

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *President Musharraf of Pakistan went to Delhi to watch more than a cricket match with India. After a summit with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh the two declared their peace process irreversible. Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin's minority government was saved by the Speaker's casting vote. Malaysia began to mend fences with Australia and talked free trade. President Obasanjo of Nigeria sacked ministers in a drive on corruption. The Ugandan parliament agreed on a referendum to decide whether it should become multiparty. Britain began relieving Tanzania and Mozambique of debt. Zambia's economy took a lift as copper prices zoomed. Just before celebrating 25 years of independence Zimbabweans went to the polls and President Robert Mugabe claimed the parliamentary elections had been as free and fair as anywhere else. And South Africans renamed their capital Pretoria. It will become Tshwane.*

New Zealand

Pete Hodgson, minister responsible for climate change policy, made New Zealand the first country in the world to introduce a carbon tax. He announced (4 May 2005) that New Zealanders would pay NZ\$2.90 (£1.11) a week for electricity, petrol and gas, adding 6% to household energy prices and 9% for most businesses. The tax would take effect in two years. It would make polluting energy sources such as coal and oil more expensive than cleaner ones like hydro, wind and solar. Big countries would be watching to see how it works out. In 2003 the government planned a methane tax on farmers because flatulence from cows and sheep causes more than half New Zealand's total greenhouse gas emissions, but farmers forced abandonment of the idea.

On a trip to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji in March Prince Charles visited his old school, Geelong Grammar. After a generally cool reception in Australia, Prime Minister Helen Clark chose, after talks with the Prince, to repeat her view that her country would inevitably become a republic. She admitted there was "scarcely even a debate" about the role of the monarchy.

Clark was in an aircraft which had to make an emergency landing (13 April). Turbulence blew open a door of the Piper Aztec over notoriously windy Wellington. She was badly bruised.

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Australia

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited Canberra in April 2005—only the third leader of Indonesia to pay an official visit to Australia in 30 years. A week later Abdullah Badawi became the first Malaysian prime minister to visit Australia since 1984. The visits followed trips by Howard to Indonesia and Singapore in January—all marking a switch of focus in foreign policy. In his words, Australia's dominant interests in the years ahead would be in Asia. He said in Singapore: "This is our part of the world to which we most immediately belong, not only in a geographic sense but increasingly also in a strategic and economic sense". After years of sour relations between their two countries, Howard and Yudohoyono signed a framework partnership agreement and pledged to negotiate a separate security pact. Howard and Abdullah talked about a free trade agreement, although before he arrived Abdullah accused Howard of being too preoccupied with Australia's alliance with the USA to care about Asia.

Australia planned to accept 20 000 extra skilled immigrants in 2006 and backpackers spending at least three months harvesting were to be allowed to double their stay to two years. The moves aimed to end the chronic shortage of plumbers, lorry drivers, doctors, boilermakers, pharmacists, accountants, chefs and hairdressers. Unemployment was at its lowest for 28 years. In 2004 20% of immigrants were British.

A landmark ruling by the High Court said the government was obliged to take in refugees facing prosecution in their homeland. A test case involved a Russian Jew and his son refused refugee status on arrival six years ago. Australia does not accept Russian Jews and their non-Jewish spouses and children, arguing that they should go to Israel for protection.

The kidnapping of engineer Douglas Wood (1 May) was the most high-profile seizure of an Australian since the Iraq war began. Three other cases had ended in swift release. The militant group released a video of Wood pleading for life. Howard sent a team to Baghdad that included Australia's most senior but controversial Muslim cleric to try to secure his release.

In April an aerial cull of camels in the Outback was agreed at a meeting of government and meat industry officials and Aboriginal and pastoral landholders. They would be shot by marksmen in helicopters. Animal rights campaigners said it would be a bloodbath because aerial killing could not guarantee a clean kill. The 600 000 wild camels are damaging the environment by using water supplies needed by sheep and cattle. Scientists said 15 000 camels needed to be killed each year to keep the population stable. It was doubling every eight years. Camels were introduced into Australia in the 1840s as desert transport animals.

New Zealand-born Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, controversial right-wing premier of Queensland from 1968 to 1987, died (13 January) aged 94. He was often in conflict with governments in Canberra, opposing progressive ideas, human rights and centrist notions. In 1971 he called a state of emergency to ensure anti-apartheid demonstrators did not disrupt the South African rugby team's programme in Brisbane.

Papua New Guinea

Australia had to pull out in May 2005 the 200 police officers it had sent to the country six months earlier to help restore law and order. Judges found their deployment unconstitutional. The Supreme Court decided the visitors' immunity from prosecution—demanded by Canberra before the troops went to Papua New Guinea—violated local laws. The ruling was a blow to Australia's policy of greater intervention in the Pacific. The police were there mainly to train their local counterparts. Immunity from prosecution was one of several legal exemptions demanded by Canberra before it agreed to send the police.

A proposal was made by Papua New Guinea at a UN environment meeting in Bonn (16 May) that rainforest protection should be added to measures to prevent global warming. The meeting was the first international attempt to look into what to do when the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. The PNG initiative was novel. Until now other developing countries had rejected spreading of responsibility for global warming beyond the industrialized countries. Now PNG was prepared to be held accountable for greenhouse gas emissions attributed to the destruction of its rainforest. Its ambassador to the UN said "a tonne is a tonne is a tonne", but there was no way developing countries could trade avoided rainforest destruction on the international market. Trees absorb carbon dioxide that causes warming. Cutting them down removes that benefit.

PNG protesters demanded an apology (31 May) because Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare was ordered to remove his shoes by airport security at Brisbane airport. They suggested stripping naked the next Australian minister to visit.

Kiribati

The problem of waste piling up in Pacific island towns was highlighted by the Kiribati branch of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. The Kiribati capital Tarawa is the most crowded corner of the Pacific. It generates 6500 tonnes of solid waste a year and its landfill sites cannot cope. Rubbish is being swept out to sea. Pollution is so bad that people are warned not to eat raw shellfish. In neighbouring Tuvalu the problem is even worse. Asterio Takesy, director of the environment programme, said: "The Pacific needs to develop and this waste is generated by growth".

Tonga

Royal Tongan Airlines, the national carrier, closed in May 2005. Mechanical failure grounded its last aircraft, a Boeing 757, and cash for repairs ran out. In April the Brunei government had impounded it and hundreds of stranded passengers were rescued by Air New Zealand. New Zealand and Australian airlines were expected to take over domestic routes covering the 169 islands within Tonga's territory, as well as services to Sydney, Auckland, Honolulu and elsewhere. Tonga Airlines' losses were put at £12 million.

Solomon Islands

Harold Keke, leader of the Guadalcanal Liberation Front, was jailed for life (18 March 2005) for murdering cabinet minister Father Augustine Geve in 2002. Police said Keke was responsible for a string of atrocities during the ethnic unrest of the late 1990s. He was among hundreds of rebels arrested after the intervention of Australian-led peacekeepers. Justice Minister Chris Ellison and Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said the case showed the laws of the country were again being effectively upheld.

Pitcairn Islands

The appeal by the six men found guilty of sexually abusing young girls was dismissed by the Pitcairn Supreme Court sitting in New Zealand (24 May 2005). Four were sentenced to jail for two to six years; the others had non-custodial sentences. The men argued that they did not know British law applied to Pitcairn and their trial was unfair. They watched the hearing on a video link to New Zealand. Another appeal based on the claim that Britain did not have legal jurisdiction over Pitcairn would go to the Privy Council.

Fiji Islands

President Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan made an unscheduled visit during a Pacific tour in May 2005. Taiwan media reports said Fiji was switching its diplomatic ties from Beijing to Taiwan. But the Taiwan government said Chen was there as a guest of Taiwanese people living in Fiji. Only 25 countries recognize Taiwan rather than Beijing.

A tribe in Namalata Island claimed ownership of neighbouring Mago Island, which had been sold to film star Mel Gibson for £7.8 million by, it was believed, a Japanese hotel chain. The tribe said that in the 19th century Mago was sold for 2000 coconut plants and their ancestors were evicted at gunpoint. Fijian Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said the government could not do anything because it was freehold property.

Guyana

The worst floods in the country's history followed torrential rains in January–February 2005. The UN said 40% of the population had lost some or all of their possessions. The disaster and appeals for help were overshadowed by the Indian Ocean tsunami a few weeks earlier. Several people died in the rains, and disease that followed caused many more deaths. At one stage almost 100 000 people were living in waterlogged homes.

Grenada

Following the disastrous Hurricane Ivan in September 2004 the Commonwealth Secretariat pledged more than £1 million in technical assistance over three years.

Help included provision of experts to resuscitate the nutmeg industry and develop a framework for its oil and gas, as well as to assist in economic planning, road engineering and town and country planning.

Grenada-born British army Private Johnson Beharry, 25, who won the Victoria Cross for saving the lives of 30 members of his unit in Iraq, was given a national reception in London by Prime Minister Keith Mitchell (23 March). Only 14 VC recipients are still alive and the award was the first given since the Falklands war.

Canada

A month-long political crisis ended when Prime Minister Paul Martin survived a critical parliamentary vote on the budget (20 May 2005). Independent MP Chuck Cadman decided at the last minute to back Martin's minority Liberal government so the ballot tied at 152 votes each. Speaker Peter Milliken, a Liberal, cast the deciding vote. Martin's survival was boosted by the defection a week earlier of leading Conservative MP and millionaire businesswoman Belinda Stronach. The opposition Conservative Party, led by Stephen Harper, had been trying to oust the government because of a financial scandal dating back to the 1990s that involved alleged irregularities over public advertising contracts. Martin was finance minister at the time but not implicated in the scandal. The Conservatives argued that the government was corrupt and should be forced out of office, Just before the vote the Conservatives said they would join forces with the Bloc Québécois, giving them 153 seats, and the Liberals did a deal with the left of centre New Democratic Party, giving them 151 seats. Meantime, the judicial commission of inquiry into the scandal, set up in February 2004, was expected to last until the end of 2005.

The European Union and Canada imposed retaliatory duties on US imports ranging from paper to machinery from 1 May because of the US failure to repeal an anti-dumping law deemed illegal by the World Trade Organization. The Canadian duties were to be on live swine, cigarettes, oysters and some fish. The US Senate voted (3 March) to block the resumption of billions of dollars worth of live cattle imports from Canada. They said Canada had still not shown its cattle were free of mad cow disease (BSE). The Bush administration wants to resume the trade. The impasse was changing the Canadian cattle industry as it raised its slaughtering capacity and processed meat exports to offset losses from live cattle sales.

After a 19-month, £43 million trial in the Supreme Court of British Columbia in Vancouver the judge cleared two Sikh militants of involvement in the 1985 bombing of an Air India jetliner over Ireland's Atlantic coast. The shocked families of the 329 victims urged Canada to set up a public inquiry.

The largest seal cull in half a century began on the ice floes of Newfoundland at the end of March. About 320 000 pups were killed in four weeks. The government, confronted with protests from welfare groups, argued that the cull was essential to protect fish stocks.

Queen Elizabeth visited Saskatchewan and Alberta for nine days in May to celebrate the centenary of the provinces' absorption into the Canadian confederation. Her first call was to a Cree pow-wow at the First Nations University in Regina. It was her 22nd trip to Canada and coincided with the political turmoil in Ottawa.

Nigeria

President Olusegun Obasanjo stepped up his drive against corruption in early 2005. In January Labour Minister Husseini Akwango was sacked and put on trial for receiving bribes from a French company to help it secure a contract to produce identity cards. Then education minister Fabian Osuji was dismissed for bribing legislators to inflate ministerial budget allocations (22 March). He said Osuji had paid the Senate president and six other legislators £223 000. Allegations about other ministers would be investigated. Obsajano said: "We cannot continue to solicit for debt relief without being prudent and relentless in our fight against corruption at home". Osuji denied the charges against him and said his dismissal infringed human rights. His lawyers said he had been made a scapegoat and he would take the government to court. Both houses of the assembly condemned the president.

Adolphus Wabara resigned as Senate president—third in line to the head of state—having been ordered to go by the majority People's Democratic Party. He said he was quitting voluntarily "to preserve the sanctity of the office". He was replaced by Ken Nnamani, 57-year-old senator from Enugu state. Obasanjo then sacked Housing and Urban Development Minister Mobolaji Osomoi for arranging to sell 207 government houses in Ikoyi, Lagos, to senior officials and others of influence. Nigeria's former police chief Tafawa Balogun appeared in Abuja court (4 April) charged with 70 counts of graft and money laundering.

Osuji, Wabara and five others went on trial for corruption in Abuja (16 May). Osuji said he was being made a scapegoat because he was close to Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, a possible successor to Obasanjo.

On a visit to London Obasanjo asked Britain (15 March) to live up to its commitments and take the lead in writing off Nigerian debts and to do more to recover stolen money held in international banks. Nigeria's foreign debt is £18 billion—the largest in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Senate rejected plans by Obasanjo to curb budget spending increases for 2005 by £7.1 billion. It called them "illegal and unconstitutional".

Obasanjo opened Nigeria's first national blood transfusion centre to fight HIV/AIDS. The centre, set up by US organization Safe Blood for Africa, aimed to cut new infections by providing uncontaminated blood to hospitals. It is the first of seven to open across the country over two years.

Obasanjo and President Paul Biya of Cameroon met UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Geneva (11 May) to settle their dispute over the oil-rich Bokassi area. After five hours they failed to agree on a timetable for Nigerian troops to withdraw or when to demarcate the border. Annan said he would work out a new programme of withdrawal.

International pressure increased on Nigeria to hand over Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, to the UN-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone. He faces 17 counts of war crimes for his role in backing Sierra Leone rebels who burned and raped their victims. Nigeria gave Taylor asylum in Calabar in a deal to prevent further bloodshed in Liberia. The court prosecutor said Taylor was also plotting the assassination of President Lansana Conte of Guinea. The US House of Representatives called for Nigeria to hand Taylor over. President Bush took up the matter with Obasanjo in Washington in early May.

Britain imposed a year-long ban on first-time visas for Nigerians aged 18–30. It did not apply to students seeking to study in Britain or to some business travellers. Nigeria was the only country to face this type of restricted visa ban.

The new national carrier, part-owned by Virgin Group, said it planned to make Lagos an African aviation hub when it began operating. Virgin Nigeria would service domestic and international routes in Africa, and make flights to Europe, the Middle East and the USA. Virgin Nigeria replaced Nigeria Airways, which was liquidated in 2003 with £30 million debts.

Cameroon

Widespread corruption in the finance ministry that was believed to have begun in 1994 and cost it £1 million a month was uncovered during a payroll inquiry. The office of Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni, who came to office in 2004 vowing to fight corruption, said in March 2005 that staff had lied about their rank and delayed their retirement to boost their earnings. The government would now carry out an audit of payrolls at all ministries.

Sierra Leone

The largest single direct foreign investment in the country—£100 million—was set to come from a Chinese company wanting to develop Lumley Beach, one of West Africa's most beautiful, into a tourist resort with conference centres, sports facilities, casino, and night club. Another Chinese project was already underway—restoration of the country's largest hotel.

Former military leader Valentine Strasser formed the People's Redemption Party and said he wanted to fight presidential elections in May 2006. Strasser seized power in 1992 at the age of 25 and was deposed four years later. When he put down a coup attempt in December 1992 nine plotters and 17 other prisoners were executed.

Uganda

Parliament voted overwhelmingly to hold a referendum on whether the 'no-party system' should be replaced by a multiparty one. Elections were due in 2006. Until now, under President Yoweri Museveni, candidates have had to run for parliament as individuals. His National Resistance Movement says it is not a party because all Ugandans are members. The government and all parties support a return to multipartyism ahead of elections. Britain cancelled £5 million budget support aid (29 April 2005) because of the slow progress in the transition to multiparty politics. Museveni said Uganda would try to do without aid, adding: "The so-called donors cannot continue to show us how we should manage the country". He said their meddling was partly responsible for perpetuation of terrorism in the north.

Two public demonstrations took place in Kampala, one supporting and one opposing Museveni's efforts to amend the constitution and stand for re-election in 2006. Under the constitution Museveni, in power since 1986, has to step down

after two terms of office. The demonstrations were rare events and police did not intervene, but they did break up a third protest (31 March) and 17 people were arrested.

At the International Court of Justice the Democratic Republic of Congo accused Uganda of invading its territory and “massacring Congolese nationals”. The DRC applied to the court in 1999. It wants the end of aggression and reparations for destruction it says Uganda troops wrought on its soil. Officially, Uganda has withdrawn, but the Congo says it has left behind a network of warlords.

Kenya

President Mwai Kibaki came under fire for rampant corruption and failing to implement reforms when donors met in Nairobi (11 April 2005). He appealed for more time to overcome “some challenges”.

Finance Minister David Mwiraria told donors the economy was expected to grow from 2.6% to 3.5% in 2005. The IMF said the economy was not growing fast enough to help lift regional economies.

The President’s wife, Lucy Kibaki, and six bodyguards drove to the offices of Kenya’s biggest newspaper *The Nation* at midnight (2 May) and demanded the news editor’s arrest. She stayed for several hours. A struggle with a photographer ensued. Mrs Kibaki was upset by a widely published story that she had interrupted a party being held by her next-door neighbour, the World Bank country director, and demanded music be turned off. It was the latest in a series of outspoken remarks and bizarre episodes involving Mrs Kibaki. In Kenya the press today is free and the incident was widely reported in newspapers and on the radio.

A band calling itself the Republican Council, which said it wanted to break control of the coast away from the rest of Kenya, sent a 19-page declaration to Queen Elizabeth. It claimed an 1896 accord between Queen Victoria and the Sultan of Zanzibar said the coast was separate from the rest of Kenya. The area was the scene of tribal unrest in 1997 and recently troops stormed a forest training base.

Thomas Cholmondeley, great-grandson of Lord Delamere, in 1903 one of the first settlers in the White Highlands, was charged with shooting dead a wildlife warden on the family estate (28 April). Cholmondeley, sole heir to the title, pleaded not guilty and claimed he fired in self-defence. The charges were dropped (17 May) for lack of evidence. A few days later Director of Public Prosecutions Philip Murgor was sacked because he had “acted unprofessionally”. The lifestyle of the early settlers was the subject of the novel and film *White Mischief*. An uneasy atmosphere pervades the area where the Delamere family still live. In April a Masai leader threatened to invade the 100 000-acre Delamere ranch, claiming the land was deceitfully taken from the Masai a century ago. In the first four months of 2005 ethnic violence caused 30 deaths in the central Rift Valley province.

A new photograph of Mt Kilimanjaro showed that its snowy cap at 19 340 ft was now all but gone. The picture was in a book sent to the G8 energy and environment summit held in London in March.

Tanzania

Foreign Minister Jakaya Kikwete, 55, was nominated (4 May 2005) by the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) as its candidate to succeed President Benjamin Mkapa on completion of his second and final five-year term in October. He was preferred to Communications and Transport Minister Mark Mwandosya and former Organisation of African Unity secretary-general Salim Salim. The opposition Civic United Front chose economist Ibrahim Lipumba. The CCM has been in power since independence 40 years ago.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown signed a memorandum in Dar es Salaam (14 January) relieving Tanzania of £40 million of the £370 million debt it owes the World Bank over 10 years. Tanzania said it would now be able to move towards having 50% of children in secondary education by 2015. Brown's action was the first step in his campaign to persuade developed countries to follow Britain's lead and take on the multilateral debt. The UK had already cancelled its bilateral debts to Tanzania and other poor nations.

The British- and German-run company City Water was stripped of the 10-year contract it made in 2003 to supply Dar es Salaam. A new company, Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Corporation, was to be set up. Water Minister Edward Lowassa said the quality of the services had declined. Promised investment had not materialized. The World Development Movement said it was "yet another example of water privatization failing to deliver water to poor communities". A pop song backed by Britain's Department for International Development had been used to promote the merits of water privatization to Tanzanians.

A previously unknown monkey species—named the highland mangabey—was found recently in the Tanzanian mountains. The existence of such a large mammal living out of sight for so long has astounded biologists. The last new African monkey was found 20 years ago. The latest lives at up to 8000 ft and has long fur to withstand the cold.

Mozambique

Although the country is still poor, poverty levels have fallen from 59% to 54% and the economy has grown at 8% a year since 1996. On a visit senior World Bank economist Gregor Binkert called the changes and progress incredible. The once war-ravaged country is increasingly winning international plaudits for its progress and stability. But as a low-cost sugar producer it can still get only 16% of its exports on to the European markets. Prime Minister Luisa Diogo has called for short-term preferential treatment on the issue of trade barriers.

On his January visit to East Africa British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown said Britain would cancel its total debt of £80 million and 10% of the country's £1.07 billion debt to donors.

The government cut by 60% the £1.3 million budget for the beach-front mansion allocated to former president Joaquim Chissano when he retired and handed over to his chosen successor Armando Guebuza.

Prime Minister Diogo said she did not think the Commission for Africa initiated by British Prime Minister Tony Blair would meet the concerns of individual African

states. Mozambique had special conditions and it was not easy to have one recommendation for all the African countries.

Malawi

President Bingu wa Mutharika allowed parliament to meet again in the 300-room palace from which he had ejected it a few months earlier in order to live there himself. Controversy followed when newspapers reported that Mutharika said the palace was haunted. Two journalists were arrested for publishing false news, then freed. Mutharika's predecessor as president, Bakili Muluzu, apologized to Malawians for choosing Mutharika to succeed him "and imposing him on the country". No party has a majority in the 193-member parliament. Mutharika had left the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) and formed a new one, but Muluzu and the UDF remained influential.

Education Minister Yusuf Mwawa was sacked and charged with using public funds for his wedding ceremony. He was the first serving minister to be arrested in an anti-corruption drive by Mutharika. Many officials were arrested.

A major land redistribution project funded by the World Bank started in four districts in the south dominated by tea and tobacco estates. Under the scheme the government is buying up property to give to 20 000 landless families.

Work began on a mausoleum for the country's first president, Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Autocratic Banda ruled for 30 years until 1994. He was buried in a humble grave. Now the mausoleum is to have a library, dancing areas, research centre—and a view of Banda's remains.

First Minister of Scotland Jack McConnell visited Malawi in May in a novel attempt to draw together government aid, professional support and voluntary back-up for a country with connections that go back to David Livingstone. Malawi's capital Blantyre is named after Livingstone's Scottish birthplace. Earlier in the year Scottish MPs toured Malawi and reported on poverty, illness, and HIV/AIDS.

Zambia

The prospects for the Zambian economy were increasingly bright. The emergence of India and China on the world trade scene was set to benefit Zambia considerably by raising the price of copper, which was now at a 16-year high. The Konkola Deep Mining Project launched by President Levy Mwanawasa (10 May) would create 6000 jobs in three years; the Australian company Equinox Minerals project in northwest Zambia was expected to become the largest copper mine in Zambia; and the restoration of the Benguela Railway from Angola would boost copper and cobalt exports to Europe. The tobacco industry, with 260 000 workers, continued to expand and was now producing record earnings—partly because the farmers who had fled Zimbabwe and been welcomed by the Zambian government were now becoming well established.

Deputy Finance Minister Mbita Chitala gave parliament a rundown of assets recovered by the task force on corruption (8 March). They included a plane worth £40 000.

Two accidents caused heavy death tolls of young people within 10 days. A truck carrying 100 students overturned at Kawambwa, 480 miles from Lusaka, killing 44 there. Then a massive blast at the Chinese-owned explosive plant in Chambishi, 400 miles from Lusaka, killed 49 workers aged 18–23 (20 April).

Veteran politician Sikota Wina and his wife Princess Nakatindi bought the bankrupt Zambezi Sawmills, once the timber industry in Africa, for £260 000 in May. He planned to employ 1000 people.

Zimbabwe

Parliamentary elections were held on 31 March 2005. As President Robert Mugabe cast his vote he said: “There can never be anywhere else where elections can be as free and fair as they have been here”. That was not the general international view. Violence (but not intimidation) had been lower than in the 2000 and 2002 elections, but the state of the voter register was worse, with huge numbers of people long dead on the roll—‘ghost voters’. The electoral commission announced that the ruling ZANU-PF had won 78 of the 120 elected seats. There was one independent—Jonathan Moyo, the recently dismissed information minister. With the 30 government-appointed seats, this gave ZANU-PF the two-thirds majority of the 150-seat parliament needed to make constitutional changes. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) held 41 seats, a fall from 50. It claimed to have won 94, cited “massive vote-rigging” and called for new elections. Many constituency boundaries had been changed before the poll. An estimated 3.4 million Zimbabweans living overseas were barred from voting by a Supreme Court ruling.

South African and other African observer missions endorsed the elections. Observers from the 14-state Southern African Development Community (SADC), led by a South African minister, congratulated Zimbabwe on “peaceful, transparent, credible and well managed elections, which reflect the will of the people”. The African Union and the governments of Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and South Africa gave assent to the result. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network, which deployed thousands of observers, said more than 10% of voters were turned away at the polls. It noted huge discrepancies in many areas between those recorded as having cast ballots and the final tallies. The Commonwealth, EU and USA were barred from sending missions, but the Libyans, North Koreans and Chinese were allowed in. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace condemned the poll, as did Pius Ncube, the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, who said the government was one of crooks and liars.

Central to Mugabe’s campaign was his argument that Tony Blair was the great enemy of Zimbabwe and the cause of all its troubles. Advertisements and leaflets, even a pop song, called on voters to “Bury Blair”; opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai was a British puppet and all the blows had been inflicted on Zimbabwe by “Mr Blair, within the Commonwealth, within the EU—getting the EU to impose sanctions...”.

Unicef said (17 March) that one in eight children would die before the age of five—the highest mortality rate in the world. AIDS killed a child every 15 minutes. Mugabe admitted for the first time that the country had food shortages, but promised no one would starve. After the elections prices of basic commodities shot

up. Poor rains had seriously affected food supplies. The Zimbabwean dollar was 6114 to one US dollar, but on the black market it was nearly 17 000 to one.

After his victory Mugabe, now 81, joked that he would rule until he was 100. Later he said he would retire in 2008 and write a book. His new 30-strong cabinet contained mostly loyal stalwarts: the former ambassador in London, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, became foreign minister in place of Stan Mudenge, now education; Herbert Murerwa became finance minister again; former Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa got a new portfolio—rural housing and social amenities.

In the aftermath of the election President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, much criticized for not being tougher with Mugabe, told parliament (14 April) he was glad the MDC had lodged complaints with the Zimbabwe Electoral Court. South Africa had encouraged it to do so and, if after this and several MDC complaints to the courts it was ruled that the elections had not been free and fair, “that is a determination that we will accept”. The MDC was challenging 13 results.

On 18 April Zimbabwe celebrated 25 years of independence. As Chinese jet fighters flew over the Harare stadium Mugabe said he had no need of Western help or Western-style democracy. He added: “We have turned East where the sun rises and given our back to the West, where the sun sets”. He was referring to his efforts to find new economic partners among the Asian tiger countries. A few days later he attended the Nonaligned Movement founding celebrations in Bandung.

The 62 South Africans linked to the alleged coup plot in Equatorial Guinea in 2004 were freed from jail and deported to South Africa (15 May). They had been in jail for a year, having landed in Zimbabwe on a plane said to be bound for Equatorial Guinea.

South Africa

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the Afrikanerbond met in Johannesburg (11 April 2005) “to explore avenues to further deepen nation-building and reconciliation”. They agreed to discuss education, safety and security, agriculture and land reform, affirmative action, local government and good governance. They committed to creating “a shared patriotism to give effect to the country’s motto ‘Diverse People Unite’”. A channel for dialogue between the ANC and the Afrikanerbond would be created. The Afrikanerbond’s predecessor, the Broederbond, was central to the old National Party and its apartheid policies.

A few days earlier the federal council of the New National Party (NNP), successor to the National Party of apartheid days, decided by 88 votes to two to close down and encourage members to join the ANC. In the 2004 election it collected only 2% of the vote. Its leader, Martinus van Schalkwyk, had formed an alliance with the ANC and become Tourism Minister. The extinction of the NNP left the three million Afrikaners without a political voice. Former president F. W. de Klerk called for the creation of a new opposition movement. In a speech in Cape Town he said the ANC was pursuing policies which alienate non-black minorities and undermine multiculturalism.

Pretoria’s city council decided to rename the capital Tshwane—the traditional name of the river that runs through it (7 March). White voortrekker Andries Pretorius was leader of the great trek in 1838. The opposition Democratic Alliance

leader in parliament, Tony Leon, strongly opposed the move. The Azania Youth Organization in the West Cape took the debate further by suggesting that the country be renamed Azania. It argued that South Africa was the only country in the world without a name—"South Africa is just geography". Azania means the land of black people.

Deputy Chief Justice Pius Langa, 66, onetime factory worker and defender of many victims of apartheid, became Chief Justice (1 June)—the first black to hold the post. Earlier he had united with the outgoing chief justice and several others to fight government moves to change the constitution. The effect of the change would be to do away with the judiciary's right to administer its affairs with total independence. The current constitution guarantees the judges the "inherent power" to "protect and regulate" their own process. An amendment says that, while the Chief Justice is head of the "judicial function", the Justice Minister would exercise final administrative power over all courts. A two-day meeting of the judges in mid-April was held behind closed doors.

White farmer Mark Scott-Crossley and a black employee were found guilty of murder at Phalaborwa court, Limpopo province (28 April), for beating up and feeding a sacked farmworker to a pride of lions. It happened near the small town of Hoedspruit. The much publicized case highlighted the conditions of many farm labourers 10 years after apartheid and produced charges that the government had failed rural areas.

When President Thabo Mbeki addressed a special congress of the Communist Party in Durban, (9 April) he asked why there was so much fuss about Zimbabwe when other African countries had far graver problems. He said: "You get reports that something like three million people have died in the Congo over the past few years. . . . But the amount of noise you will hear about Zimbabwe, and no noise about the Congo, must surely raise questions as to why. . . [some] make extraordinary volumes of noise about another country where only a few people have died." Earlier in an interview Mbeki had attacked a US decision to put Zimbabwe on a list of 'six outposts of tyranny'.

Mbeki, mandated by the African Union to mediate in the three-year Ivory Coast dispute, chaired four days of talks (3–6 April) convened in Pretoria to end hostilities which had killed thousands. President Laurent Ghagbo, opposition leader Alassane Ouattara and rebel chief Guillaume Soro signed a declaration that it was hoped would produce a lasting peace after more than two years of war. In another South African mediation Deputy President Jacob Zuma was continuing efforts as facilitator of the civil war peace process in Burundi.

On a tour of southeast Asia ahead of the summit of 50 Asian and African leaders in Jakarta (22–24 April) Mbeki said Africa should learn from Asia's story of economic success. Before the summit Mbeki delivered the annual Singapore lecture. After months of silence on the subject of HIV/AIDS he said his view that the key to fighting the disease is good nutrition had been vindicated.

Barclays Bank returned to South Africa by agreeing to pay £2.8 billion for a 60% stake in Absa, one of the country's biggest banks. The deal, approved in May by Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, made Barclays the largest bank in Africa. Barclays operated in South Africa for 80 years. It pulled out in 1986 after a campaign by the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Nelson Mandela announced (11 April) he was taking court action to prevent lawyer Ismail Ayob and businessman Ross Calder from dealing in artwork attributed to him. He also wanted them to account for all previous dealings using the Mandela name. George Bizos, advocate and longtime friend of Mandela, said more than £2 million arising from the sale of the artworks and memorabilia worldwide remained unaccounted for. Ayob was Mandela's personal lawyer for more than 30 years.

In a further step towards the integration of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) South Africans and Mozambicans no longer needed visas. This already applied to Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Mauritius, Malawi and Lesotho.

Lesotho

An expert team organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and led by the president of the Uganda Local Government Association, Councillor J. E. Otekat, was present for the local elections held on 30 April 2005. Other members came from Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago.

Swaziland

King Mswati III celebrated his 37th birthday in style (19 April 2005). He told 20 000 people at the stadium in Manzini that his subjects wanted to "uphold the monarchy and for the King to continue to lead the nation in every respect". Swazi Prime Minister Themba Dlamini likened the King to Mahatma Gandhi. The ceremonies cost nearly £1 million. One South African newspaper asked: "When will this madness come to an end?"

Botswana

In a bold effort to remove the stigma of HIV/AIDS a third beauty contest was staged in a Gaborone resort (2 March) of women victims of the disease. They paraded in evening dress and traditional wear. The winner was crowned Miss HIV Stigma Free and they were judged on their courage and spirit. The 2005 victor, Cynthia Leshomo, 32, would spend the next year travelling across Botswana and Africa on projects to break down the fear and prejudice around HIV/AIDS.

Lebang Mpotokwame, chairman of Transparency International, Botswana, referring to the corruption watchdog's rating of the country as the least corrupt in Africa, said (7 March) said: "The government is forever preaching to the nation about corruption and I can't think of any corruption involving government ministers". A poster in Gaborone airport arrivals hall says: "Botswana has ZERO tolerance for corruption. It is illegal to offer or ask for a bribe."

Namibia

At a rain-soaked ceremony watched by 20 000 people Sam Nujoma, 75-year-old leader of the liberation struggle and first president, handed over power after three terms to 69-year-old Hifikepunye Pohama, his close ally for 40 years (21 March

2005). In elections (15–16 November) the ruling SWAPO party had won 75% of the vote and 55 of the 72 seats in parliament. Ben Ulenga, presidential candidate of the opposition party Congress of Democrats, won 7.3% against Pohama's 76.4%. The result was challenged in the high court. A recount ordered for 13 March was hampered because 38 ballot boxes had been filled by water after rainstorms. Despite the delay, Pohama and SWAPO were declared winners. At the age of 25 Pohama had helped found SWAPO. He held several ministries and became vice-president in 2002.

German archaeologists gave 2000 copies of rock art paintings, including the renowned one of the White Lady of the Brandberg, to the national archives of Namibia to help preserve the ancient art. The news was given at an international rock art conference in Windhoek (11 April). The copies had been made in 1963 by experts from Cologne University, which has conducted studies in Namibia for 70 years. A cave in the Brandberg is covered with hundreds of drawings. The White Lady was discovered in 1917.

India

The government's privatization programme was given a boost when Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram promised a white paper on his proposals (17 May 2005). Delays in moving forward had brought increasing criticism of the Manmohan Singh government. A constraint has been the Common Minimum Programme negotiated by the coalition, which stops the government selling more than 50% of profitable state-owned companies. The coalition depends on the outside support of the Communist parties, which hold 61 parliamentary seats.

The government planned a labour market reform allowing women to work in factories through the night. The move would increase the country's competitiveness, especially *vis-à-vis* China, and advance gender equality in the subcontinent. Companies would have to offer door-to-door transport. It was also planned to introduce Chinese-style special economic zones. Fiscal and labour advantages enjoyed by the information technology sector would be extended to export-oriented manufacturers. States would be able to bypass India's strict labour laws, which often deter foreign companies from investing in the country. The biggest reform, of the tax code, since independence began on 1 April when all but eight of the 29 states began to enact a long-delayed value added tax aimed at curbing evasion and boosting their revenues. VAT would replace a mass of sales taxes.

Following a visit to South Asia by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Washington offered to sell India jet fighters, share civilian nuclear and space technology, and cooperate over energy policy. A State Department spokesman said US companies would be able to bid for 126 "multi-combat aircraft". He added: "India is fast becoming a major world power and our interest is in helping to integrate that world power into the existing power structure the world". In her talks with India Rice said the USA opposed the Indian plan to lay a pipeline linking Iran, Pakistan and India. She wanted the USA and India to begin a "large-scale energy dialogue". In the meantime, India and Japan agreed to develop jointly natural gas resources near the Andaman Islands.

A bill was introduced in Parliament (10 May) to codify Indian policy to prevent nuclear weapons and missile technology being spread to non-nuclear states. India has refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty but, unlike Pakistan, it has not let its nuclear technology proliferate.

The cabinet imposed direct rule on Bihar (7 March) following the state election in which the Chief Minister, wife of Laloo Yadav, who is also Railways Minister in the Delhi government, lost her majority. No party was in a position to form a government in Bihar. The controversial Yadav said he would not pull out of the Delhi coalition.

Building began in a Kerala shipyard in April on a 37 500-tonne aircraft carrier with space for 30 fighters. It will be able to operate for 45 days over 7500 nautical miles. One aim was to provide a military counterbalance to China in Asia. In 2004 India acquired a Russian carrier to replace the ageing *Veerat*.

Only 50 000 people in India travel by air each day, but with the start of low-cost airlines in 2005 and the signature of open skies agreements with UK and the USA the Indian fleet was set to treble by 2010. Plenty of women were queuing to become air hostesses but trained pilots were still in short supply.

A right to information law was approved by the lower house of parliament (11 May). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said it heralded the “dawn of a new era” against corruption. An independent information commission would be set up at national and state government levels, which could impose a daily penalty of 250 rupees on any official refusing to disclose information.

Parliament approved a bill (22 March) stopping domestic companies copying branded drugs. NGOs, including Médecins sans Frontières, opposed the bill. They said it would jeopardize India’s role as the largest exporter of generic drugs to developing countries, especially treatments for HIV/AIDS. The opposition BJP also opposed the law, although it had drafted the bill when in office.

Water from the Indira Sagar dam in Madhya Pradesh was released by mistake and 60 people were drowned (7 April). Officials said they had not been told that 300 000 people had gathered along the Narmada river for a religious festival.

To balance the sex ratio, Andhra Pradesh offered to pay £1200 to families who restrict their offspring to one daughter. It would be paid when the daughter reached 20.

Aid agencies warned that children affected by HIV/AIDS in India were being ignored and left to fend for themselves. No figures are available but experts say a million children under 15 have lost one or both parents. About 5.1 million people in India are believed to be infected.

The first stereographic mapping satellite in the world, Cartosat-1, was launched into orbit (5 May) from a new launch pad near Chennai. Its cameras would give stereo images of the Earth’s surface that can distinguish features down to 2.5 metres across, directly generating three-dimensional maps.

Plans to build a 2330 ft skyscraper in the Delhi suburb of Noida were given the go-ahead (28 March). It would be designed to resemble the peaks of the Himalayas, with a 50-foot hotel, a 40-storey atrium and four million sq ft of shopping centres. Opening date: 2013. Architect’s name: Hafeez Contractor. Cost: £5 billion.

The Prime Minister set up a public commission to inquire into the disappearance of the tiger population from Sariska Tiger Reserve. Eight detectives were sent from

Delhi to investigate. In 2003 the reserve had 25–28 tigers. Now there is none. In colonial days it was to Sariska that maharajas and top people travelled to hunt the tigers. India is thought to have 3000 tigers today, but experts say that is an exaggeration.

Biologists relocated more than 3000 coral reefs in a creek in the Arabian Sea. Each coral was checked, dead portions cut and then safely picked up. The reefs had been damaged by the tsunami and by the building of an oil refinery. In Tamil Nadu the tsunami cleared sand covering a lost city 800 yards from the shore south of Chennai. It is thought to date from the ninth century.

The city of Rajahmundry in South India was so fed up with persistent tax evasion it began sending drummers to make a din outside the homes and shops of offenders until they paid up. Tax take soared to an all-time high.

Pakistan

On a visit to Pakistan, US Secretary of state Condoleeza Rice called (17 March 2005) for free and fair elections to be held within two years. She praised President Pervez Musharraf for his courage in supporting the ‘war on terror’ and said she had also discussed “the need for democratic reforms in Pakistan”. She did not say specifically that he should give up control of the army and become a civilian leader. After the Rice visit the USA offered to sell F-16 fighters to Pakistan, dropping the sanctions policy imposed 15 years ago because of Islamabad’s nuclear weapons programme. When President Bush phoned Manmohan Singh to tell him of the proposed sale the Indian Prime Minister expressed great disappointment. But in May Pakistan and China agreed to start joint production of a new JF-17 fighter aircraft to replace ageing French and Chinese planes used by the Pakistan air force. The first four were to be delivered in 2006 and supply of 150 would begin in 2007. Eventually 400 would be produced, half in China and half in Pakistan.

Information Minister Sheikh Rashid said Musharraf would stay on in power when his term expires in 2007 “because Pakistan needs his leadership”. Parliamentary elections are due then. After elections the president is selected by an electoral college from parliament and the four provincial assemblies.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said (17 May) economic growth was expected to reach 8.3%—the highest for 20 years. In May a hectic privatization programme opened with bids for the country’s largest fertiliser complex, for Pakistan Telecom, Pakistan State Oil and the national petroleum refining complex. Foreign direct investment had doubled in five years. A four-year £80 million tax collection reform plan, mostly World Bank-funded, was launched (4 April). Pakistan has only 1.1 million taxpayers from a population of 150 million.

Japan lifted (1 May) all economic sanctions more than seven years after Pakistan’s first nuclear tests.

The government confirmed (10 March) that disgraced scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan gave Iran centrifuges, which are used as fuel for nuclear power plants or weapons. Pakistan had admitted that he smuggled nuclear secrets to North Korea, Iran and Libya, but until now not given specifics. The government said it was in no

way involved. Two weeks later it confirmed it was handing over to the International Atomic Energy Agency components of the centrifuges to help establish how far Iran's nuclear programme had progressed.

Pakistan security services said (4 May) that alleged al-Qaida No 3, Abu Faraj al-Liby, had been arrested. Soon afterwards 20 suspected al-Qaida fighters were arrested in the Lahore and Peshawar areas. Al-Liby was said to have masterminded two assassination attempts on Musharraf. President Bush praised Pakistan for its support for the war on terror.

India and Pakistan

What was originally represented as an informal three-day trip by President Musharraf to India, his birthplace, to watch a cricket match in Chandigarh between India and Pakistan (17 April)—his first visit since 2001—turned into a successful summit with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The two leaders declared their peace process irreversible and agreed to open up the heavily guarded, militarized frontier dividing Kashmir. They would work towards a 'soft border', providing meeting points for divided families and boosting trade, travel and cooperation across the frontier. They agreed to increase the twice-a-month bus service across the ceasefire line. Thousands of Pakistanis were given visas to watch the test matches and a good atmosphere persisted between Indian and Pakistani crowds at the matches. It was the first time the countries had played cricket together in India since 1999.

A few days earlier an embarrassing security lapse occurred when two militants attacked passengers waiting in the tourist centre in Srinagar to travel on the first bus. Three people were injured in the melee and both attackers were killed. The 22 passengers insisted on proceeding and Manmohan Singh waved the bus off.

Musharraf told a meeting of South Asian parliamentarians (20 May) that a Kashmir solution was within the grasp of himself and the Indian leader. They should take the "fleeting moment" and reach a solution "within the tenures" of the two of them. He added: "We do understand India's sensitivity over their secular credentials and therefore (the solution) cannot be, maybe, on a religious basis". In the past he had said Kashmir should be carved up along religious lines.

A week later a setback to the peace process came when talks in Rawalpindi on the long-running stand-off over the Siachen glacier in Kashmir—the world's highest battlefield—ended (27 May) without a breakthrough. Pakistan wants both sides to pull back to the positions they held 20 years ago before India occupied most of the ice field. Most soldiers have died from extreme cold, not from enemy fire. In February more than 200 people died from avalanches in Indian-administered Kashmir after the heaviest snowfalls for 15 years.

Bangladesh

An eight-storey garment factory 20 miles north of Dhaka with 200 people inside collapsed after an explosion (11 April), killing more than 20.

Sri Lanka

Five months after the tsunami 500 containers—a quarter of all aid shipped to Sri Lanka—were still on the Colombo dockside. Officials said most were stranded because of missing paperwork and bureaucracy. Aid workers blamed the pile-up on unclear rules on duties and demands that every container be unloaded and inspected by naval officers.

The Paris Club offered to freeze debt payments of tsunami-hit countries until the end of 2005, but Sri Lanka said it would press for a moratorium until the end of 2007. Reconstruction would take five years. Economic growth had been hit—down from 6% to 5.4%.

A navy vessel carrying Nordic peace monitors was attacked by Tamil insurgents (31 March). It was one of a growing number of incidents that were once again threatening to end the three-year ceasefire in the north.

Maldives

An Australian report on the after-effects of the tsunami said the coral reefs and the baitfish population of the Maldives were virtually unharmed.

Fathimath Nisreen, detained in 2002, held in jail and then under house arrest, for working on an email newsletter exposing alleged human rights abuses and corruption, was freed under a presidential pardon (10 May). She denied any wrongdoing. The government said she had had a fair trial. She denied that and said she had been beaten and tortured. Reporters sans Frontières, which took up her case, said it hoped the Maldives would respect freedom of expression in future.

Malaysia

After 382 000 illegal migrants had left the country under an amnesty Malaysia planned to recruit 169 000 foreign workers to overcome a labour shortage threatening economic growth—a major government U-turn. Centres were set up in Indonesia to speed the return of workers as legal employees. The biggest need was for manufacturing and building workers. Kuala Lumpur stock exchange falls made Malaysia Asia's worst performer for the first quarter of 2005. Long expected revaluation of the ringgit did not materialize, disappointing investors. Malaysia imposed a fixed exchange rate in 1998 to stabilize the currency.

Abdullah Badawi visited Australia in April—the first Malaysian prime minister to pay an official visit for 20 years. Relations had been strained until quite recently because of Prime Minister John Howard's involvement in Iraq. Abdullah repeated his criticism of this again before he left for Australia, but now the two leaders talked about a free trade agreement between the two countries and hoped for closer ties.

A month later Abdullah talked in Tokyo with Prime Minister Junisichiro Koizumi of Japan and reached a basic deal on a free trade pact. All tariffs would end within 10 years and, notably, the Malaysian car market would open up to Japanese firms in exchange for Japanese training for Malaysian car workers.

Plans to fingerprint and footprint all newborn babies raised controversy among civil liberty groups. Police hoped storage of such information would help catch future criminals. Computer software would allow for growth of baby hands and feet to adult proportions, and match marks found at crime scenes to the dabs given years before. Rights groups said police wanted to treat all children as potential criminals; the idea was worthy of Big Brother in George Orwell's *1984*.

Singapore

The Geneva-based World Economic Forum said Singapore had overtaken the USA as the world's most successful economy in exploiting the new information and communications technology. The USA was now fifth. Singapore also led for maths and science education.

But in the first quarter of 2005 Singapore's economy shrank by 5.8% and was at its weakest since the SARS outbreak in 2002. It had been hit by competition from generic drug producers.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that if Singaporeans wanted to keep their competitive edge they should try to speak proper English and stop peppering daily conversation with local expressions. Singapore had a competitive advantage over other Asian nations because English had become the lingua franca of international commerce.

After a furious public debate, the government gave the go-ahead for two casinos to open by 2009 (11 April 2005). Lee said: "We want Singapore to...have the buzz you get in London, Paris or New York". The goal was to double the number of tourists to 17 million a year.

Hong Kong

Tung Chee-hwa, 67, resigned as Chief Executive (30 March 2005) two years before the end of his second term. He gave poor health as the reason, but it was generally thought China had lost confidence in him. Donald Tsang, Chief Secretary, and Tung's deputy, took over as interim leader. At a press conference Tung denied he had been dismissed. The resignation coincided with a unique event—the broadcast of the BBC programme *Question Time* from Shanghai. The last governor of Hong Kong, Lord Patten, was on the panel. He praised Tung, and said it was time China gave Hong Kong more democracy. The people should elect their Chief Executive. Also on the panel was Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao. He said democracy should be introduced gradually in accordance with the constitution, the Basic Law.

The Chinese National People's Congress standing committee in Beijing ruled (27 October) that Tsang should serve two years instead of five. The Basic Law says the tenure of the Chief Executive is five years, but does not say what happens if an incumbent goes early. Opposition lawyer Leung Kwok-hung protested at the decision, stuffed a copy of the Basic Law into a black box in the legislature and said: "This insults everyone in Hong Kong". Tung was named a vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee in Beijing.

Financial secretary Henry Tang said (16 March) Hong Kong would balance its budget by 2007–08, one year ahead of schedule. The economy grew by 8.1% in 2004. It was boosted by mainland China tourists and a property market rebound.

After a long debate in the legislature it was decided that smoking would be banned in all restaurants, bars and offices from 2006.

UK

Prime Minister Tony Blair launched (11 March 2005) the 460-page report of the Commission on Africa he had set up in 2004. Entitled *Our Common Interest*, it called for “a radical change in the way donors behave and deliver assistance” to Africa. Its 17 members were mainly serving officials but also included the President of Tanzania, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Finance Minister of South Africa, and Sir Bob Geldof. Among its many proposals were a doubling of aid to £26 billion a year, launch of an international Finance Facility to boost aid flows through borrowing, extension of debt relief with 100% cancellation of multilateral debt, an arms trade treaty by the end of 2006, commitments by G8 countries on repatriating the proceeds of corruption, and a fund to cushion African countries against economic shocks and natural disasters.

The report highlighted corruption and misgovernment in Africa and criticized developed countries over trade policies, reluctance to lift debt burdens and self-serving approaches to aid. It said: “The issue of good governance lies at the core of all of Africa’s problems”. The report strongly attacked the £170 million spent annually on farm subsidies, mainly by the EU, the USA and Japan—16 times the volume of aid going to Africa.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said the report was a “step in the right direction, but we still need a quantum leap before we see real change in the lives of African people”. He added: “The report ticks the right boxes and vindicates what the Commonwealth has been advocating for decades. It provides an excellent template. It will remain hollow if it doesn’t stimulate the delivery of democracy and development to the people of Africa. There is still a huge gap between positive recommendations and real change on the ground. The missing link is political will and, until now, it has been sorely lacking.”

Following the general election of 5 May, which Labour won with a much reduced majority, Blair kept in place Jack Straw as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Gordon Brown as Chancellor of Exchequer and Hillary Benn as International Development Secretary. But the Foreign and Commonwealth Office team of five junior ministers was cut to four—for Europe, the Middle East and Trade. Chris Mullin, minister responsible for Commonwealth and African affairs, was dropped from the government and his duties were taken over by Lord Treisman as parliamentary under-secretary of state. But Treisman’s main responsibility was to be Foreign Office spokesman in the House of Lords.

Paul Boateng, Chief Secretary of the Treasury, was appointed High Commissioner to South Africa (14 March). Boateng, born in London of a Scottish mother and Ghanaian father, became Britain’s first black minister in 1997 and first black member of the cabinet in 2002. He left Parliament at the dissolution to take up the diplomatic post.

Cyprus

Rauf Denktash, 81, stepped down after 22 years as President of Turkish-occupied Cyprus. He was succeeded by Prime Minister Memet Ali Talat, a quietly spoken and reserved 53-year-old engineer and pro-Europe supporter of reunification—in direct contrast to his predecessor. In an election (17 April) he won 55.6% of the vote. His nearest rival, Dervis Eroglu, polled 22.7%. Calling for the end of the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, the Cyprus government saw Talat's victory as improving the prospects of a resumption of the talks on the Kofi Annan plan for reunification. But President Tassos Papadopoulos warned that it was Ankara that determined policy in the occupied area, no matter who headed the Turkist Cypriot leadership. He warned against an over-hasty return to the table. A new round of talks must be well prepared. Cyprus was disappointed at the response of Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw to a British House of Commons foreign affairs committee report on Cyprus in February. He had not rebutted 'misrepresentations' in the report.

Straw said after talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul (14 March) that the issue of Turkey's recognition of the Republic of Cyprus would be resolved in the context of its full membership of the EU. Cyprus said it was "inconceivable" for Turkey not to recognize the Republic of Cyprus as a full EU member state if it wanted to start talks to join the EU.

Tourism Ministers

At the second meeting of Commonwealth tourism ministers held in Abuja (28–29 April 2005) Malaysia offered to host and finance for the first three years a Commonwealth Tourist Centre to boost information and enhance promotion. The meeting dealt with security for tourists, better passenger handling, more accurate information and closer relations with other tourism bodies. A tourism business forum organized by the Commonwealth Business Council was held in parallel.

Around the Commonwealth

Following an EU commitment made in May 2005 to double aid, Secretary-General Don McKinnon said "we tend to forget that after the Second World War each citizen in Europe received the equivalent of about \$220 under the Marshall Plan. Today, in real terms, EU aid to Africa amounts to less than \$10 per African citizen—that's 22 times less than they received! This is the time for Europeans to show the kind of generosity that they had benefited from 50 years ago."

The first Pan African Forum on the accountability of and relationship between the three branches of government—the judiciary, executive and legislature—as spelled out by the Commonwealth's Latimer House Principles—was held in Nairobi (4–6 April). More than 150 parliamentarians, government officials, judiciary, bar associations, civil society activists and academics attended.

The Commonwealth held in Maputo its seventh Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Ministerial Forum (15–16 March). Ten HIPC countries attended, as well as for the first time five Francophone ministers. Most of the 38 HIPC members are in

sub-Saharan Africa—10 in the Commonwealth. The Forum reported that 15 countries had reached their completion points in implementing the initiative and 12 more would reach them soon. Some had slipped through, leading to the suspension of debt relief. Many of these were mired in conflict.

Four publications jointly produced by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and Unicef—Adolescent and Youth Participation Handbooks—were launched at the Commonwealth Secretariat (23 May). They are the result of three years' research. The books will help publicize the importance of young people's participation in development and understanding their basic rights.

Four universities in India were offering courses in human rights in 2005 following the launch of the new Commonwealth Human Rights Curriculum Model in Mumbai (16 May). The courses were designed by the Commonwealth Legal Education Association.

A two-week Commonwealth-sponsored seminar for senior budget officers and managers, *Enhancing Budgetary Outcomes*, opened in Singapore (30 May). Its aim: to expose delegates to the results-oriented public management experience of Singapore.

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Chairperson-in-Office of the Commonwealth, delivered the 2005 Commonwealth lecture in London (15 March). Its title: 'The Commonwealth in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges'.

Women with AIDS took part in a four-day workshop (16–19 May) organized by the Commonwealth Youth Programme Asia Centre in Chandigarh. The women, who are standing up for their rights and reintegration into society, came from seven states and were trained in public relations and project management.

Officials from four ministries in Mozambique were attached to divisions in the Commonwealth Secretariat for four months in 2005 to learn about the development programmes of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Secretariat and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) signed two grant arrangements totaling £214 000 (11 March). One would support the Trade and Investment Access Facility; the other was for the improvement of the Secretariat's performance management systems and evaluation process.

Documents released in March 2005 under the 30-year rule included records of the 1973 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Ottawa, Pakistan's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1972, and 1974 material from the office of the first Secretary-General, Arnold Smith.

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications

Agriculture in the Doha Round by Neil Andrews, David Bailey and Ivan Roberts. Examines the benefits of liberalization and the interrelated use of the three pillars of domestic support, export subsidies and restrictions on market access in distorting world agricultural trade. Outlines the negotiating positions of key players. 123 pp.

Making it Flow: Learning from Commonwealth Experience in Water and Electricity Provision. Case studies commissioned by the Commonwealth Foundation to expand the debate on essential service delivery, and inform on the policies and practices around the Commonwealth. 221 pp.

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