

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *The tsunami hits eight Commonwealth countries from Malaysia to Kenya—Sri Lanka worst of all. Huge stretches of its eastern and southern coasts are laid waste. Severely damaged Maldives manages to hold an election only a month late. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group keeps Pakistan on its agenda and Africans remain unhappy about its lifted suspension. Bush visits Canada, but Prime Minister Martin refuses to join his ballistic missile system. The UK pushes Kenya even harder to clean up corruption. Chissano steps down and Mozambique has a new president. Mugabe chooses a woman vice-president for Zimbabwe after upheaval within Zanu-PF. Spain and Britain give Gibraltar a seat at the negotiating table. And the first underground trains begin to run in New Delhi.*

India

The tsunami (26 December 2004) hit 2260 km of the coast of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh as well as the Andaman and Nicobar islands. India was the only country in the region with the resources and emergency planning capacity to run its own relief operations and it was also able to help Sri Lanka and Maldives. Mainland deaths reached 8800. The number of those on the islands was less certain, with up to 6000 missing. India resisted offers of help, but did eventually let Unicef operate in the islands where poor communications and remoteness complicated the work.

The Indian economy grew by 8.2% in 2004—just behind China's 9.5%. Goldman Sachs predicted that India would become the world's third largest economy after China and the USA. Average incomes have soared by 60% in a decade. IBM said more than 75% of its services outside the USA were now sourced from India. From five million in 1990 telephone ownership had risen to 75 million today, with two million being added to the network each month. In the first half of 2004 foreign direct investment inflows rose by 70%. Two states, New Delhi and Maharashtra, accounted for half the total. Poorer states such as Orissa and Bihar attracted none.

A £42 million contract to digitize hundreds of thousands of paper-based corporate filings of 650 000 companies went to Tata Consultancy Services, India's largest software company (9 February)—the biggest outsourcing government deal to date and a major move towards reforming the bureaucracy. The paper mountain is to be

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converted in six years and make a goldmine of information instantly available online.

The World Bank offered to double its annual lending to India to £1.6 billion, making it the world's largest recipient. After meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (19 November) then Bank President James Wolfensohn said the government was pretty much everything the Bank could hope for. Its common minimum programme negotiated with the communist parties, which support Singh from outside the coalition, emphasized reform and rejuvenation of the rural economy—"an absolutely first class blueprint", Wolfensohn told the London *Financial Times*.

In his first full budget since the Singh government came to power (28 February) Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram produced £3 billion of new spending to uplift the rural population. Irrigated land would be expanded by 10 million hectares and primary education and nutrition for young people stepped up. The business community was positive about lower corporate taxes and reductions in tariffs on capital goods imports. It was mostly good news, they said, but the budget did not produce an expected radical overhaul of the tax system. Simultaneously with the budget the banking regulator announced long expected reforms limiting to 5% the stake foreign banks can hold in healthy domestic private sector banks.

Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar scored a major success in January when he persuaded Bangladesh and Burma to agree in principle to a pipeline that would bring Burma's huge natural gas reserves to India via Bangladesh. It could be built in two years and would end Bangladesh's long hesitation about whether to sell its reserves to India. The deal could greatly improve relations between the two countries. The energetic Aiyar's pipeline diplomacy also involved plans for a pipeline linking Iran to China that would cross India and Pakistan.

In the wake of the takeover of power in Nepal by King Gyanendra India called for the restoration of multiparty democracy and halted all military supplies (21 February). India is a major provider of arms to the Nepalese army.

In state elections in February Congress won a landslide victory in Haryana, but suffered setbacks in Bihar and Jharkhand. Congress took 67 of the 90 seats in the Haryana assembly, putting it back in power for the first time in nine years. The incumbent Indian National Lok Dal got only nine seats. Jharkhand produced a hung assembly. Congress won 26 seats and the BJP 36. In Bihar Congress ally Rashtriya Janata Dal, which is run by the popular Laloo Pradas Yadav, federal Minister of Railways, lost its majority. Yadav's wife, Rabri Devi, resigned as chief minister.

Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said (31 January) India would speed hospital accreditation and visa processing to boost it as an international destination for 'health tourism'. By the end of 2005 it would accredit 75 hospitals for overseas patients.

Prime Minister Singh offered dual nationality to all Indians who left the country after 1950 (7 January). An estimated 23 million Indians live abroad with assets put at one-third of India's gross domestic product.

A UN report (24 February) predicted that India's population would overtake that of China before 2030—five years earlier than forecast. By 2050 it would reach 1593 million.

The Supreme Court ruled (25 November) that for the first time for 20 years visitors could see the Taj Mahal in five moonlit nights every month. Numbers would be restricted to 400 a night. Night viewing was banned in 1984 for fear of attack on the building by militant Sikhs seeking independence for North Punjab.

Another Supreme Court decision (12 February) was to ask the government to curb marketing by mobile phone. A Delhi resident had brought a case against telecommunications companies and telemarketers that they were breaching the Indian citizen's constitutional right to privacy.

The first underground trains began to run in Delhi (19 December). They connected Delhi University to Kashmere Gate, a main bus terminal. By September a 23-station line would link the main shopping district with the commuter belt and by 2010 it would have 225 stations, all air-conditioned and built with marble and glass. Two-thirds of the money for the project is being lent by Japan.

Aviation Minister Praful Patel gave private airlines for the first time the right to compete with Air India on flights to London (1 February)—a move expected to raise the level of service and reduce fares.

Nearly 250 Hindu pilgrims died in an extraordinary accident at a hilltop temple near Wai, 160 miles from Mumbai (25 January 2005). As 300 000 people jammed the temple and a narrow road leading to it, overhead cables fell on them. A short circuit caused electric current to pass through a huge pool of coconut water in the sanctum sanctorum. People panicked and a stampede developed. Fire broke out and many burned to death.

A head-on collision between two passenger trains 90 miles east of Amritsar (14 December) killed 30 people and injured 60.

P. V. Narasimha Rao, ninth prime minister of India (1991–96) died aged 83 (23 December). He came to power as a compromise figure when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and lost office when elections brought the opposition BJP to power.

Pakistan

When the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) met in London (10–11 February 2005) it confronted the problem that General Pervez Musharraf had remained Army Chief of Staff as well as President, although the Commonwealth had lifted the country's suspension in May 2004 on the basis of a commitment by him to cease being Army head by 31 December.

Musharraf had been authorised by the Pakistan Senate and National Assembly in November to hold the two offices and now said he would not continue as army head beyond 2007—the end of the current presidential term. At its London meeting CMAG again urged him to give up one of the offices and said it would not expect the two to be combined beyond 2007.

It affirmed that the holding by the same person of the two offices “is incompatible with the basic principles of democracy and the spirit of the Harare Commonwealth principles”. It also said its “strong view” was that until the two offices are no longer combined in the same person “the process of democratisation in Pakistan will not be irreversible”.

The CMAG discussion was difficult, particularly because African feeling was strong that Pakistan was somehow being treated differently from Zimbabwe, which

had been suspended at the Abuja summit in 2003, although it then chose to quit the Commonwealth. Pakistan, on the other hand, had stayed on, been let back into full membership and was now not to be re-suspended.

CMAG kept Pakistan on its agenda and urged the Secretary-General to maintain high-level contact. One major difference in the cases of Pakistan and Zimbabwe was that Musharraf had always remained engaged with the Commonwealth, while President Mugabe of Zimbabwe had refused to talk with the Secretary-General since pulling out.

The London CMAG meeting was lower level than usual. Only four of the nine foreign ministers attended—Nigeria, Bahamas, Lesotho and Malta. Deputies represented the other five—Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Canada, India and Samoa.

Musharraf made a whirlwind overseas trip in early December, visiting the USA, UK France, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. In Washington he met President Bush and in London Prime Minister Tony Blair and, informally, in parliament 50 MPs. He admitted that the hunt for Osama bin Laden had gone cold, saying: “We don’t know where he is. He might be anywhere.” But he said Pakistan had “broken the back” of al-Qaida and smashed its command structure, destroying 600 terrorists in its cities. He blamed the USA for not sending enough troops to Afghanistan, but Bush praised Pakistan’s efforts, adding that its army had been incredibly active and very brave. Musharraf said he had told Bush a key to wiping out terrorism worldwide was to resolve the Palestinian problem. The Washington visit was preceded by news that the USA had proposed a £1 billion arms sale package to Pakistan—the largest for 14 years.

Pakistan denied (7 February) that its disgraced nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan had sold secrets to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Arab countries. In London Musharraf said interrogation of Khan had “squeezed out” all the secrets of his sales. He was angry when asked why other countries were still asking for direct access to Khan. He admitted Bush had pressed him on the subject. Pakistan continued to refuse any outside interrogators access, even the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Within a month of release from eight years in jail Benazir Bhutto’s husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was arrested on arriving in Islamabad from Karachi (21 December). Hundreds rioted and ransacked the airport building. A day later he was freed from house arrest. Exiled prime ministers Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif met in Saudi Arabia (11 February) to call for the restoration of democracy. Zardari said they had vowed “to bury their bitter past”. Their two parties had joined forces as the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy.

Mushtaq Ahmed, believed a key figure in the assassination attempt on Musharraf in December 2003, said to be al-Qaida inspired, escaped from military prison in Rawalpindi early in 2005.

Eleven people died when a bomb exploded at a market in Quetta. The little-known Baluchistan National Army claimed responsibility.

Pakistan’s economy in early 2005 was flourishing, with growth up to 7.5%. In 2004 the Karachi stock exchange rose 50%, largely thanks to privatizations, with more than one million shareholders. Foreign investment, led by Britain and the USA, was growing at 100% a year.

Following torrential rain in early February the recently built Shadikor dam south of Quetta burst and swept away five villages along the coast near Pasni. Several

hundred people were missing and large parts of a new coastal highway were destroyed.

Lahore High Court overruled a federal law abolishing the death penalty for under-18s (7 December). It meant children as young as seven could be hanged in Punjab.

The Senate passed a bill (7 December) to outlaw “honour killing” of women said to have brought shame on their families. Opposition parties said the bill did not go far enough in protecting women. Zubaida Jalal, the only woman cabinet minister, said it was an achievement for the bill to have been passed at all.

India and Pakistan

Foreign Ministers Natwar Singh of India and Khurshid Kasuri of Pakistan agreed in Islamabad (16 February 2005) to start a passenger bus service across the line of control that divides Kashmir on 7 April. The deal linking Lahore to Amritsar had been stalled because India had insisted passengers carry passports. Other bus services were agreed, as well as a rail service between Rajasthan and Sind by October and direct talks on a multibillion dollar, 1600-mile pipeline that would carry Iran’s large gas reserves to India across Pakistan. The talks did not make any tangible beginning to resolve the Kashmir dispute, but one promising move was the setting up of a joint group to draft an agreement on economic cooperation

On his visit to London in December President Musharraf said he “would love” Britain to play a role in resolving the Kashmir dispute, but he accepted that for 30 years India and Pakistan had agreed to strict bilateral negotiations. In his two meetings with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh he had found him “very sincere and genuine” but more than sincerity was needed.

In separate talks in Islamabad in December the two countries discussed steps to avert misunderstanding over their nuclear arsenals, including a draft accord to notify each other before missile tests.

Jyotindra Nath Dixit, hawkish national security adviser and senior official in the peace process with Pakistan, died suddenly (3 January) at the age of 69.

Bangladesh

Controversial author Taslima Nasreen, forced into exile from Bangladesh in 1994 after she seemed to call for the Koran to be rewritten because it was “unfair to women”, applied for Indian citizenship (17 February). She had been living in Sweden and now wanted to move to Calcutta. Five of her books are banned in Bangladesh. She says she is not an enemy of Islam but opposes all forms of fundamentalism.

A ferry was hit by a cyclone near Dhaka and capsized, killing 81 people. Dozens more were missing (20 February).

Four journalists were wounded in a bomb attack against a press club in Khulna (5 February). Seven months earlier a journalist had been murdered and police had assigned 250 officers to protect the club and the offices of local newspapers.

Sri Lanka

After Indonesia, Sri Lanka was the country worst hit by the tsunami. At least 31 000 people died along almost the entire the east coast from the Jaffna peninsula to Galle. Thousands more remained missing. Homeless numbered up to 800 000. As the clear-up got under way the cost of reconstruction was put at £1.8 billion. The biggest single disaster came when the waves threw a packed train at Telwatta, 75 miles from Colombo, into a bog. It was believed to be the world's worst train disaster. Areas held by the rebel Tamil Tigers were hit, and in the early days as rebel and government officials worked together on rescue work, hopes rose that the disaster might bring more permanent cooperation, but they were not to be fulfilled and the Tigers demanded government troops withdraw from Tamil refugee camps. British military contribution to the tsunami rescue work was concentrated on Sri Lanka, where two warships and their crews took part.

The Ceylon Workers Congress withdrew from the coalition government (25 February) and left it without a parliamentary majority. In the 225-strong assembly it had only 111 seats. The biggest partner in the coalition is the Marxist People's Liberation Front, with 39 seats, which opposes any power-sharing agreements with the Tigers.

The Tigers rejected a new government proposal to revive the peace talks (24 December) made through Norwegian peace envoy Eric Sollheim. The ambassadors of major donor countries told President Chandrika Kumaratunga they were concerned at the actions of another coalition partner, the People's United Liberation Front, which they said were undermining the peace process.

Maldives

Parliamentary elections scheduled for 31 December 2004 were postponed until the country recovered from the tsunami. They finally took place on 22 January. Political parties are barred, but President Abdul Gayoom, 67 and in power since 1978, said after the elections that the time was right for sweeping changes and a multiparty system could be in place within a year. Meantime, for this election 149 candidates stood as independents for the 42 elected seats in the 50-member assembly (Majlis). Eight seats are nominated by the president. The Sri Lanka-based Maldivian Democratic Party claimed 18 seats were taken by its supporters. Three ministers lost their seats.

An eight-member Commonwealth expert team led by former Mauritius president Cassam Uteem had been in place to observe the election for six days when the tsunami struck. The team was withdrawn and returned to witness the delayed election for a further nine days, reporting on 11 February.

In extensive observations and recommendations it welcomed plans to abolish the appointed members of the Majlis. It was critical of many aspects of the election, such as lack of voter education, the role of the media and its lack of a code of ethics, the small number of women candidates, lack of access of agents to the polling stations and need for ID to establish the identity of voters. It concluded: "...in the absence of multiparty democracy, fundamental freedoms and separation of powers guaranteed

by the Constitution and undermined by secondary legislation, Maldives would continue to have a democratic deficit”.

The tsunami killed 80 people in the Maldives archipelago and made 20 000 homeless or displaced. Male, the capital, where one-quarter of the population lives, was flooded, but saved from disaster by its concrete 3.5 metre sea wall. Property was undamaged and no one was killed. Thirteen islands were evacuated and 37 more had their infrastructure destroyed. The Commonwealth sent a disaster relief expert from Jamaica, Colonel Linton Graham, to the Maldives.

Malaysia

As a four-month amnesty ended (28 February) a force of 20 000 troops and 300 000 volunteers began a huge round-up of illegal migrants. The volunteers were to be paid £11 for every illegal worker they apprehended. Most migrants were from Indonesia and the Philippines and 400 000 were said to have taken advantage of the amnesty to leave. Another 500 000 were believed to have remained. Malaysia is short of labour and the UN warned of the danger of genuine asylum seekers, especially those from Aceh after the tsunami, being penalized. Malaysia has resisted Indonesian requests for an agreement on cross-border hiring of domestic and other informal sector workers.

The island of Sumatra shielded Malaysia from the worst of the tsunami, but it did hit western coastal states, killing 52 people in Penang and 10 in Kedah.

Singapore

Relations with Malaysia, difficult ever since the two countries split in 1965, were showing a general thaw following recent changes of leadership in both. One move was a compromise under which the Singapore air force could use Malaysian airspace for training. In return Singapore would let Malaysians who worked in Singapore withdraw their retirement funds early. Agreement was also reached with Malaysia in January 2005 to settle an 18-month dispute over a land reclamation project in the strip of sea that separates them. Malaysia took Singapore to the international Tribunal of the Law of the Sea in 2003, accusing it of going ahead with work without consulting it. The Tribunal let the work proceed but asked the two sides to go to arbitration and this led to the settlement.

The economy expanded by 8.1% in 2004—the fastest for four years. The budget (18 January) cut top personal income tax to 20%.

In an attempt to curb a rise in the sometimes fatal dengue fever people who let mosquitoes breed in their homes would be fined. In 2004 more than 8500 cases were reported—up 80% on 2003.

Hong Kong

Unusually, President Hu Jintao of China made a speech (20 December 2004) criticizing the Hong Kong leadership. On a visit to Macao for the fifth anniversary of its return to Chinese sovereignty, he praised the running of that territory, but said Hong Kong officials had to “improve their capabilities and abilities to govern”. He

added: "The officials must turn back and look over the past seven years and find out what has gone wrong". Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa called a press conference and assured journalists "it was not a dressing down...quite natural...the President...would express the hope and desire of what they might expect the team to be doing". Tung was appointed (28 February) to the Chinese People's Consultative Conference, an advisory body that sits at the same time as China's national parliament, raising speculation as to his future; on 10 March he resigned.

A strong surge in the economy took place at the end of 2004 with exports up 16.8% in the year to November. Growth was running at 7.5%, with tourist spending and trade flows out of China major factors.

Protestors took to the streets (23 January 2005) to demand direct elections for the chief executive in 2007 and the entire legislature in 2008, but the demonstration attracted fewer people than earlier rallies.

Papua New Guinea

Under the first phase of the five-year Australian programme to restore social, economic and political stability to the country 210 police officers and 60 officials were in place in December 2004. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer held talks with his counterpart Rabbie Namaliu in Lau. A report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (14 December) warned that PNG was at risk from endemic corruption, gang warfare, smuggling, prostitution, an uncontrolled birthrate, a failed economy and the spread of HIV. The basic weakness, it added, was the absence of nationhood.

State Enterprise Minister Puka Temu sacked the chairman and board of Telikom PNG. The board challenged legally his plan to privatize 51% of the company and the staff threatened to strike. Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare sacked Temu, restored the board and the government dropped the sale (15 December).

The government approved the constitution for autonomous government in Bougainville (15 December). At a formal ceremony in Arawa Minister for Inter-Government Relations Sir Peter Barter presented it to Bougainville Governor John Morris. At the same time the UN observer mission was extended for six more months. Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon, who as New Zealand foreign minister was closely involved in the Bougainville peace process, congratulated the island and said the task now was to secure a lasting peace, a sustainable economy and credible elections.

Remote Manam island, 10 miles off the north coast, was hit by repeated volcanic eruptions lasting several weeks from 24 October, stranding 10 000 people without enough food, water or shelter. So much ash followed by heavy rains fell on the houses that all 16 villages were destroyed. A chartered cargo ship evacuated victims to malaria-infested emergency centres with few facilities.

Fiji Islands

The Great Council of Chiefs appointed Tatu Joni Madraiwiwi, former high court judge, as Fiji's Vice President (14 December) to replace Ratu Jope Seniloli, who had been jailed for treason.

A detachment of 130 Fijian troops marched through Suva in November for an emotional send-off to take up peacekeeping duties for the UN in Iraq. Fiji was the first government to agree to provide troops specifically to protect UN officials in Iraq.

Vanuatu

Confusion created by Prime Minister Serge Vohor's statements on relations with China and Taiwan led to a 35:14 vote of no-confidence (11 December 2004). He was succeeded by Deputy Prime Minister Ham Lini. The new cabinet included five ministers who crossed the floor to vote against Vohor. Foreign Minister Sato Kilman said Vanuatu had "revoked all agreements made by Vohor with Taiwan". Lini told China his government adhered to the one-China policy which sees Taiwan as part of China.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer sent a delegation to warn that his country would cut aid to Vanuatu unless it governed itself better. Australia is the biggest donor. It said it was concerned about the reappointment of officials charged with serious offences, censorship and interference in the judicial process.

Tonga

The Supreme Court ruled (8 October 2004) that controversial amendments to media laws passed by the government in 2003 were unconstitutional. Under them all journalists had to be licensed annually and government had what the judge called overly broad powers to determine content standards for newspapers. The judge warned the press that freedom was not limitless and a newspaper "must face the consequences if it publishes material that is improper, mischievous or illegal".

Solomon Islands

An Australian policeman was shot dead by a sniper in Honiara (22 December 2004)—the first fatal casualty since the Australian mission arrived in July 2003. It was decided to send 100 extra troops.

Pitcairn Island

The six men convicted of sexual assaults challenged the convictions (February 2004), saying they had not realized they were subject to English law. The first of two hearings would be heard by the Pitcairn Supreme Court sitting in special session in New Zealand.

Cook Islands

A recount of the poll for Prime Minister Robert Woonton's seat in the September 2004 elections found the result was a tie. Woonton had to step down and parliament elected Education Minister Jim Marurai, a member of a new party, Demo Tumu, formed by Woonton, as prime minister (1 December). Marurai said he would serve

for two years and then hand over to Sir Geoffrey Henry, Deputy Prime Minister and leader of Demo Tumu's coalition partner, the Cook Islands Party.

Pacific Community

Britain withdrew (31 December 2004) for the second time in a decade from the body set up in 1947 as the South Pacific Commission to promote development programmes throughout the region. It had given £250 000 a year to the core budget for administration and management costs. The move coincided with the winding up of all Britain's bilateral aid to the region—a decision made by Clare Short as International Development Secretary in 2001. The original Commission comprised 22 states and territories, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, France and The Netherlands.

Australia

After little more than a year in office and within three months of his election defeat Mark Latham resigned as leader of the Labor Party and as an MP (18 January 2004). He cited health problems and media intrusion as reasons. Former defence minister Kim Beazley was elected uncontested to succeed him (29 January). He had been opposition leader until 2001 when he resigned after losing a second election to Prime Minister John Howard. He now promised more consultation, party discipline and a new approach to Australian policy on Iraq.

Howard announced the creation of a security zone around the coast, far beyond Australian territorial waters, in which all ships would be monitored by Australia and have to supply details of their crew, speed, cargo and destination. Naval and customs ships would be given powers to intercept and board all vessels suspected of posing a terrorist threat. Indonesian Foreign Minister Nur Hasan Wirayuda said the plan "contradicts our absolute jurisdiction and our sovereignty over our seas". New Zealand called for urgent clarification. Australia said the new zone would extend only where there was no maritime border and pre-existing jurisdiction.

Australia, with about 950 troops stationed in or around Iraq, decided in February to send another 450 to replace a contingent being withdrawn because the Dutch government was not renewing its mission. Howard said he knew it would be an unpopular decision but one major need was to protect Japanese troops doing humanitarian work.

After three months East Timor agreed to resume talks with Australia about maritime boundaries and the division of royalties from oil and gas fields in the Timor Sea (31 December). A month earlier East Timor President Xanana Gusmao accused Australia of robbing his country of nearly £200 million a year from oilfields over which it claimed jurisdiction. He criticized foreign minister Alexander Downer for saying East Timor should feel grateful for its leadership of UN intervention in 1999 which helped free it. He said: "If Australia thinks all our suffering during the war is over with champagne we say...don't hide the past".

Nearly 300 Aborigines went on the rampage on Palm Island off the Queensland coast (26 November) after the death of an Aborigine held for drunkenness. When

police said the man had died from a fall they burned down a police station and threatened to kill its officers. Unrest in the state increased when two white farm workers allegedly beat an Aborigine. Human rights activists marched in Townsville. State Premier Peter Beattie appealed for calm.

A scheme called 'wash for fuel' caused an outcry among Aboriginal groups in remote Kimberley, Western Australia. Aborigines had been told children must wash their faces twice a day to qualify for government aid. They must also shower daily and turn up daily for school. In return they would get £62 000 state aid towards the cost of new petrol pumps at a local shop. Opposition politicians said it was patronizing, but Prime Minister Howard called it "common sense".

Unemployment in Australia fell to its lowest for nearly 30 years—5.2% in November. But the OECD said (2 February) that broad policy reforms in several areas were needed immediately if Australia was to continue its strong growth.

Immigration figures published in November showed the flow from Britain had jumped from 8749 in 2002 to 18 272. Today's migrants from Britain differ hugely from those who flooded into Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. To become a resident now people must be under 44, have a university education, and preferably be a doctor, dentist, radiographer, biochemist, architect or engineer. Rules introduced by the Howard government favour white, English-speaking people.

Western Australia Premier Geoff Gallop announced a feasibility study into ways of transporting water from the tropical north to Perth. The amount of water coming into the city has dropped by two-thirds in seven years because of decreasing rainfall across southwest Australia. Yet by 2050 demand in Perth is expected to double. One solution would be to build the world's longest canal to transport water from the Kimberley region and Lake Argyle. Until now the longest canal is the 1000-year-old Grand Canal in China.

New Zealand

After an acrimonious debate parliament legislated to recognize civil unions between gay couples. The Civil Union Bill, passed by 65 votes to 55, accepts unions between men and women who do not want to marry and gives unmarried couples the same rights as married couples in areas like child custody, tax and welfare.

In advance of a 2005 general election Prime Minister Helen Clark made a major reshuffle of her cabinet (20 December 2004). Portfolios held by John Tamihere were reassigned, following his resignation in November pending fraud investigations.

Grenada

Six months after Hurricane Ivan devastated the entire island in September 2004 people were still in a state of shock at the loss of homes and in some cases livelihoods. Only one building in 10 was unscathed. Doctors were overwhelmed and the public health system collapsed. Forty people died, but hundreds more were

traumatized or had heart attacks and strokes. The old Georgian parliament, the Catholic cathedral and main Anglican and Presbyterian churches all remained under tarpaulin covers.

Prime Minister Keith Mitchell visited China in December 2004. Afterwards China re-established relations with Grenada, which was one of 27 countries in the world still in relations with Taiwan.

Jamaica

The Senate abolished the mandatory death sentence for capital murder and allowed a judge to impose life imprisonment. This changed the law in line with a Privy Council ruling that the mandatory death sentence was a breach of Jamaica's constitution and international obligations.

One of Britain's most experienced detectives, Chief Superintendent Mark Shields, became a commissioner in the Jamaica police under a deal with the UK to help cut the high crime rate. British officers have often helped specific investigations, but Shields would have a formal position and Jamaican officers would serve under him. The deal reflected the need to reassure the tourist industry that action was being taken to cut the high crime rate.

The government took back control of ailing Air Jamaica in a move to restructure it and find a new buyer. It has not made money since since 1994, although it carries 55% of all passengers to the island

Dominica

Edward Le Blanc, who led the freedom movement as premier (1961–74), retired at 50, re-emerged as a delegate at the 1977 independence conference and then withdrew from public life, died (29 October 2004), aged 81.

Bermuda

Prime Minister Alex Scott set up a 14-member Bermuda Independence Commission to begin work in January 2005. It would hold public meetings and take submissions on the question of independence. The opposition United Bermuda Party said it would not take part because it was a "distraction".

Guyana

Sustained Commonwealth efforts to promote constructive dialogue between the main political parties and to encourage a peaceful and conflict-free country seemed to be meeting with success. When New Zealander Sir Paul Reeves paid his eighth visit to Guyana as special envoy of the Commonwealth Secretary-General in January 2005, he said encouraging signs had emerged, including the agreement of the parties to recognize that parliament is the correct forum for constructive dialogue. Two parliamentary advisers—from Australia and the UK—were being deployed with the help of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Canada

President Bush paid his first official visit to Canada (30 November 2004) since coming to office in 2000. Relations had cooled after the Chretien government had opposed the war in Iraq and public opinion polls showed only 17% of Canadians supported Bush's policies. The visit was short on results. No resolution was reached to Canada's trade disputes with the USA. The border remained closed to Canadian beef, since a case of mad cow disease in May 2003. Three more cases had been reported, the last in January 2005. Canadian cattle farmers have lost billions of dollars. On his visit Bush said he favoured reopening the border, but the matter was largely out of his hands. In Ottawa anti-Bush protestors held a candlelight vigil on the lawn of parliament and scuffled with police.

Although Prime Minister Paul Martin had started formal talks about possible Canadian participation in the US-led ballistic defence system, he headed a minority government and significant opposition came from within his Liberal Party. After much hesitation he announced (24 February 2005) that Canada would not join the system. He said: "We respect the right of the US to defend itself and its people. We will continue to work in partnership with our southern neighbours in the common defence of North America and on continental security."

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale promised in his budget (23 February) more generous foreign aid, the biggest defence outlays for 20 years and the creation of a £427 million 'Clean Fund' as part of Canada's commitments to the Kyoto protocol.

Martin became the first sitting prime minister to appear at an inquiry since 1873 when he faced questions (10 February) about millions of dollars of misspent government funds earmarked at the time he was finance minister for promoting national unity with companies closely tied to the Liberal party. Martin called for the inquiry after the auditor's report was released. He told it 30 times that he did not know how the money was being spent, being too busy with Canada's budget crisis to get involved in the national unity campaign. Jean Chretien, prime minister at the time, told the inquiry some mistakes were made but he had never knowingly acted illegally. The campaign had been needed, he said, to keep the country together after the 1995 referendum on Quebec secession.

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously (9 December) that same-sex marriages were constitutional. The judgement paved the way for national legislation, but the issue was controversial and was expected to split the Liberal Party.

Immigration Minister Judy Sgro resigned (15 January) over allegations that she agreed to help pizza shop owner Harjit Singh avoid deportation in return for free food for her campaign staff during the run-up to the June election. Singh, who came to Canada in 1988, was now in detention on fraud charges awaiting deportation. Sgro denied any arrangement or even speaking to Singh. In a separate case Sgro had also run into trouble over the granting of residence to a Romanian stripper who had worked on her re-election campaign.

Nigeria

Plans were announced in early January 2005 for a three-month conference to reform the constitution. No date was given. It would be attended by 400 delegates. Fifty

would be nominated by President Olusegun Obasanjo, with six from each of the 36 states. The conference would not be able to redraw the constitution but would make proposals to the president. The current constitution was drawn up under military rule.

Two rear-admirals were found guilty by a Lagos court-martial of helping to steal an oil tanker. They were dismissed from the navy. The tanker had been captured off the coast two years ago with a cargo of 11 000 barrels of stolen crude. It vanished in August 2004 while being transferred from naval to civilian police custody. The two services blamed each other for the loss.

The Swiss Supreme Court rejection of an appeal by the Abacha family (16 February) removed a final obstacle to the repayment to Nigeria of the funds sent by the dictator Sani Abacha in the 1990s to Swiss bank accounts. Earlier, German police arrested one of Abacha's sons (9 December), following a Swiss extradition order. He had tried to withdraw £49 000 from a business bank.

Archives released in Britain revealed that President Yakubu Gowon raided the National Museum in Lagos to bring a 16th century Benin bronze as a diplomatic gift for Queen Elizabeth on his state visit to London in 1973. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office knew at the time that it was expropriated treasure. The bronze is on display at Windsor Castle. Nigeria has asked the British Museum to return the Benin bronzes—700 items—found in 1897 when British forces entered Benin City.

Sierra Leone

Ten men found guilty of treason by trying to overthrow the government in 2003 were sentenced to death (20 December 2003). Six were members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, which ruled the country after the 1997 coup.

The Gambia

The five main opposition parties formed a coalition (18 January 2005) to run in the 2006 presidential elections. Ousainou Darboe, leader of the United Democratic Party, said they had all realized they had to unite to win. Gambians were disenchanted with the government of President Yahya Jammeh. He added: "We are not interested in regime change. We are interested in a complete change of system."

Deyda Hydara, 58, co-editor of *The Point* newspaper, was shot dead as he drove home from work (17 December). He had been highly critical of a tough press law passed three days earlier providing for jail terms for those found guilty of libel or sedition and the seizure of homes of editors of libellous newspapers. The authorities denied Hydara's attackers were state security agents. Reporters without Borders said it was astounded that a few days after the attack the African Union decided Jammeh should host its summit in July.

Ghana

President John Kufuor won a second four-year term in elections (7 December 2004). He defeated his main challenger, John Atta Mills, in the first round with 52.75% of

the vote. Mills secured 44.32%. Kufuor's New Patriotic Party won a majority in parliament with 129 of the 230 seats. Mills' National Democratic Congress won 88 seats. Turnout was 83.2%. Domestic observers declared the poll peaceful, free and fair. The electoral commission rejected complaints about spoilt and rejected ballot papers. After his victory Kufuor pledged to focus his second term on tackling poverty.

Cameroon

Following his re-election President Paul Biya appointed Ephraim Inoni, deputy chief of staff at his office, as prime minister in place of Peter Mafany Musonge, who had held the post since 1996.

Uganda

The first formal peace talks for more than a decade between the government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took place in Kitgum (28 December 2004) following a ceasefire in mid-November. They were sponsored by the UN, UK, Netherlands and Norway. Betty Bigombe, former minister in charge of pacification, and Brigadier Sam Koll, of the LRA, took part and at the outset negotiators embraced. But within days the government accused the LRA of rejecting a deal meant to pave the way for full talks, and the ceasefire began to break down. President Yoweri Museveni said the talks should take place abroad. In late February Bigombe said she was disappointed but was still in touch with the rebels.

As the political temperature rose ahead of the 2006 elections a White Paper before parliament proposed major amendments to the constitution, including granting the president the power to dissolve parliament and lifting the two-term limit on the presidency. Museveni, now in power for 18 years, had long been highly critical of African leaders for staying in power too long. In the 2001 election manifesto he said he wanted a last term in office. Now it seemed he himself had changed his mind about staying on.

Another promise was that a referendum would be held on whether multiparty politics should be restored. Until now, in the novel no-party system, only Museveni's 'Movement' had been allowed to take part. The Constitutional Court overturned (17 November) a law preventing political parties from taking part in elections and this seemed to make a referendum unnecessary.

Kenya

International criticism of the failure of President Mwai Kibaki's government to take tough action against corruption led to the resignation of John Githongo, the country's respected first permanent secretary for ethics and governance (7 February 2004). He said he "was no longer able to continue serving the government of Kenya". His appointment a year earlier was one of Kibaki's first moves to fulfil election pledges to fight corruption.

The resignation took place after a renewed attack on corruption by British High Commissioner Sir Edward Clay. He complained in a speech to journalists

of “massive looting and/or grand corruption which in toto has a huge impact on Kenya’s economy”. When challenged to name names he gave Kibaki a list of 20 suspicious deals. Foreign Minister Chirau Ali Mwakwere said Clay was unfit to represent Britain, adding: “He was talking nonsense”. Justice Minister Kiraitu Murungi told state radio Clay had behaved “as an enemy of this government”.

Following Githongo’s resignation, the USA suspended £1.3 million a year funding towards Kenya’s fight against corruption (8 February). Germany did likewise when four members of the National Anti-Corruption Campaign steering committee, including the chief executive of the Standard newspaper group, resigned. The German ambassador said money would be withheld until Kibaki sacked ministers found to be corrupt.

A few days later Kibaki reshuffled his government and dismissed two permanent secretaries. National Security Minister Chris Murungaru changed places with Transport Minister John Michuki and the anti-corruption commission was asked to investigate procurement by Murungaru’s department. But no minister was sacked in the reshuffle.

Britain warned that ministers, civil servants and businessmen suspected of involvement in corruption would be refused visas to the UK.

A government report (11 December) detailed a vast looting of land for political patronage that had stoked ethnic tension during the Kenyatta and Moi governments. It said substantial public land had been unjustly allocated to individuals and companies. Now the government had started to repossess millions of hectares. Former president Daniel arap Moi had returned two beach plots he held in Mombassa and agreed to return other properties. Land commission chairman Paul Ndungu said “the problem of land in this country is bigger than anybody can imagine”. A land title tribunal would be set up to hear complaints.

Fourteen people were stabbed to death in Kikuyu–Masai clashes over access to water northwest of Nairobi (23 January). Hundreds fled their homes. The Masai said land and the use of its rivers were wrongfully taken by the government in the 1970s and given to Kikuyus.

Malawi

After a power struggle with his predecessor, Bakili Muluzi, President Bingu wa Mutharika left the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) and launched a new political party to be known as the Democratic Progressive Party (5 February 2005). He sacked three ministers seen as allies of Muluzi. The cabinet sided with the president and five ministers resigned from the UDF. Mutharika had created enemies within the government and UDF because he had been conducting an anti-corruption campaign. Muluzi said he had never tried to undermine Mutharika and had no wish to run the country from behind the scenes.

Earlier, three officials of the ruling UDF were said to have carried guns into a meeting called to heal party divisions with Mutharika. The meeting was cancelled and they were charged with treason (5 January) but two days later pardoned.

In December Mutharika moved his residence into the palace that had housed parliament since 1995. He wanted MPs to use a sports stadium, but they rejected

that. While searching for new premises parliamentary committees were meeting in a motel.

The 26 High Court and Supreme Court judges went on strike (20 January), saying they would not hear any more cases until the government replaced their ageing fleet of cars. After four days the government promised new cars and the strike was off.

Britain announced (2 December 2004) that it would put £100 million into a pioneering international scheme to tackle disease and overcome a crippling shortage of health workers in Malawi. It was described as a new approach in seeking to upgrade the whole sector rather than work through fragmented aid projects.

Mozambique

Armando Emilio Guebuza, 61, secretary-general of the ruling Frelimo, won the third multiparty presidential and legislative elections (1–2 December 2004). He succeeded Joaquim Chissano, president since 1986, taking 63.47% of the vote. His rival, Afonso Dhlakama, leader of Renamo, scored 31.74%. Frelimo took 160 seats and Renamo 90. Turnout was only 36%.

A six-strong Commonwealth observer group from as many countries led by Dr Vaughan Lewis, former prime minister of St Lucia, complained of lack of access for observers at several stages. It issued a strongly critical report, which said that, although there appeared to be a debate about whether alleged fraud “was of such magnitude as to narrow or reverse the difference in the number of votes between the ruling party and the main opposition party, Renamo, a growing consensus has emerged among observers and commentators that some degree of fraud did actually take place”. It added that “fundamental electoral reforms would be necessary if the credibility of the electoral process in future is not to suffer. The low turnout... was a warning sign.” The Group’s several recommendations included a call for depoliticization of the electoral commission.

President Guebuza, who has a reputation for fighting corruption, led the Frelimo government delegation to the Rome peace talks that ended 16 years of war in 1992 and paved the way for multipartyism. He has held several portfolios. Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon attended his inauguration (2 February).

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown signed a deal in Maputo (14 January) under which Britain would cancel Mozambique’s total debt of £80 million as well as paying 10% of its debt to the World Bank and IMF.

Zambia

In a frank admission (10 January) President Levy Mwanawasa apologized for not having tackled poverty—“one of my failures”. He said: “If Zambians made a mistake to elect me as president they are stuck with me”. He would stay on until the 2006 elections. Following these remarks, he reshuffled his cabinet. Home affairs minister Ronnie Shikapwasha swapped with Foreign Minister Kalombo Mwansa and controversial veteran politician Vernon Mwaanga came in as chief whip—his third time in the post.

Two boosts to the economy marked the beginning of 2005. One came when demand from China drove the price of copper to its highest level for 16 years (18

February). The other was news that the total of tourists in 2005 was set to hit a record 40 000.

Finance Minister Peter Magande admitted (29 January) a scam by civil servants had siphoned off £500 million. They had connived with contractors to falsify documents to claim Treasury money for services they never provided.

The Supreme Court dismissed a challenge to Mwanawasa's 2001 election victory (15 February), but said the ballot had flaws. Chief Justice Ernest Sakala said: "The results were potentially perfect". Claimants had alleged vote-rigging and vote-buying, and Mwanawasa had said he would leave office if the poll was found to be invalid.

The National Task Force on Corruption seized 30 maisonettes and five houses owned by Zambians accused of plundering national resources. One house was owned by a former head of intelligence.

First president Kenneth Kaunda, now 80, refused (4 January) to pay a legal bill of £400 000 to lawyers who had defended him in cases at the time of the government of Frederick Chiluba, which had once tried to deport him. Kaunda said he had not instructed any of the lawyers to act for him. In December 2004 the High Court in London froze Chiluba's assets at the request of the Task Force on Corruption.

Zimbabwe

A major upheaval took place within President Robert Mugabe's ruling party in the days leading up to the opening of the five-yearly Zanu-PF congress (2 December 2004). It centred on Mugabe's decision to nominate Joyce Mujuru, 49, a minister from independence and one-time guerrilla leader, wife of army commander Rex Nhongo, as joint vice-president with 82-year-old Joseph Msika. Mujuru, a minister since 1980 when she was 25, became famous during the war for shooting down a helicopter singlehandedly with a machinegun. She now succeeded Simon Muzenda, who died in 2003 and had not been replaced. Speaker and former intelligence chief Emmerson Mnangagwa, 62, long backed by the powerful Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, had been expected to get the post.

The government *Herald* called the upheaval a night of the long knives. At the politburo meeting which agreed the changes six provincial party chairmen were removed from the party's lists for plotting Mugabe's succession. Moyo was "very strongly reprimanded" as a plotter. Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and war veterans' leader Joseph Chinotimba were also dropped from the party's list. Moyo registered as an independent candidate for the March election and was sacked from Zanu-PF.

A month after the congress news was released of the arrest of five senior party officials close to Mugabe on 15 December. They were charged with spying for Britain. One was wealthy high-profile businessman MP Philip Chiyangwa. Others included the ambassador-designate to Mozambique, Godfrey Dzvairo, and Zanu-PF's external affairs director Itai Marchi. In trials held behind closed doors (8 February) Dzvairo was jailed for six years and Marchi and a banker for five years.

A separate arrest was that of a member of the South African secret service, which gave rise to suggestions that South Africa had launched a high-level spying operation against Mugabe. The African National Congress uttered its first public criticism of

Mugabe's regime when its secretary-general Kgalema Motlanthe said the playing field should be levelled and the police act impartially. An 18-strong delegation from the South African trade union federation COSATU led by its secretary-general flew to Harare, was labelled "prohibited immigrants" and deported (2 February). Archbishop Desmond Tutu called Zimbabwe "a huge blot" on Africa. Veteran Zanu-PF leader Didymus Mutasa called Tutu "an embittered little man who lost his soul to false gods".

In a major interview with the London *Financial Times* (22 February) South African President Mbeki said US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had discredited US policy to promote freedom by putting Zimbabwe on a list of six "outposts of tyranny", alongside Myanmar, Cuba, Belarus, North Korea and Iran.

The House of Assembly approved a package of electoral reforms (9 December 2004) that included the setting up of an independent electoral commission, provision of the counting of votes at election centres and a single day of voting instead of two. The MDC said the new laws would not guarantee free and fair elections.

When Mugabe announced the election date would be 31 March the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) national council voted "with a heavy heart" to contest the poll (4 February), even though it did not expect it to be free or fair, especially after a state commission announced it had redrawn the constituencies. It said SADC had not put Mugabe on the spot to demand that he comply with the standards, adding: "We feel let down by the region".

Zimbabwean exiles in 11 countries, forming a large proportion of the 5.6 million voters, formed a Diaspora Vote Action Group to force the government to let them vote. In preparation for the election Zimbabwe sent envoys to neighbouring Namibia and Botswana to persuade them to approve the election in advance of the result. EU and US observers had already been excluded. On the BBC World Service President Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania, a member of the Commission for Africa set up by Tony Blair, rejected the idea that Zimbabwe was an "illustration of bad governance". It had suffered "the cost of transformation".

A weekly newspaper, *The Zimbabwean*, was launched in Britain and South Africa. It was edited by Wilf Mbanga, a founder editor of the banned *Daily News*, and other exiled journalists (11 February). In Bulawayo a new independent newspaper *The Weekly Times*, was closed by the government after the first issue (2 January) because of its overtly 'political' coverage. Its editor Gibbs Dube was questioned for hours.

Journalists Jan Raath (*London Times*), Angus Shaw (Associated Press) and Brian Latham (Bloomberg) left Zimbabwe after interrogation, office searches and threats to jail them. Peta Thornycroft (*Daily Telegraph*) was the only remaining correspondent for a British newspaper.

The government said it was starting a drought relief operation for 1.5 million people, contradicting Mugabe's earlier claims that Zimbabwe had so much food it was "choking" on it. The move followed UN concern about food shortages. A US monitoring group said the emergency was second only to Ethiopia's.

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai was given back his passport after his treason acquittal and travelled to South Africa, the UK, and Belgium, meeting President Mbeki, Prime Minister Tony Blair and EU officials. On his return to Harare airport he was briefly detained and his passport photocopied.

A report based on a visit by the leaders of the Bars of six countries said (8 December) the legal system in Zimbabwe had been “distorted and subverted for the illegitimate maintenance of political power”. Judges, magistrates and lawyers had been intimidated.

Zimbabwe ended 2004 with the world’s highest inflation rate—149%, though well down from the 2003 peak of 600%—and the worst performing currency. The Zimbabwe dollar fell 85.6% against the US dollar, now Z\$5711. At independence in 1980 the US dollar was Z\$0.66. Acting finance minister Herbert Murerwa forecast in his budget (25 November 2004) a turnaround, with real output growth of 3.5%.

After weeks of indecision over a possible boycott and attempts by Zimbabwe to exclude British reporters from the country and ban TV coverage, the England cricket team played four one-day matches against the home team in Zimbabwe at the beginning of December, winning 4–0. The matches passed off without incident.

South Africa

When Nelson Mandela’s oldest and only surviving son Makgatho, a lawyer for Standard Bank, died in Johannesburg at 54 (6 January) he called journalists to his garden and told them AIDS had been the cause of death. He said families should not hide the facts because that was the only way people could come to understand that HIV was an ordinary illness like TB or cancer. At the graveside, standing with President Mbeki and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mandela’s grandson, Mandla, told mourners his mother had also recently died of AIDS. Mandela’s first son died in a car crash at 24.

The South African Medical Research Council supported researchers’ findings that the true AIDS death toll in the country was three times the official figures—in the region of 370 000 in 2004. Death certificates omit mention of AIDS because of the stigma and fear among the people, citing instead TB or pneumonia. Figures issued by the government agency Statistics South Africa (18 February) showed a huge rise of deaths among women. Whereas in 1997 149 men aged between 25 and 29 died for every 100 women, in 2003 77 men died for every 100 women.

The Health Ministry and the national blood service agreed (3 December 2004) that a donor’s colour should not be used to determine the risk of the blood being infected. Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang discovered that, in addition to a donor’s sexual practices and healthiness of lifestyle, the blood service used skin colour to evaluate safety for donation.

Earlier it had come to light that blood donated by President Mbeki had been destroyed because he did not complete a questionnaire and his race put him in a high-risk category.

President Mbeki told the Sudanese assembly (1 January) that the British had left a terrible legacy of countries divided by race, colour, culture and religion. He singled out Winston Churchill, saying his prejudice had been used to justify British atrocities. Mbeki was in Sudan following the signing of a peace accord between the Khartoum government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement.

As 2005 opened campaigns were launched to tempt back home South Africans who had left a decade ago during the transition to democracy, fearing the country would fall into chaos. A website offered tips on immigration, schools, property,

banking and tax. Whites have begun to trickle back from the UK, Australia, New Zealand and North America. About a million South Africans live abroad—a quarter of them in the UK.

Tough measures to control crime came into force on 1 January. A three-month amnesty allowed people to hand in unlicensed guns free from prosecution and under a new law all legal weapons had to be re-licensed over a five-year period. Gun owners feared the removal of their only defence against rampant crime. The government said the step was urgent for a country with one of the world's highest rates of gun-related crime. The new measures were tough. Legal age of gun ownership would go up from 16 to 21 and owners would be limited to only one weapon for self-defence, with a maximum four others for hunting or other uses. Registered owners total 2.5 million, with an estimated four million illegal weapons. Recorded murders fell to 20 000, half gun-related, in the year to March 2004—the lowest for a decade.

A crime success story was the transformation of central Johannesburg, which a few years ago had been ruined by lawlessness. A revolutionary new system of closed circuit television linked to instant police response units had cut street crime by 88% and become a remarkable example of urban renewal. Numerous police chiefs from US cities and from cities such as London have visited Johannesburg to learn how it has been done.

Former president Bertrand Aristide of Haiti, now in exile in South Africa and an honorary research fellow at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, delivered a lecture on African values and the trauma of slavery (28 January).

A sharp clash erupted between two anti-apartheid warriors when Archbishop Desmond Tutu criticized the government's black empowerment policies because they were benefiting a "small elite". He complained of the lack of debate within the ANC. President Mbeki accused him of not working with the facts. Tutu thanked Mbeki (29 November 2004) "for telling me...that I am a liar with scant regard for the truth, and a charlatan posing with his concern for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed and the voiceless".

Sir Mark Thatcher pleaded guilty in Cape Town High Court (13 January) to helping to finance the coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea. He was given a suspended four-year jail term and ordered to pay a £265 000 fine. He flew out of South Africa the same night but returned for another appearance in court (19 February) to answer 43 questions submitted by Equatorial Guinea. Meantime, the seven-year sentence imposed on Simon Mann, who led the mercenary plot, was halved in Harare. In the last weeks of 2004 widespread speculation arose as to how much the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office had known about the coup's origins and at what stage.

A New York district court dismissed in December claims filed against nearly 40 multinational corporations seeking billions of dollars of damages over allegations that their investments had helped prop up the apartheid regime. Companies had feared the case might lead to huge lawsuits against any company that had done business with oppressive governments.

Swaziland

The protracted judicial crisis which led to the resignation of the judges of the Court of Appeal in 2002 was brought near to an end when Prime Minister

Absalom Themba Dlamini announced (17 September 2004) that new legislation had paved the way for restoration of the court and the rule of law. The government withdrew a statement impugning the independence and integrity of the court and judges. The agreement was reached with the help over more than two years of the Commonwealth Secretariat. In thanking Secretary-General Don McKinnon and his team the prime minister said: "We cannot but be impressed by the strength of the Commonwealth commitment to the principle of the rule of law".

The country continued to be troubled by the excesses of King Mswati, who chose a 17-year-old girl as his 13th wife in January. News that he had bought a £260 000 luxury car for himself was followed by the revelation that he had bought ten new BMW cars for his wives. Later he banned all photos of his cars. A royal decree said it was not permissible to take pictures of his majesty "when he alights from his car". A few months earlier the King had been forced to abandon plans to buy a royal jet. At the end of January the main trade union called a two-day general strike to press for democratic reforms. Roadblocks stopped people joining protests in Mbabane and the strike, as on previous occasions, was a flop.

Lesotho

Four huge flawless diamonds worth £3.25 million were found in January within six days of reopening Letseng mine—the highest diamond mine in the world (10 500 ft). The mine, now owned by the government and a South African conglomerate, was closed in 1982 after a market slump and royalties dispute. New machinery can now tap into a rich, deep seam of hard rock and the finds raised hopes of similar finds that could boost the country's economy.

Botswana

President Festus Mogae warned his country (1 December 2004) that it could not go on with such a high HIV/AIDS rate; 37% of the population are HIV positive. With 35 000 people on anti-retroviral drugs the epidemic still did not seem to be peaking. Mogae told his people to abstain from unsafe sex or die. Foreign funding for treatment, he said, would not last forever.

Namibia

Sam Nujoma said he would become a student when he stepped down as president in March 2005. He would study geology at the University of Namibia, where he had recently been reappointed chancellor for six years. He has often said he believes the mountains of Namibia are full of mineral wealth yet to be tapped. Nujoma's retirement package includes a furnished residence in Windhoek, use of state vehicles and a considerable staff. He led the armed struggle against South Africa from 1962 and became president at independence in 1990.

UK

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced (15 December 2004) the closure of six high commissions—Vanuatu, Tonga, Kiribati, Bahamas, Lesotho and Swaziland. Three embassies were also to be shut—East Timor, Paraguay and Madagascar. In addition 21 consulates would go or take on local staff. Of these Brisbane, Perth, Auckland and Douala (Cameroon) were in the Commonwealth. Much of the work would be handled by embassies and high commissions in the capitals or from a neighbouring country—Bahamas from Jamaica; Swaziland and Lesotho from South Africa; Vanuatu, Kiribati and Tonga from Fiji. The £6 million saved would be spent on opening embassies in areas regarded as central to the ‘war on terror’. Britain has 153 embassies and high commissions, 70 consulates, 10 missions to organizations such as the UN, EU and NATO, and nine governors in overseas territories. Since Labour came to power in 1997 staff recruited in London had risen from 5600 to 6100.

On a six-day tour in January Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown visited Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa to promote a package of debt relief, aid and trade reform for Africa. In Tanzania Brown said Britain would relieve part of the debt owed to the World Bank by Tanzania, adding: “What we offer to Tanzania today we now offer to the whole developing world tomorrow”.

His ambition was to launch a Marshall Plan for Africa at the beginning of a year in which Britain was to chair the G8 and EU and had set up the Commission for Africa to prepare a plan for the summit meetings. In South Africa Brown enlisted the support of Nelson Mandela, who later travelled to London to be there when G8 finance ministers met. The Brown initiative was generally well received, but Washington was doubtful and the prospect of support from the USA for his goal of doubling global aid to Africa to £53 billion under the International Finance Facility was not good. Canada supported the US line. The finance ministers’ meeting in London (6 February) was divided on the debt relief issue and the US delegation was especially cool about Brown’s ideas, which included revaluation by the IMF of some of its gold reserves to allow some poor country’s debts to be written off.

Plans to abolish the ancient role of Lord Chancellor, a position said to date back 1400 years, were abandoned by the Blair government (3 December 2004) because of opposition from the House of Lords. Instead it was to be reformed. Creation of a supreme court, however, would go ahead.

Cyprus

When the EU and Turkey agreed to open talks on 3 October 2004 on EU accession President Tassos Papadopoulos warned that Cyprus could still veto Turkish membership. He said: “The Republic of Cyprus has the right not to consent to the start of the entry talks”. Retiring Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş said: “Any move towards recognition would amount to Turkey accepting being an occupier (of North Cyprus) and the approval of Greek Cypriot massacres”.

The ruling Turkish Cypriot party led by Mehmet Ali Talat won parliamentary elections (20 February) in the northern area. It gained seven seats but this was not

enough to govern without a coalition. The Republican Turkish Party won 44% and the National Unity party of Dervis Eroglu 32%. Eroglu opposes the UN plan for reunifying the island.

UK government documents released on 1 January showed that in 1974 plans were drawn up on the orders of Prime Minister Harold Wilson for British military intervention in Cyprus to restore Archbishop Makarios as president after he had been deposed by the Nicos Sampson coup. Events moved faster than expected and Turkish troops invaded north Cyprus.

Malta

The UNHCR criticized Malta for its treatment of asylum-seekers (18 January), which it said was the strictest in Europe. Conditions in detention camps were completely unacceptable. People were being held for 18 months, although the UN says they should not be detained except in specific circumstances. When asylum-seekers demonstrated peacefully Maltese soldiers had used excessive force.

Gibraltar

At talks between Britain and Spain in Chevening House, Kent, the Gibraltarians were at the negotiating table for the first time. The meeting agreed (16 December 2004) to create a new forum to provide Gibraltar with its own distinct voice. Future dialogue would be three-sided and on an equal footing. Chief Minister Peter Caruana represented Gibraltar. The change of direction was a product of the new Spanish Socialist government. The opposition Conservative Party deplored the talks. Another sign of change came when Spain and Gibraltar both condemned the unscheduled arrival of the ailing Royal Navy nuclear submarine *Sceptre*.

Jews celebrated 300 years of British rule in the Gibraltar synagogue, Europe's third oldest continuously used synagogue (12 December 2004). Gibraltar was a refuge for centuries for the Sephardic Jews and in World War Two a conduit for Jewish refugees.

Commodore David White, 50, commander of British forces in Gibraltar since May 2004, was found dead in his swimming pool (9 January). A few days earlier Ministry of Defence police had asked him to return to Britain pending an inquiry into 'personal' issues.

Commonwealth Foundation

Dr Mark Collins, former director of the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre in the UK since 2000 and recently based in Nairobi, took over as Director of the Commonwealth Foundation on 14 March.

He succeeded Colin Ball, who retired in November. In a characteristically outspoken valedictory speech in London Ball complained that the resources, energies and abilities of the so-called unofficial Commonwealth were not being properly mobilized. He proposed a core group be set up through which the official and unofficial Commonwealth could seek ways of collaborative working, including strategic and annual planning. No such body currently existed. Thus recently he had

discovered that two organizations, both based in London, had set up meetings in the same country at the same time without realizing it. They had not even organized a joint welcome desk at the airport.

Around the Commonwealth

Senior election managers from 38 countries met in New Delhi (24–26 February 2005) to discuss ways of improving the management of elections. It was the eighth meeting of Commonwealth Chief Election Officers in 12 years

The Prince of Wales opened a Commonwealth information Centre in Quadrant House, Pall Mall, London (7 February)—a resource for journalists, researchers and the public. He also launched a new website dedicated to teaching young people about the Commonwealth—www.youngcommonwealth.org.

Secretary-General Don McKinnon launched in Marlborough House (7 February) the first of a series of events aimed at getting the development agenda back into the current round of trade talks taking place at the World Trade Organization (WTO). High Commissioners attended. So did EU Commissioner for Trade Peter Mandelson and UK Minister of State for Trade and Investment Douglas Alexander. A few days earlier a meeting for small states was convened to help them secure tangible gains from the Doha Development Agenda. And in Brussels Deputy Secretary-General Winston Cox told ambassadors from Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean that the Secretariat was ready to help mobilize support for global integration at the WTO ministerial conference in Hong Kong in December.

Sixty Namibian small-scale gem miners were trained in cutting and polishing gemstones under a Commonwealth Secretariat project to develop Namibia's small and cottage industries. The project, based at the Gemstones Centre in Keetmanshoop, aimed to equip miners with skills to add value to raw stones. A second phase would develop a pool of trainers in quality management, grading and polishing gemstones.

Five new open and distance learning programmes organized by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) aimed to build rural capacity in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and Solomon Islands in food security, environmental protection, rural development, nutritional education and micro-enterprise.

COL has invited Commonwealth small states to help create their own 'virtual university'.

A Commonwealth roundtable was held in London to help (9–10 December) the World Bank explore whether anti-corruption insurance was a feasible means of promoting foreign direct investment.

The Secretariat is helping Ghana develop a website to market the country as a tourist destination.

A Commonwealth Business Council meeting in London attended by Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath brought together 100 business executives to discuss India and global partnerships.

In the wings of the Asian Tourism Fair in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, the Commonwealth Asia Youth Centre, based in Chandigarh, joined the Indian Youth Ministry in a regional consultation on Youth Enterprise (5–11 February). The

Caribbean Youth Centre, based in Guyana, agreed at a four-day meeting in Barbados (24–27 January) to start talks on designing new occupational standards for youth work in the region.

Grace Mfunne is one of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's Youth Ambassadors for Positive Living. She is HIV positive and on World AIDS Day (1 December) she hosted a morning talk show on a Lusaka radio station popular with the young. A workshop on integrating youth participation in HIV/AIDS issues in southern Africa was held in Lusaka a few days later.

A pilot programme to promote a Commonwealth human rights curriculum in universities in India was launched by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Legal Education Association in Nasik (20–21 December). The plan is to develop similar curricula in other parts of the Commonwealth.

At a meeting in London on the Recruitment and Migration of the Highly Skilled (25 January) the focus was on the drain of teachers and nurses from the developing to the developed world. To curb the loss a Commonwealth teachers recruitment protocol and code of practice for the recruitment of health workers have been introduced

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications

Chains of Fortune: Linking Women Producers and Workers with Global Markets. Case studies of women employed in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Samoa and South Africa.

The Plain Language Guide to the World Summit on Sustainable Development by Janet R. Stgrachan, Georgina Ayhre, Jan McHarry and Rosalie Callway, 253 pp.

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