canada, India and Malaysia.

In the Olympic Games 11 Commonwealth countries figured in the final tally of medal winners. They were: Australia 37, UK 22, Canada 7, Kenya 6, South Africa 4, New Zealand 2, Bahamas, 1, Cameroon 1, India 1, Jamaica 1, Trinidad and Tobago 1.

Around the Commonwealth

Sierra Leonean Andrew Jeneke Kromah, who ran his country's first rural radio during the civil war of 1991–2002 and now broadcasts 20 hours a day to rural listeners using four languages, was awarded the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's 2004 Elizabeth R. Award for Exceptional Contribution to Public Service Broadcasting. He had ensured all sides of the conflict were heard. His

radio series 'Democracy Now' aims to educate illiterate people about voter rights.

At a meeting in Melbourne organized by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation and the Australian Communications Authority (16–20 August) 80 delegates agreed proposals to enhance global telecommunications standards. They would be taken forward to the four-yearly meeting in Brazil organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications in 2004

Poverty, Democracy and Development by Dr S. K.Rao. The issues faced by the Commonwealth Expert Group on Development and Democracy. 90 pp.

A Profile of the Public Service of Malaysia—Current Good Practices and New Developments in Public Service.

A Profile of the Public Service in India.

Titles available at: www.publications.thecommonwealth.org