

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *Devastating hurricanes batter Grenada and other Caribbean islands. John Howard wins a fourth term and becomes the most powerful prime minister in Australia for 24 years. President Biya wins another seven years in Cameroon but Commonwealth observers give election the thumbs down. In Namibia a new president is elected to succeed veteran independence leader Sam Nujoma. Next door in Botswana President Mogae wins a second and final term. India and Pakistan edge towards better relations, but President Musharraf hesitates to shed his army uniform. A British court sitting in Pitcairn (pop. 47) sentences the mayor and five other men for rape and indecent assault committed decades ago. Unrest and strike threats hit the Nigerian oil delta. Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai wins the Nobel Peace Prize.*

Pakistan

General Pervez Musharraf went back on his promise to step down as Army Chief of Staff on 31 December 2004 when a bill was passed in the lower house of parliament (15 October 2004) enabling him to remain in the post as well as being president. Opposition MPs boycotted the vote, thumping their desks and tearing up copies of the bill. Ministers said the step was essential for the “stability and integrity” of Pakistan in light of the war on terrorism. The Senate passed the bill on 1 November. In 2003 Musharraf had made a deal with the Islamic opposition alliance that he would take off his uniform in return for constitutional changes giving him powers to sack parliament and dismiss the government.

When the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) met in New York (25 September) the main discussion centred on Pakistan, which had been restored to full membership of the Commonwealth only in May. CMAG urged it to “continue to make progress in the democratic transition, ensuring the supremacy of the constitution and parliament as well as the full implementation of the 17th Amendment to the constitution in letter and spirit, including the issue of the separation of the offices of President and Chief of Army Staff”—a pointed reference to the position of Musharraf.

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His change of mind had put the Commonwealth in a difficult position, since withdrawal of Pakistan's suspension of membership had been on the basis that he would shed his army uniform at the end of the year. Secretary-General Don McKinnon visited Pakistan (22–23 October). He said he acknowledged the position of the Pakistani government that it had decided to take a parliamentary route in dealing with the question of the separation of the offices of president and Chief of Army Staff. But he noted that recent developments in this regard were a matter of Commonwealth concern. He emphasized that the step, although advanced through the parliamentary processes, fell short of the expectations of the CMAG. The Commonwealth expected the supremacy of parliament and the constitution to be upheld at all times and he made it clear that it was for CMAG to determine the Commonwealth position on this issue. After seeing Musharraf McKinnon said he appreciated Pakistan's role in the war on terror and that the country faced the problem of religious extremism.

Musharraf talked with President Bush in New York (22 September). A US official said Bush tried to nudge Pakistan "forward with democratic institutions", but the meeting was mainly about rooting out al-Qaida and the Taliban in the tribal areas. Pakistan air and ground attacks took place in September, but the results were indeterminate. US–Pakistan military cooperation in the region was said to be increasingly close. Pakistan claimed a breakthrough (26 September) with the shooting of its most wanted man, Amjad Hussain Farooqi—held responsible for several assassinations and two attempts on Musharraf's life.

A suicide bomb attack at a mosque in Sialkot, central Pakistan (1 October) that killed 25 Shia Muslims was suspected to be retaliation for Farooqi's death. Six days later two bombs exploded at a rally of Sunnis in Multan, killing 40. Religious and political gatherings were banned after the attacks.

The National Assembly passed a Bill prescribing the death penalty for 'honour killings' of women (26 October). The UN said 8451 cases had been registered since 1998. Under tribal customs killings are carried out for bringing shame to families by marrying for love, committing adultery or earning an inadequate dowry.

Pakistan refused (30 September) to let the UN atomic agency interview disgraced scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, who organized a smuggling network that supplied Iran, Libya and North Korea with nuclear technology. The Supreme Court rejected (10 November) a petition filed by a friend seeking the release of Khan from house detention on health grounds. The government said he was not ill and Khan himself opposed the petition.

Asif Zardari, husband of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, was released in the Supreme Court from detention on bail (23 November). He was first held in 1996 and has faced numerous charges, including the murder of his brother-in-law and corruption. On his release it emerged that the government had been talking for months with leaders of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, of which Zardari was seen as the main leader in his wife's absence. In a UK court hearing (16 August) Zardari's lawyer admitted owning a £4.35 million estate in Surrey, UK, which Pakistan says was bought from corruption proceeds in 1995 when Bhutto was prime minister. She denies involvement.

India

In a reversal of the previous administration's policy the Congress-led government said it would accept aid from G8 countries and other European donors, such as Italy and Scandinavian countries. The BJP government had restricted bilateral aid to six donors—the UK, USA, Russia, Germany, Japan and the EU, trying to suggest that India is a donor rather than a recipient. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh indicated that it was still India's aim to move from needing aid to giving it.

Just before state elections in Maharashtra the BJP launched (8 September 2004) a national 'educational campaign' to highlight census findings that showed the Muslim growth rate outstripping that of the Hindus. The figures put Muslim growth of 29% to 138 million between 1991 and 2001. Hindu growth was 20%. Demographers said the figures had been misleadingly presented. Leading the campaign with a 16-day march, part of the BJP's sharp turn to the right after its election defeat, was the controversial former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Uma Bharti.

Her campaign failed because the ruling Congress party and its allies scored a clear victory in the state elections (17 October 2004), winning 141 seats in the 288-seat assembly, boosting the new Manmohan Singh government. The poll was a blow for Shiv Sena, the local Hindu nationalist party allied to the former ruling BJP.

Singh signalled a change in style by hosting the first press conference by a serving prime minister for more than a decade (5 September). He took a strong line on the boycott of parliament by the BJP, which sought the removal of six allegedly corrupt ministers from the government. Singh said he would draw up a code of conduct on parliamentary stands and the criminalization of Indian politics. In six years as prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee never gave a news conference.

Congress party leader Sonia Gandhi told an audience that included Henry Kissinger and Imran Khan (5 November) that she had never wanted to become prime minister despite winning the May general election. She denied she was 'the power behind the throne'. She said: "[I do] not look at government files or take government decisions".

Trade Minister Kamal Nath said (31 August) the new government planned to double India's share of global trade in five years. It would simplify procedures for exporters and take a more liberal approach on import of capital goods. Trade is growing by 20% per cent a year, but remains 0.8% of the global total. In the three months to June India recorded growth of 7.4%. But in October inflation had climbed in a year to 7.38% in 2003–04.

President Abdul Kalam scrapped (22 September) the controversial anti-terrorism law introduced by the BJP after the US 9/11 attacks. It allowed police to detain people indefinitely. Under the law 100 Muslims had been detained and the Singh government said it was being misused.

A Bangalore-based NGO, the Public Affairs Centre (PAC), reviewed the criminal, financial and education background of all 543 members of the new parliament in Delhi. It found that nearly a quarter face criminal charges—more than half in four northern states. Some states had no MPs facing criminal charges and some parties had none, notably the communist bloc. Most of those facing five or more years' jail belonged to the RJD, which rules Bihar and is the second largest party in the ruling coalition. Two MPs were elected from prison and are still there. PAC chairman

Samuel Paul said: “It is a great irony. . . that the most trustworthy leader we have had in years is forced to tolerate mafia dons in order to stay in office”.

In June and July at least 700 people died from monsoon flooding in India. In Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Bihar the floods were the worst for 10 years.

Bandit Koose Muniswamy Veerappan, 57, who was wanted for 130 murders and had eluded police for two decades, was surrounded and shot dead in a west Tamil Nadu forest (18 October). In 2000 he held film star Rajkuma for 100 days and he had butchered 2000 elephants. A special 500-strong task force had been set up to catch him.

UK junior development minister Gareth Thomas said in Delhi that Britain would “redesign” its £123 million proposals to fight HIV/AIDS in line with the new Indian government’s increased willingness to tackle the disease. The amount disbursed in recent years had been low, but now, the minister said, India had “changed the way it operates and we respond to that”. Under the new government India was less hesitant about discussing sexual health. Richard Feachem, head of the UN-backed Global Fund to fight AIDS, said in Delhi (15 September) that India had overtaken Africa as the area with the largest number of HIV-infected people. S. Y. Quraishi, new head of India’s National AIDS Control Organisation, rejected Feachem’s claims.

After months of talks the USA removed its ban on technology exports to India’s civilian space agency (18 September). It imposed sanctions six years ago when India first declared testing of nuclear warheads. The move came just before Prime Minister Singh had a first meeting with President Bush in New York.

Signs were growing that the brain drain of highly qualified professionals was going into reverse. It was estimated that 35 000 ‘returned non-resident Indians’ attracted by the opportunities offered by India’s booming economy now lived in Bangalore—Asia’s fastest growing city. More than 100 firms from outside India, including Microsoft, Google and Reuters, set up offices in Bangalore in 2003. The city’s infrastructure was overstretched. Traffic jams, power cuts and 60 000 potholes were only part of the problem. A Finnish company opened India’s first mobile phone handset production plant in Bangalore (3 November) with 1000 employees.

In New Delhi a new symbol of the economic growth was the opening in December of the city’s first underground railway. The initial link was from Delhi University to Kashmir Gate. When completed 225 stations will cover 245 km of track. By 2009 New Delhi will be linked to Gurgaon, a satellite town in Haryana state. So far the work has been ahead of timetable. Passengers use smart cards or tokens, not paper tickets.

New census details showed that the proportion of girls to boys among children up to six years old fell from 945 girls (to 1000 boys) in 1991 to 927 girls in 2001. The trend was most pronounced in the fastest-growing and wealthiest states. Another census finding was that Muslim and Christian communities were growing faster than the Hindu majority. Muslims numbered 138 million—36% up on 1991. Falling birth rates and growing migration meant that Parsees were facing extinction. The community was now down to 70 000, against 115 000 in 1941 and could be down to 20 000 by 2020.

An overload of applications in Uttar Pradesh for half a million firearms licences led the state to announce in July that to obtain a single-barrel shotgun two people would need to be sterilized. For a revolver licence the price would be five. Under a

programme backed by USAID, Uttar Pradesh, which is the size of Britain and has 170 million people, had a 2004 target of 930 000 sterilizations.

The UK and India agreed to double the number of direct flights between the two countries within 18 months. Demand for seats far outstrips supply.

In one of the worst outbreaks of terrorist violence in the sensitive northeast for years more than 60 people were killed in Assam and Nagaland in October. Home Minister Shivraj Patil said (4 October) Delhi remained open to unconditional talks with separatist groups. A major problem for Delhi is the half-century-old Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which allows the army to shoot suspected militants on sight. Prime Minister Singh's upper house constituency is in Assam. Manipur was also racked by strikes and protests demanding the repeal of the Act for weeks. The murder in July of a woman picked up by paramilitaries set off the crisis and a visit by Patil in September failed to solve it.

In October the Supreme Court approved a distribution of an extra £170 million to 572 173 survivors of the 1984 disaster at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal—amounting to between £300 and £1200 each. In a 1989 settlement Union Carbide had paid the Indian government £254 million.

The Taj Mahal celebrated its 350th anniversary (27 September) with a huge cultural performance at sunset, release of pigeons and kite-flying contests. But discovery that one of the four minarets was tilting outwards by $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches set off an investigation. An inquiry was also underway to discover why famed Lake Pichola at Udaipur was now only 10% of its normal size. The manager of the Lake Palace Hotel, which was once surrounded by water and now has shrubland on three sides, said the environmental catastrophe had been in the making for 30 years.

A £78 million plan by billionaire Subrata Roy to build floating ecotourist cities on the Sundarbans, the world's biggest mangrove swamp, met stiff opposition from environmentalists. The Sundarbans is a world heritage site.

Indian scientists at the Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species in Hyderabad announced plans in August to use cloning techniques to save the Asiatic lion, which is now found in only a small forest in western India. Just 300 are left. They also want to revive the cheetah population.

India and Pakistan

After Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India met President Pervez Musharraf in New York (25 September 2004) he said: "I believe we have a person with whom we can do business". Musharraf said: "I found Manmohan Singh an extremely sincere man". Singh promised to look at all options and Musharraf said he would implement some of the 72 confidence-building measures Delhi proposed. A month later Musharraf said Pakistan was willing to pursue a negotiated settlement over Kashmir, calling for independence or joint sovereignty. He talked about dividing Kashmir into seven administrative regions and demilitarizing the area. Indian officials reacted coolly, but Singh said (7 November) he would consider any suggestions from Pakistan. He paid his first visit to Kashmir since becoming Prime Minister (17 November), offering unconditional dialogue to "anyone and everyone" who renounced violence. A gunfight took place in Srinagar just before he arrived. Soldiers killed two men in a building overlooking the stadium where he was to speak.

Before Singh's visit he ordered a reduction in troop strengths in Kashmir, which total 500 000, citing a decline in violence. Later he met the new Pakistani Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz, in New Delhi.

Foreign Ministers Natwar Singh of India and Khurshid Kasuri of Pakistan had met earlier in Delhi (6–7 September) but, in what was called an affable meeting, the talk was mainly of 'confidence-building measures'. One result of these contacts seemed to be agreement to withdraw troops from the world's highest battleground, the Siachen glacier in the Himalayas, where sporadic fighting had continued since 1984. A ceasefire had held since November 2003.

Just before the foreign ministers met India carried out a third test launch of its Agni II surface-to-surface missile (29 August). Pakistan was notified a test was pending. On the fifth anniversary of Musharraf taking power by coup Pakistan tested a medium-range nuclear-capable missile (12 October). Each side notified the other that a test was pending.

Bangladesh

The World Bank and Asian Development Bank said (27 September 2004) that floods in July and August—the worst in 15 years—caused £1.2 billion damage and put Bangladesh's 6% growth target for 2004–05 in danger. The government put the damage at three times the Banks' estimates. Final death figures were 766. Severe malnutrition followed. The rainfall in Dhaka on one day was 341 mm—the highest in 50 years. All government offices were closed.

Former foreign minister and independent politician Kamal Hossain said after touring northern areas said he was stunned by the appalling condition of poor people there. Hundreds of people had been reduced to skeletons.

Talks with India on sharing water from the two countries' 54 common rivers ended in Dhaka without major result (15 September). Agreement exists on the Ganges waters, but a long-term deal on other sources is sought. A joint committee was set up to narrow the gaps on highly technical issues within three months.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman said (14 June) that per capita income in 2003–04 had risen by 19.52% in the past two years.

Indian industrial group Tata agreed to invest £1.1 billion in Bangladesh—the biggest single investment in the country. It would build a power plant, steel mill and fertilizer factory.

The government said it would change the marriage laws to give women the right to divorce. Currently only men can initiate proceedings. Islamic parties and priests oppose any change, claiming it would be contrary to the spirit of the Koran.

The first women's football tournament took place in Dhaka in October, despite the objections of hardline Islamic opposition parties, which oppose any outdoor game involving women. One said women's soccer was indecent, but the sports minister called the event epoch-making.

Work began on a programme to destroy 200 000 landmines. Bangladesh and the Maldives are the only South Asian countries which have signed the UN Anti-Personnel Treaty. Work began (2 November) with demolition of 750 mines inside a cantonment near Dhaka under a project funded by Canada. The programme would be completed by February 2005.

To counter appalling traffic congestion in Dhaka 800 illegal cycle rickshaws were seized (13 October). Of 400 000 in the city only 80 000 are licensed.

The decapitation by axe of regional daily newspaper editor Dipankar Chakrabarty in Sherpur brought to four the number of journalists killed in Bangladesh in 2004. Reporters sans Frontières said more journalists suffered physical attack and received death threats in Bangladesh than in any other country during 2002, 2003 and the first months of 2004.

Namibia began in September repatriating 400 recently arrived Bangladeshi textile workers because of employment conditions in a Malaysian-owned factory near Windhoek

Sri Lanka

In an attempt to restart the peace talks which had broken down in April Norwegian deputy foreign minister Vida Helgesen visited Colombo (25 July 2004) to talk to the government and the Tamil Tiger rebels. He accused both sides of complacency. Norwegian negotiator Erik Solheim tried to bring the two sides together for new talks (17 September) without success. Days later activist Thambithurai Sivakumaran was shot dead and protesters from a pro-government party paraded the body outside the Norwegian embassy in Colombo. They blamed the rebels for the shooting.

New government proposals to restart peace talks were rejected, but the Tigers put forward an alternative plan in mid-November after talks between Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Petersen and Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. President Chandrika Kumaratunga said the government was totally committed to the peace process.

Japanese peace envoy Yasushi Akashi spent a week talking to both parties in late October—his eighth visit to the island. He said he believed the government was showing some flexibility. As Sri Lanka's biggest aid donor, Japan was actively supporting the Norwegian peace efforts. In 2003 it pledged more than £2 billion if the talks progressed.

The US-based Human Rights Watch, citing Unicef, said the Tamil Tigers had forcibly recruited 3000 child soldiers under 18 after the ceasefire in February 2002.

High court judge Sarath Ambepitiya, known for tough sentencing that once included 200 years handed to Prabhakaran, was shot dead (21 November).

The Ceylon Workers Congress, which has eight MPs, joined the United People's Freedom Alliance coalition (10 September), giving the government a majority for the first time since the April general election

Maldives

In the wake of the riots and declaration of a state of emergency in August the European Parliament called on EU member states to suspend all non-humanitarian aid and impose a travel ban against Maldivian officials entering the EU. The government regretted the move and said it remained committed to constitutional reform. President Abdul Gayoom shuffled his cabinet (1 September 2004) and gave up the defence and finance portfolios he had held since taking office in 1978. When the state of emergency was lifted (10 October) Commonwealth Secretary-General Don

McKinnon said those detained should have full access to the due process of law. He sent two experts to give judicial and electoral help and then himself visited the country.

Malaysia

Former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, 57, was released after nearly six years in jail (2 September 2004). The step followed a 2:1 high court decision overturning Anwar's conviction and nine-year sentence for sodomy. The court said the lower court's reasoning has been "deeply flawed". Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi won praise for not interfering in the judicial process, but former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who dismissed Ibrahim from his government in 1998, said he still believed Anwar was guilty: "I am not going to lose any sleep. . . My conscience is clear".

The ruling United Malays National Organisation (UNMO) refused to readmit Anwar to its ranks (14 September) and a day later the high court unanimously upheld a second conviction, for abuse of power, which meant he could not run for political office until 2008. The next general election is in 2009. On his release Anwar went at once to Germany for emergency spinal surgery. Back in Malaysia he said he would restart a campaign for democratic reforms and racial equality.

In his maiden budget speech as finance minister Prime Minister Abdullah (10 September) imposed VAT from 2007 and increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco. The government would finance smaller infrastructure projects and promote grassroots development. Growth would slow to 6%. In a liberalization of capital markets the budget aimed to ease foreign ownership limits. In his first address as party leader Abdullah signalled to the UNMO annual convention (23 September) some unwinding of the affirmative action programme for the ethnic Malay majority, in order to increase Malaysia's international competitiveness. The *bumiputra* (sons of the soil) policy favouring ethnic Malays and indigenous peoples was introduced in 1970 after race riots. It aimed to narrow the gap with the economically better-off Chinese minority.

Singapore

A month after becoming Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong appointed Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Senga as 'population czar' to stimulate population growth. In 2003 the birth rate fell to 1.26 babies per woman of childbearing age and more Singaporeans are dying or leaving the country than are being born. The current 50 000 births a year are not considered enough to sustain the labour force needed to preserve living standards.

Activists burned a Singaporean flag in Taiwan (1 October) because Singapore had said at the UN that it would be dangerous for Taiwan to pursue formal independence from China. Taiwanese Foreign Minister Mark Cheng called Singapore "the size of a piece of snot".

Brunei Darussalam

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, head of state and government, reopened parliament for the first time in 20 years. He warned the 21 appointed members against

making 'mistakes'. He signed a new constitution (29 September 2004), allowing limited elections for the first time in 42 years. Up to 15 members would be elected in an expanded 45-seat legislature. All nine cabinet ministers would still be appointed. Parliament would be mainly advisory and the Sultan could veto any legislation. Elections were banned in 1962 after a revolt against the royal family. In 1984 the Sultan abolished parliament after Brunei gained independence from the UK.

At the marriage of the crown prince, Billah Bolkiah, to the 17-year-old half-Swiss Sarah Salleh 5000 guests dined from gold plates in the 1788-room royal palace (20 September). Afterwards family and guests drove round the capital in 100 limousines.

Hong Kong

A record number of voters turned out (12 September 2004) for the legislative council election—55.6%—but, against expectations, the Democratic Party gained just one seat while the pro-democracy campaign added three to reach 25 of the 60 seats—far short of the hoped for majority. Pro-Beijing candidates increased their directly elected seats to 12 from seven. Some democrats blamed intimidation from the mainland that included a propaganda campaign reminding Hong Kong of its subordination to Beijing's economic, political and military power, and military displays in April and August. However, new pro-democracy members included several outspoken and popular candidates who were likely to produce a more lively legco. Among them was Albert Cheng, who quit as radio chat show host in May after being threatened because of his views.

Reports published by the think-tank Civic Exchange in November said that air pollution was threatening the region's economic growth as well as people's health. Smog was increasingly shrouding the delta. Greenpeace accused the Hong Kong government of hiding the facts.

Papua New Guinea

Lawyers acting for indigenous tribes wrote to British Development Secretary Hilary Benn in mid-2004 claiming £25 million compensation for backing a project that ruined their ancestral lands, poisoned their water and made them ill. It was alleged a company owned by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) had caused destruction to a big oil palm plantation in Oro province. The scheme, begun 26 years ago, involves the clearing of rainforest and use of chemicals. Friends of the Earth back the claim.

Fiji Islands

Vice-President Ratu Jope Seniloli was jailed for four years (5 August 2004) for taking an illegal oath to serve as interim president after the 2000 coup that ousted the Chaudhry government. Ratu Ovini Bokini was appointed chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs in succession to Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who was removed from office in a dispute over whether his term expired in 2006.

A court martial (6 August) sentenced 21 soldiers to between three and six years in jail for involvement in the coup. Multi-Ethnic Affairs Minister George Shiu Raj, the only ethnic Indian member of the cabinet, resigned following a report from the Auditor-General that he had overspent government funds on a visit to India. Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said he had been one of his most effective ministers.

Vanuatu

Confusion followed a surprise move by Prime Minister Serge Vohor and Taiwan Foreign Minister Chen Tan-sun announcing in Taipei that diplomatic relations had been established between their two countries (3 November 2004). Only two months earlier newly elected Vohor had reassured Beijing of Vanuatu's commitment to the One China principle, and after the Taipei announcement China said it had been told Vanuatu was not switching relations from Beijing to Taipei. The move, if confirmed, would increase Taiwan's formal ties to 27. Three countries had switched recognition to China in the past three years.

After three rounds of voting a 58-member electoral college elected Kalkot Mataskelekele as president (16 August). In April he had been defeated in the election of President Maseng Nalo, who was removed after a criminal conviction came to light.

Nauru

The government asked the Pacific Islands Forum to help the island weather its financial crisis. In response the Forum sent a team which said it would aid the government with its wage bill and provide help with budget and financial reforms (27 September 2004). It was a rare intervention in the affairs of a member state.

A few days later President Ludwig Scotty dissolved parliament and declared a state of emergency. The new crisis arose because Health Minister Kleren Keke refused to leave parliament (30 September 2004) on being suspended for holding dual Nauru and Australian nationality. The suspension lost the government its majority so Scotty took absolute power until polling. In the election (23 October) he won a majority and the crisis ended. The Commonwealth and the Pacific Islands Forum sent a joint team of five to observe the poll

Earlier an Indian group which owns property across Asia said (3 May) it would pay the country's £97 million debt and save it from bankruptcy. In return it would take over the remnants of Nauru's overseas property, including hotels in Sydney and Melbourne. The group would manage and restructure the properties while Nauru remained owner. The deal would fit with the Australian offer of technical help to work out the island's finances.

Tuvalu

Prime Minister Saufatu Sopoanga lost a vote of confidence in parliament by eight votes to six in October 2004. Former deputy prime minister Maatia Toafa took over with eight votes to seven.

Kiribati

President Anote Tong accused China of trying to destabilize his government (21 August 2004). He had switched diplomatic recognition from China to Taiwan and forced the closure of a Chinese satellite tracking station on the main atoll, Tarawa. But three Chinese stayed at the station and the former Chinese embassy remained occupied.

Solomon Islands

A riot at Honiara central prison led to the arrest of 176 prisoners and heavy damage (10 August 2004). The prisoners demanded release under a reconciliation and pardoning process. Agriculture Minister Alex Bartlett was arrested (2 September) and accused of demanding money with menaces and of arson following the 2000 coup. He was leader of the Malaita Eagle Force ethnic militia at the time. Former prime minister Billy Hill was elected leader of the opposition after John Martin Garo defected to the government and became minister of state.

Pitcairn Island

A British court sitting in the island, made up of three New Zealand judges, sentenced three men to terms ranging from two to six years for raping under-age girls (25 October 2004). After the month-long trial three others convicted of indecently assaulting girls were ordered to perform hundreds of hours of community service. The three sentenced to serve in a jail they had helped to build included Steve Christian, the mayor, and his son. Some of the crimes dated back 40 years and one of the guilty was 78. Of the 55 charges brought, 32 were proved. The men argued there was a culture of under-aged sex on Pitcairn. None of the women victims still lives on the island. They testified by video link from Auckland. The guilty were given leave to appeal to the Privy Council in London and the sentences were suspended. The men claim British rule was never accepted by Pitcairn, which was the refuge of the mutineers aboard *HMS Bounty* in 1789. The island's population is now down to 47 and those convicted represent half the island's adult male population. Pitcairn has no airstrip or quay so the judicial team—the three judges, four prosecutors, three defence lawyers, two court officials and two Defence Ministry officials—made a six-day air and sea journey that ended in longboats. After Steve Christian was convicted the seven-member governing council replaced him as mayor by his sister Brenda, the island's police officer.

Norfolk Island

Leith Buffet, one of the nine members of the legislative council, was arrested for murdering his father, Ivens, the Land and Environment Minister, who was shot in his office (19 July 2004). The murder was only the second in 150 years. About half the population are related to descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers who migrated from Pitcairn.

Cook Islands

After general elections (7 September 2004) petitions were filed contesting results in 13 seats, delaying the outcome. Provisional results gave the ruling Democratic Alliance Party 14 and the opposition Cook Islands Party led by Geoffrey Henry nine. Turnout was 81.6%.

Australia

Prime Minister John Howard, 65, was elected for a fourth term in a general election (10 October 2004). By winning an outright majority in the senate his government took control of both houses and he became the most powerful prime minister in 24 years. The Labor Party led by Mark Latham lost several key seats to the Liberal–National Party coalition. Its defeat was the second-worst result in its history. After the election Howard kept his cabinet almost unchanged.

In the campaign the issue of Australia's role in Iraq was played down. Latham pledged to pull its troops out by Christmas if he was elected, but he promised long-term commitment to the US alliance. He also vowed to seek reconciliation with the Aborigines and to hold a referendum to become a republic. The election was fought against a background of economic prosperity, with unemployment at its lowest for 30 years and growth hitting 4.1%. Howard's campaign was mostly based on domestic issues. At the outset of the campaign Treasurer Peter Costello announced (30 August) that he would not challenge Howard for the leadership during the next three years if the government won.

During the campaign a car bomb exploded outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta (9 September) killing nine people and injuring 182. A group linked to al-Qaida was blamed. Australia said (20 September) it would set up six counter-terrorist centres in southeast Asia and federal police teams to be deployed in the region at short notice. The plans produced lukewarm responses from Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia.

After the election pledges on security it was announced that unmanned spy planes would patrol oil and gas resources offshore. Two new patrol boats would cover the North West Shelf off Western Australia.

Before Howard called the election a former senior civil servant Mike Scafton contradicted the prime minister's version of the 'children overboard' incident in 2001 when the navy intercepted a ship carrying asylum seekers. Later Howard admitted he was wrong. Scafton said he told Howard three times there was no evidence to support the story, but he repeated it during the 2001 election campaign.

Sea boundary talks with East Timor broke down (27 October) despite an earlier promise by both sides to do a deal by Christmas.

Australia signed a free trade deal with Thailand (5 July) that could pave the way for free trade talks between Australia and New Zealand and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

To much local regret, shareholders of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, News Ltd, voted (26 October) to shift the group's corporate domicile and main market listing from Adelaide to the USA. Murdoch began his career in Adelaide after his father's death. Now 73, he became a US citizen in 1985. News Ltd controls about 75% of the

Australian newspaper market. The government said (17 October) it would push ahead with changes to media ownership laws, hitherto blocked by the Senate. It wanted to allow more foreign ownership and to see another big operator emerge.

The Sydney suburb of Mosman became in November the first place in the world to ban smoking at pavement cafes. Bondi and other famous beaches were already no-smoking zones and all Australia was on course to phase out smoking in pubs and clubs by 2007. Twenty per cent of Australians smoke compared with 25% in Britain.

New Zealand

Former Associate Maori Affairs Minister Tariana Turia, who had been dismissed for refusing to vote against a Bill asserting Crown ownership of the coastal areas, won a seat on North Island for the newly formed Maori Party, of which she is co-leader. She got 90% of the vote (10 July 2004).

Race Relations Minister Trevor Mallard attacked Turia for remarks on Maori teenage pregnancy (4 November). Among 13- to 17-year-olds pregnancy is 26 per thousand—more than five times that of non-Maori. Turia said she “was intolerant of the excessive focus on controlling our fertility. Maybe one of our policy goals in the Maori Party should be to go forth and multiply.” Mallard accused Turia of encouraging teenagers to get pregnant.

The two suspected Mossad agents jailed in Auckland in July for trying to procure a passport were released for good behaviour and deported (29 September).

Floods and small earthquakes hit the Bay of Plenty in mid-July when 25 mm of rain fell in 48 hours. Two people died.

Caribbean Hurricanes

Several Commonwealth countries were struck in early September 2004 by a series of hurricanes. The severest, Hurricane Ivan, was the most powerful in the region since 1995. Worst hit was Grenada, where 39 people were killed and 90% of the buildings destroyed or badly damaged. About 100 000 people were made homeless and losses were put at £500 million. The coca and nutmeg crops were almost destroyed. Many historic buildings were wrecked in the capital, St George’s, including the governor’s mansion and prime minister’s residence. Prime Minister Keith Mitchell was taken to safety by a British frigate and declared an emergency. Two hundred troops were sent from Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean countries. The EU gave £3 million in aid.

Jamaica was also badly hit, with 15 killed and extensive flooding. The tourist resorts escaped. In Cayman Islands damage and flooding was severe, but high building standards ensured casualties were few. People sheltered in caves. Trinidad and Tobago was struck, but damage was relatively light. Worst hit in the Caribbean were the non-Commonwealth countries of Haiti and Dominican Republic, with more than 2000 people killed.

Montserrat

An independent Scientific Advisory Committee met on the island at the end of September 2004 to discuss the status of the Soufrière Hills volcano, which erupted in

1995 and has been restless ever since. Of the 10 500 population 7000 were evacuated and the rest live in the northern part of the island. The committee examined evidence to decide what hazards remained and if the level of risk of further eruptions had reduced.

Grenada

Fourteen members of the revolutionary government jailed after the USA invaded the island in 1983 began an appeal at the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court sitting in St Lucia (22 November 2004). They contested the legality and constitutionality of their 1986 trial. Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard and others were originally sentenced to death for their role in the coup and execution of prime minister Maurice Bishop. Coard's wife was freed in 2000 to undergo cancer treatment.

Jamaica

Hugh Shearer, of the Jamaica Labour Party, who became prime minister in 1967 and was swept away in the 1972 general election by the People's National Party, died aged 81 (5 July 2004). When his party returned to power in 1980 he served as deputy prime minister and foreign minister until 1989.

St Kitts–Nevis

A Commonwealth team of four, led by David Thompson of Barbados, a former Opposition leader there, was present at the general election (25 October 2004). It found the election was credible but said reforms were needed in voter registration, the identification of voters, balance in media reporting and demarcation of constituencies.

Belize

Seven ministers resigned because Prime Minister Said Musa refused to dismiss Finance Minister Ralph Fonseca. They said Fonseca was responsible for a sharp rise in the national debt and for financial mismanagement scandals in the public sector. Musa decided to take over the finance portfolio himself and the ministers agreed to return (18 August 2004).

Canada

Prime Minister Paul Martin's minority government averted a no-confidence vote on his spending plans (8 October 2004). The crisis came over four navy submarines bought from the UK, which had mothballed them in 1994. One, the *Chicoutimi*, developed an electrical fault on its maiden voyage to Nova Scotia and caught fire 120 miles off Ireland. British warships went to the rescue in atrocious weather, but a Canadian lieutenant died and several of the crew went to hospital. The submarine was towed back to Scotland and the other three were temporarily withdrawn from service in Canada. The opposition in Ottawa accused the government of buying

second-rate submarines. A compromise between government and opposition avoided the no-confidence vote 30 minutes before it was to take place.

At a meeting of provincial premiers and territorial leaders Prime Minister Martin announced a £525 million package to improve the health of the indigenous people (14 September 2004). Health care services for their communities are said to be shameful. Inuit people in the far north wait days to see a doctor from the south and food is twice as expensive in the region. Suicide rates are six times the national average.

Privacy Commissioner Jennifer Stoddart warned in her annual report (5 November) that personal freedoms were being eroded by the 'war on terror'. She said US pressure on the government to share information about people travelling to Canada meant individuals could be singled out and treated unfairly.

Canadian immigration officials reported that the number of US citizens visiting their website rose sixfold the day after President George Bush won the election. Inquiries rocketed from the average 20 000 to 115 016.

A Toronto court approved Canada's first same-sex divorce (14 September). The judge ruled that the definition in the Divorce Act of spouses as a man and a woman was unconstitutional.

Nigeria

Threats of disruption in the Nigerian oil industry grew in the last months of 2004. The rising activities of the most assertive of self-styled resistance leaders in the Delta, Alhaji Mujahid Dobuko-Asari, disturbed international oil markets. Asari, a convert to Islam, leads the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, known as the Egbesu Boys after the Ijaw god of war. The area had been troubled since the 2003 elections when the polls in the region were condemned over ballot rigging and intimidation. Asari said: "We are fighting to control the resources of the Ijaw people. Nigeria is a fraudulent creation and the oil companies are evil collaborators." The Ijaw form a majority in the delta, and pipelines carrying half of all Nigeria's oil run through Asari's territory. A three-day general strike over a 25% rise in oil costs in Nigeria in mid-October—the third in 18 months—shut down much of the country and drove world oil prices to a record high. Another strike called for 16 November was suspended because the government agreed to cut the fuel price by 6%. When Shell went to court to try to block the strike union leaders called the oil giant "an enemy of the Nigerian people".

Asari called an offensive for 1 October named Operation Locust Feast, but President Olusegun Obasanjo met him in Abuja two days earlier and after talks he said he was calling a ceasefire.

Amnesty International said (16 September) up to 500 people had been killed in clashes between rival armed gangs in Port Harcourt. Fifty more deaths came a few days later when a pipeline exploded near Lagos as thieves tried to siphon oil from it.

The House of Representatives voted (1 September) to exclude the US oil services company Halliburton from new business in Nigeria until the end of an investigation into a £100 million alleged bribery case involving a Nigerian subsidiary. Halliburton was headed by Dick Cheney before he became US vice-president.

To quell rumours that he was stealing money from the state, in November Obasanjo declared publicly for the first time the income from his private farm—

£170 000 a month. His farm is diverse and includes a conference centre where a regional summit on the Cote d'Ivoire crisis was held.

Obasanjo said at a conference of African Anglican Bishops in Lagos (27 October) that homosexuality was “un-Biblical, unnatural and definitely un-African”. He admired the bishops’ principled stand against the “totally unacceptable tendency towards same-sex marriages”.

The Swiss authorities decided to unfreeze most of the £275 million funds deposited by the dictator Sani Abacha. They would monitor the use of the money to ensure that it was dedicated to health care, education and infrastructure projects, as Nigeria had promised.

Locusts swarming across West Africa reached northern Nigeria in August and devastated farmland in Zamfara state. It was the first invasion for 15 years.

In a letter to President Obasanjo, author Chinua Achebe rejected a national award because of the “dangerous” state of affairs in the country. Achebe was scathing about the political turmoil in his home state, Anambra, where the run-up to local council elections had been marked for months by unrest. Governor Chris Ngige fell out with his political backer in 2003 and was forced to resign at gunpoint.

Sierra Leone

Two years after the end of the civil war UN peacekeepers handed back control of security in Freetown to local forces. The Security Council extended the peacekeeping mandate of the UN mission until 30 June 2005 (17 September). The mission relinquished security responsibility for the last of the country’s four provinces to government forces. At its peak the UN mission was 17 000 strong, the world’s largest. Now it was 8000.

Sierra Leone embarked on a seven-year programme to set up a stock exchange. The Commonwealth Secretariat began helping to create a regulatory framework in a project funded by the World Bank, IMF and donor governments.

Eugene Davies, chairman of the electoral commission, resigned (1 September). He said the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party had tampered with the results of May’s local elections—the first for 30 years. It had been thought they were free and fair.

Ghana

Ghana became the 14th country to reach its completion point under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative (13 July 2004). Total debt relief from all its creditors amounted to £1.7 billion. ‘HIPC benefit’ signs were beginning to appear on new school buildings and clinics and more money was being spent on roads and electrification. Of the 14 countries that had qualified for relief, four are Commonwealth members—Guyana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

Cameroon

Widespread charges of fraud and rigging preceded the presidential elections (11 October 2004). Paul Biya, president for 22 years and now 71, sought another seven-year term. His opponent, as in earlier elections, was John Fru Ndi, leader of the

Social Democratic Front, but 14 other parties joined the contest. A 10-party coalition also put up a candidate, Adamou Ndam Njoya. Biya was declared the winner by the Supreme Court with 70% of the estimated 3.7 million votes. Ndi took 17% and Njoya 4.5%.

The Commonwealth sent a 16-member observer mission from as many countries, headed by former Canadian prime minister Joe Clark. Its guarded conclusion was that “in a number of key areas the electoral process lacked the necessary credibility”. Many people who wanted to vote were not on the register. The report said, “we believe that the intention of those who voted was reflected in the result”. But it added: “no one can quantify the numbers of those who have become disenchanted and disengaged from the democratic process, particularly young people. This problem needs to be addressed.”

The group made many recommendations for systemic reform, including such matters as the need for an independent management election body, separation of the dividing lines between the state and ruling party, and separation between political parties and election managers.

Two calls for specific Commonwealth action were made: new means of cooperation between the Secretariat and La Francophonie, other international organizations and donor governments “to help Cameroon strengthen its democracy”; and “the Secretariat should actively promote awareness of the growing body of ‘best practice’ by African election management bodies”.

Biya is an often reclusive ruler little seen in public and hardly known to ordinary Cameroonians. He is said to have held only two cabinet meetings in five years. Cameroon sat on the Security Council during the run-up to the Iraq war and has warm relations with the USA, being in the group of western African countries that provides 15% of US crude imports.

The formal transfer under an International Court of Justice ruling of the disputed Bokassi peninsular from Nigeria did not place take as expected on 15 September. The Nigerian Defence Minister said there were “technical difficulties” over the finer details of the sea border. Reports said some inhabitants were ready to take up arms because they did not want to live under Cameroonian rule.

Uganda

President Yoweri Museveni said (29 September 2004) Uganda was ready to move on from the non-party system and he would campaign to introduce multiparty politics. Elections were due in 2006. The Constitutional Court overturned the law preventing political parties from taking part in elections (18 November 2004). Parties had six months to register. A new opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change, was formed, merging the Reform Agenda, the Parliamentary Advocacy Platform and the National Democratic Forum. Several MPs had joined to build what it was said would be “a strong democratic mass organization independent of any of its present and future leaders”.

Jotham Tumwesigye retired after eight years as anti-corruption tsar. He said no one had dared to tempt him with a bribe, but despite investigating 10 ministers none had been charged. He said the job had been stressful and he had had enough.

Kenya

Environmentalist and human rights campaigner Wangari Maathai, who founded the women's Green Belt Movement that planted more than 30 million trees in 20 countries, became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (8 October 2004). It was also the first time the Nobel committee had rewarded attempts to improve the environment as a step towards peace. The Committee said: "Peace on Earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment". In campaigning days, Professor Maathai, now Deputy Environment Minister, was several times imprisoned and was once was clubbed unconscious by riot police in Nairobi.

Novelist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o was given a hero's welcome in Nairobi on his return in August from 22 years in exile. But only days later he and his wife were attacked in their apartment by four thieves. Ngugi is professor of English and comparative literature at University of California, Irvine.

The UN Security Council met in Nairobi in November—only the fourth time in its history that it had gathered outside New York. The objective was to achieve a final, comprehensive settlement between the Sudanese government and the southern Sudan People's Liberation Movement and so end the 20-year war in Sudan. It did not achieve that, but instead got a memorandum of understanding by the parties to sign the agreement by 31 December.

Uhuru Kenyatta, acting chairman of the former ruling Kenya Africa National Union (KANU) and son of the first president, apologized at a party meeting in Nairobi for the wrongs committed in power (13 September). KANU was the only legal party for much of the 1980s. Kenyatta listed many acts, but without naming former President Daniel arap Moi or anyone else, and said guilt was always individual and not collective. They needed to wipe the slate clean.

The officer in charge of Maru prison, eastern Kenya, and his deputy were suspended after seven inmates died in September, taking the total of deaths since January to 47. The prison, designed to take 500 inmates, holds 1400, mostly on remand. Human rights commissioner Tirop Kitur was shocked at the conditions when he visited the prison.

British farmer John Palmer Martin was killed and a guard badly injured when a gang of eight men dressed as policemen raided his farm 55 miles north of Nairobi in August. One theory was that he was a victim of the growing dispute between Masai pastoralists and farmers who own valuable land in central and western Kenya. The Masai case is based on a 1904 treaty the government says may now be worthless.

On the day an international anti-graft conference was opened in Nairobi by President Mwai Kibaki (12 October) a UN Economic Commission for Africa report ranked Kenya, along with Cameroon and Nigeria, as one of the most corrupt and least well run countries on the continent. In his speech Kibaki called the perpetrators of corruption, unpatriotic, selfish, greedy and "lazy opportunists". Britain gave Kenya £10 million in September to boost the fight against corruption. The money would be entrusted to an independent manager.

Wildlife Service Director Evans Mukolwe was suspended over allegations that 520 of nearly 1000 trainee rangers were employed on the recommendations of politicians.

Rampant commercial poaching in national parks of dik-diks, impala, kudu and zebra for bushmeat had reduced Kenya's wildlife by 60% in 20 years, according to

conservationist Richard Leakey. In Tsavo National Park alone 42 000 snares had been recovered since 1999.

Malawi

In his first 100 days as President, Bingu wa Mutharika surprised opposition and government alike by a tough stand on corruption. He had been expected to continue the policies of his predecessor Bakili Muluzi, but instead he said he would do things his way, warning “all corrupt officials that very soon they will have nowhere to hide”. He ordered the arrest of the secretary-general of the ruling United Democratic Front, Humphrey Mvula, a close aide to Muluzi, for alleged corruption and state prosecutors said six former ministers would be charged with embezzling state funds.

Tanzania

After 30 years’ planning the first electric power from natural gas began to flow (15 July 2004). The £130 million gas-to-electricity project had involved building a 225 km natural gas pipeline from Songo Songo Island in the south to Dar es Salaam. The end of over-reliance on costly hydroelectric power was in sight. Experts estimated Songo Songo had natural gas reserves to last 20–50 years. Under 10% of the population have electricity. Most use firewood for energy, endangering forests.

Plans were launched in September for a huge marine park in Mnazi Bay and the Ruvuma River estuary, which has 30 000 inhabitants. The park would match the goals of conservation with the needs of the fishermen living off the sea. The community would be a partner, said the warden, but some fishermen were unhappy about the concept.

The Zanzibar parliament adopted a flag to be flown within the archipelago, but not at international forums (11 October). It will be the first time Zanzibar has flown its own flag since uniting with Tanganyika to form Tanzania in 1964.

Mozambique

Brazil cancelled 95% of debt owed by Mozambique (£185 million) and called on other nations to follow its example for poorer nations.

Zambia

The 40th anniversary of independence (24 October) was marked by several pointers to economic improvement. Copper output continued to rise and so did world prices. Electricity was now being exported to Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. A bumper maize crop led to appeals for help from neighbouring Angola, DR Congo, Malawi and Zimbabwe. A tourism drive was bringing results as the country won awards for becoming a top international attraction. And exploration for gold began following discovery of large deposits in Eastern Province. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa led daylong independence celebrations at

which President Levy Mwanawasa honoured 40 Zambians, including the first president, Kenneth Kaunda.

India's largest copper refiner, Vedanta Resources, signed up (18 August) to a deal giving it 51% of Konkola Copper Mines. Since Anglo-American gave up Konkola in 2002 output had soared by 80%, turning its operations into profit. Mwanawasa said Vedanta would help revive the copperbelt and the entire Zambian economy.

Mwanawasa and President Sam Nujoma of Namibia commissioned (16 May) the new multi-million pound Katima Mulilo bridge that would link Zambia and other landlocked SADC countries to Walvis Bay harbour and become an important entry point to Zambia for trade and tourism.

Zambia called on Zimbabwe to hand over the William Reid Dick statue of David Livingstone, which has stood since the 1930s on the Zimbabwe side of the Victoria Falls. Zambians say it was once on their side and point out that, because of affection for his memory, they have never changed the name of the city of Livingstone, which in 2005 celebrates its centenary. Two years ago the statue was vandalized by Zimbabwean thugs, who saw it as a sign of colonialism.

The bridge over the Falls, built 99 years ago, was said to be in danger of collapse and causing concern to Zambians, who said Zimbabwe had failed to enforce safety rules on the size of lorries it will bear. Instead of five-tonne lorries 37-tonne vehicles were regularly crossing.

Mwanawasa sacked his vice-president, Pastor Never Mumba, because he called a press conference while the president was abroad to announce that opposition parties were being funded from the Congo.

Local elections were postponed until 2006 to coincide with national and presidential elections because setting up polling stations and apparatus in rural areas would cost £45 million—money better spent on roads and hospitals, said the local government minister.

British High Commissioner Tim David said (25 May) he had been shocked by conditions in the jails, where 90 prisoners were crowded in cells designed for 20.

Former president Chiluba, discharged in a case of theft from state coffers (13 September), was re-arrested on six more counts. He was now facing a total of 168.

Ex-president Kaunda donated to the National Museums Board one of his famous white handkerchiefs which he used as a symbol of peace and blessing to the people of Southern Rhodesia in 1959–60 after his imprisonment in the then Salisbury.

Zimbabwe

Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change was acquitted in the high court by Judge Paddington Garwe (15 October) of trying to assassinate President Robert Mugabe. Although he still faced a second treason charge for calling a strike, his passport was returned. On his first trip abroad for three years he set off to put his case to regional leaders. He went to Mauritius to meet Prime Minister Paul Berenger, current chairman of SADC, which had in August adopted a plan to ensure that the 2005 Zimbabwe elections and others in Africa were

properly carried out. He saw President Mbeki of South Africa and put Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Tanzania on his itinerary.

In Johannesburg the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) said it would send a delegation to Zimbabwe to discuss the elections. The Zimbabwean government said the visit was “not acceptable”. The delegation said it was outraged and did not need permission to make a fact-finding visit. Zimbabwe Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge said the government would send home any SADC or African Union observers if it believed they were pro-Western.

Parliament rushed through in August the Non-Governmental Organizations Bill—requiring all charity organizations to register with the government or be shut down, have officers jailed and assets seized on the demand of the state-controlled NGO Council. Local groups would be banned from receiving funds from abroad. A key clause said “no foreign non-governmental organization shall be registered if its sole or principal objects involve or include issues of governance”.

Members of an increasingly militant movement, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), marched in Harare in protest at the proposed law (1 September) and 44 were arrested. Another group marched the 250 miles from Bulawayo and 48 were arrested (28 September).

The Supreme Court again upheld the law (11 November) used to seize farms owned by white farmers under the land reform programme. A farmer who lost his farm two years ago had argued that the law was unconstitutional.

Farmer Roy Bennett, one of three white opposition MPs, was arrested as he tried to leave the country. Parliament had recommended (28 October) a one-year sentence for physically pushing the Justice Minister during a debate.

Plans were announced to raise the number of youth camps from six to 10. The opposition claim the camps are used to indoctrinate young people to intimidate government opponents and that the expansion was timed in advance of the elections.

The national airline started flying twice a week to Beijing as China strengthened its economic influence in Zimbabwe. Floods of Chinese goods were coming into the country and big construction deals going to Chinese firms. Up to 9000 Chinese were said to be working on power stations, bridges, airports and rebuilding the South African border post at Beit Bridge. China is stepping up its presence elsewhere in Africa, from Botswana to Sudan.

A court dropped charges against four directors of the banned *Daily News* (20 September). The magistrate said there was not enough evidence to show they had published the paper illegally.

Mugabe flew to Equatorial Guinea (6 November) to discuss with President Obiang Nguema the suspected coup plot by foreign mercenaries to topple the regime there. British mercenary leader Simon Mann was now held imprisoned in Harare for seven years. Nineteen other plotters held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, were jailed (26 November). They included Nick du Toit, a South African former special forces soldier, who received 34 years

As British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw walked along the UN corridors trailed by TV cameras during the General Assembly opening meetings he suddenly found himself confronting a seated Robert Mugabe holding out his hand (28 September). The two shook. It was not clear whether either recognized the other but the handshake was destined to become a piece of history.

South Africa

A report from the International Crisis Group (19 September 2004) entitled *Blood and Soil* said South Africa risked increased rural violence unless it pushed harder towards its target to redistribute white-owned farmland. A comparison was made with Zimbabwe's failure to tackle land reform in the 1980s. In South Africa so far only 3% of farmland had been transferred to blacks. The government goal was 30% by 2015.

In an attack on Anglo-American on the ruling African National Congress website President Mbeki accused it and other internationally oriented companies of sitting on "unusually high cash or liquid reserves, instead on investing in South Africa". He asked: "Is it now saying that democratic South Africa presents the business world and our country with higher political risk than did apartheid South Africa?"

A corruption trial expected to last months and involve 100 witnesses from 10 countries opened in Durban (11 October). Schabir Shaik, friend and financial adviser to Deputy President Jacob Zuma, was alleged by the prosecution to have bribed Zuma to manipulate aspects of South Africa's purchase of warships, aircraft and other arms from Europe.

The first international conference on obesity held in Africa took place in Sun City in November. The meeting heard that more than half of black women in South Africa were overweight, an epidemic like that in the USA. Diseases such as diabetes were as grave a problem as malnutrition. The spread of Western eating habits was increasing the problem. Partly the reason was that South Africans associate slimness with HIV/AIDS.

Donald Card, once a policeman employed to decode notebooks confiscated from Nelson Mandela when he was in Robben Island, handed two books back to Mandela at an emotional ceremony in Johannesburg in September. By 1971 he had lost faith in the apartheid regime and hidden the books. Now they had been recovered and given to the Nelson Mandela Foundation. They contained the neatly written drafts of 79 letters. The books' contents would remain private until Mandela had read them.

Soweto township celebrated the centenary of its founding with themed tourist tours that tell visitors the story of the people's struggle against apartheid. Some locals did not like Soweto being treated like a game reserve, but most welcomed the revenue the tours produced.

An outbreak of bird flu led to the suspension of the ostrich export industry worth £100 million a year. A cull of 30 000 ostriches began in Eastern Cape province (9 August). Hong Kong and Singapore banned all South African poultry products.

The Pan African Parliament held its first meeting at a conference centre near Johannesburg (16 September) with 46 countries represented. President Abdul Kalam of India attended the session opening. The House will have no legislative powers for the first five years. Its aim is to encourage good governance and accountability.

Sir Mark Thatcher, allegedly linked to a coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea by contributing funds, was released from house arrest in Cape Town after posting £165 000 bail. He appeared in the High Court (26 October) to challenge an order forcing him to answer questions from Equatorial Guinean prosecutors on his role in the supposed plot. The court ruled (24 November) that he must answer such

questions. Next day the judge said proceedings against Thatcher would be postponed until April because the prosecution wanted more time.

Charges made that the British and US governments were forewarned of a plot were denied for months, but in November UK Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw said his government had been “informed” in late January 2004—two months before the mercenaries were arrested on landing in a plane in Harare.

President Mbeki headed an African Union bid to mediate between government, opposition and rebel leaders in Cote d’Ivoire (11 November) after France destroyed the country’s air force in response to a government air raid that killed nine French soldiers.

The Rev. Bayers Naude, a fighter against apartheid whose father was the first chairman of the Broederbond secret society, died aged 89 (7 September). He was himself a Broederbond member until the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 led him to work for the liberation struggle. He followed Archbishop Tutu as general secretary of the African Council of Churches.

Swaziland

The culmination of months of diplomatic effort by the Commonwealth and a team led by special envoy Ade Adefuye produced a resolution of the judicial crisis that dated to 2002, when six court of appeal judges resigned after ruling that the King had acted unconstitutionally in overturning court decisions. The government withdrew a statement by the then prime minister impugning the independence and integrity of the Court of Appeal and its judges. The court was to be reconstituted at once and the rule of law restored. The government statement (17 September 2004) said: “We cannot but be impressed by the strength of the Commonwealth commitment to the principle of the rule of law”.

Botswana

President Festus Mogae won a second and final term in elections (3 October 2004). His Botswana Democratic Party, which has held power since independence in 1966, won 44 of the 57 seats in parliament. The Botswana National Front won 12 seats. Voting was trouble-free.

A strike of 2400 diamond workers for better pay, which began on 23 August, disrupted the mines for two weeks. The union accepted a 10% pay rise and a bonus, but the owners, Debswana, would not reinstate 318 workers they had sacked.

Namibia

Lands Minister Hifikepunye, 69, won the presidential election (15–16 November 2004) with more than 76% of the vote. In 2005 he will succeed President Sam Nujoma who, as leader of the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), took Namibia to independence in 1990 and served three terms as president. In the poll the largest opposition party, the Congress of Democrats, took 7.3% of the vote. It said the election was flawed. SWAPO took 75% of the vote in the parliamentary

elections held simultaneously—55 of the 72 seats. Nujoma will remain head of SWAPO, of which Pohamba was also a founding member. The two men hold similar views. As Land Minister Pohamba has been speeding the expropriation of land from white farmers to black citizens, allying himself with Mugabe in Zimbabwe.

Cyprus

The UN Security Council endorsed Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposal that the peacekeeping force in Cyprus should be cut by one-third—from 1224 to 860 troops (22 October 2004). Its mandate was extended to June 2005. The Council was told that since movement over the ceasefire line was relaxed in April 2003 there had been five million crossings. Inter-island trade between North Cyprus and the south, suspended since the 1974 Turkish invasion, was reinstated (23 August)—part of an EU package of measures designed to boost the economy of the north. But direct trade between the EU and the north was postponed after strong opposition from Nicosia.

More than 2000 Greek Cypriots crossed into the Turkish-held north (2 September) when the celebrated St Mamas church in Morphou was reopened after 30 years. A year earlier Turkish Cypriot guards had prevented a service being held there.

The government of North Cyprus resigned (20 October) after months of political deadlock. Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Talat could not form a new government that would control a majority of parliamentary seats. In September he had bitterly attacked the EU for not bringing the Turkish half of Cyprus in from the cold as it had promised when referendums reinforced the island's division.

Earlier in the year British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw held talks in London (1 July) with Talat—the first official reception of a Turkish Cypriot politician by the UK. He said he had assured Turkish Cypriots that Britain would help implement EU policy to bring north Cyprus closer to the EU.

Millions of pink locusts appeared over Cyprus in October. They had spread from North Africa because of unusually hot weather and damaged potato crops but little else. Clouds of them had appeared in Lebanon for the first time for 100 years.

Gibraltar

A sudden thaw in relations with Spain began in August 2004. Chief Minister Peter Caruana and Jose Pons, senior Spanish diplomat for Europe, lunched in Los Barrios at the end of August 2004—the first informal talks between the two parties for three years. Within days Spain lifted its ban on cruise liners visiting Gibraltar and *Queen Mary 2* docked there. Two months later Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw met in Madrid (27 October) and announced that a new forum for dialogue on Gibraltar would be set up “with an open agenda in which Gibraltar would have its own voice”. Moratinos said Spain was “not renouncing or putting aside sovereignty” but wanted to “create an atmosphere” for better understanding. He said: “We have a new strategy”. Spain now wanted to concentrate on improving relations with the Gibraltarian people. The socialist government in Madrid had changed the course of

its conservative predecessor. Moratinos is not a party politician, but was for six years EU special envoy to the Middle East.

Falkand Islands

Argentina gave flagship carrier Aerolineas Argentinas permission in June to begin direct flights from Buenos Aires to Port Stanley. It was another stage in a simmering row because the Falklands had earlier given a Chilean airline permission to run charter flights. A trip by British minister Bill Rammell failed to produce agreement. Islanders feel scheduled Argentine flights are a veiled threat to British sovereignty.

Finance Ministers

Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in St Kitts and Nevis (28–29 September) called for the international financial institutions to support trade liberalization in low income and vulnerable countries. Professor Joseph Stiglitz presented a report commissioned by the Secretariat setting out an agenda for the development round of the trade negotiations in the aftermath of Cancun. The Ministers' central concern was to get the Doha Development Round negotiations back on track. They emphasized that developing countries would not be able to accelerate growth without adequate access to the markets of industrial countries, particularly in agriculture. Secretary-General Don McKinnon warned the meeting: "If more is not done now the targets for education, child mortality and global poverty will not be met for another 150 years. And in the Commonwealth 14 countries will miss the global poverty target. This is simply not good enough. This is not what we promised."

Foreign Ministers

Commonwealth Foreign Ministers met in New York (23 September) for the annual gathering at the UN inaugurated three years ago. They talked about trade, the 2005 CHOGM in Malta, and plans for the upcoming global summit in Mauritius on sustainable development of small island states.

Twenty Million Euros, Nine Hubs and 48 Spokes

A €20 million partnership programme that will provide trade negotiating capacity for 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states was announced (17 October 2004) by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Commission, and La Francophonie. More than 50 experts will be posted to advise governments on trade policy and agreements. In what has been dubbed the Hubs and Spokes project a network of nine advisers (hubs) will operate at the regional headquarters and 48 trade policy analysts (spokes) in the national ACP capitals. The analysts will work with local counterparts.

Every euro invested by the Commonwealth has generated four euros more for developing states. The Commonwealth has contributed €4 million euros and unlocked another €16 million from other partners in the programme, said Secretary-

General Don McKinnon, “as more Commonwealth countries are grappling with the ongoing trade negotiations which will have a huge impact on their future”. The Commonwealth Secretariat will implement the four-year project in 55 ACP member states.

Law Ministers

Fighting terrorism topped the agenda at a meeting in London of Law Ministers and Attorneys-General from small Commonwealth jurisdictions (21–22 October 2004). A key objective is to get right the anti-terrorism legal frameworks and to implement effective border controls. Sparse populations in many coastal areas of small countries are a special problem there.

Women’s Affairs

For the first time ever civil society organizations took part in the plenary sessions of a Commonwealth Ministerial meeting. It happened at the meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women’s Affairs in Nadi, Fiji Islands (11 May–2 June 2004). The Commonwealth Foundation organized reports from MPs, lawyers, magistrates and judges and the Commonwealth Business Network. Poverty reduction (70% of those living in poverty are women), AIDS and conflict prevention were on the agenda. A plan of action for gender equality by 2015, known as the Denarau statement, was launched.

Royal Commonwealth Society

The Society headquarters and Commonwealth Club, relaunched in London six years ago, is so popular that in 2006 the premises are to be enlarged by the acquisition of 10 000 square feet next door. Director-General Stuart Mole, former director of the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s office, said: “We have become a victim of our own success. We need. . .better member facilities, a Commonwealth Business Centre and larger conference rooms. We want to develop into a major Commonwealth centre in the heart of London.” The Society held its 2004 international meeting in Ghana (5–7 July 2004).

Commonwealth Press Union

Oliver Clarke, chairman of the Jamaica *Gleaner*, became the new President of the Commonwealth Press Union—the first from the Caribbean—in succession to Lyle Turnbull of Australia, who died in 2003.

Commonwealth Foundation

Professor Guido de Marco, former president of Malta, and earlier deputy prime minister and foreign minister, became chair of the Foundation on 1 January 2005. He succeeded Gracia Machel. Colin Ball retired after eight years as Foundation Director at the end of November.

Around the Commonwealth

Education ministers chaired by Nigerian Education Minister Professor Fabian Osuji, met in Stoke Rochford, UK and agreed measures (1 September 2004) to address the international recruitment of teachers in Commonwealth countries. They agreed on a clampdown on the poaching of teachers from developing countries to plug recruitment gaps in British schools.

The Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators brought together 100 delegates in Lusaka (5–10 September) to examine how member countries can maximize tax revenues.

More than 500 MPs met in Quebec City (1–9 September) for the 50th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. Their theme: the responsibilities and rights of people and parliament in a global community. The meeting was preceded by a conference for countries with populations of up to 400 000.

The Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Unit ran a workshop for human rights defenders from 18 countries in Nairobi (7–10 September). Another meeting in Nairobi (20–24 September) brought prosecutors and law enforcement officers together to discuss capacity building to fight terrorism.

Educating girls—seen as the key to breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty—was the subject of a workshop held at the Commonwealth Youth Programme Asia Centre in Chandigarh (2–23 September).

A regional meeting in Mbabane, Swaziland (6–8 October), organized by the Secretariat's Health Section and its Youth Programme Africa Centre in Lusaka, discussed how men can reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS among women.

The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, UK completed (5 October) a year-long project on the spread of the English language—how it has affected people's vocabulary and accents.

Educators and trainers from every Commonwealth region met in Wellington (17–29 October) for a training course on helping public sector reform.

Three Singaporeans scooped top prizes in the 2004 Commonwealth essay competition. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong attended the prize-giving by the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Law ministers and attorneys-general of 25 small jurisdictions meeting in London (21–22 October) called on the Secretariat to help fulfil new international obligations to fight terrorism placed on them by the UN and other bodies.

The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association launched an annual bursary for broadcasters from Pacific countries.

Professor Richard Crook became the first holder of the Emeka Anyaoku Chair in Commonwealth Studies (27 October) based at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London.

A project was launched by the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Business Women's Network in four African countries to help women entrepreneurs overcome business obstacles using information and communications technologies.

A youth project in Alberta, Canada, that devises sentences for young perpetrators of crimes motivated by racism and intolerance received the Commonwealth Youth Gold Award from the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

A major meeting of civil society organizations discussed in London (24 November) ways they can interact with governments at the 2005 CHOGM in Malta (24 November).

A Commonwealth village project designed to maintain continuous support for trainers taking part in workshops using web-based audio conferencing software was launched by the Secretariat and Victoria University, Wellington. The aim: to create a “virtual community of practitioners”.

New Commonwealth Secretariat publications in 2004 included:

Small States in Transition – from Vulnerability to Competitiveness by Dr Ganesh Wignaraja, Marlon Lezama and David Joiner. 90 pp.

Chains of Fortune: Linking Women Producers and Workers with Global Markets, edited by Marilyn Carr, 220 pp.

Mainstreaming Informal Employment and Gender in Poverty Reduction by Martha Alter Chen, Joann Vanek and Marilyn Carr, 250 pp.

Gender and Human Rights in the Commonwealth—Some Critical Issues for Action in the Decade 2005–2015, papers commissioned by the Secretariat for London meeting February 2004, 312 pp.

HIPCs: Economic Prospects, Long Term Debt Sustainability and the Role of Investment.

Sourcing Practices in the Apparel Industry, by Marlon Lazama, Brian Webber and Charles Dagher, 205 pp.

Titles available at: www.publications.thecommonwealth.org.